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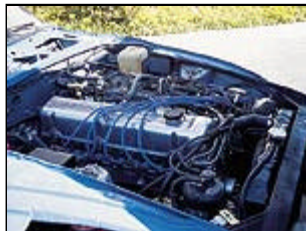
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One of the classic cars of all time was the early-'60s Ferrari 250 GTO. This roadster rendition by Reaction Research retains all the classic style of the original, but with non-Ferrari originality and appeal.



The individual hoop rollbars add to the flow of the car. The Fiero seats fit well in the car and offer lumbar support missing in the original Datsun seats. The custom console houses the stereo system, a storage compartment, and the all-important cup holders.



The Datsun 2,800ci motor is stock. The only modifications were the addition of Monza headers, a Walker turbo muffler, an extended intake tube, and a K&N cone air filter.



The simulated knock-off wire wheels are manufactured by Reaction Research.



The reflection of the building reveals

Non-Ferrari

The Velo Rossa Is a Thinking Man's Car And a Ferrari-Inspired Z-Based Project That Enzo Never Made

By Robert Eckhardt

A car should exemplify the owner's personality, and when the car is a '62 Ferrari 250 GTO replica, there is plenty of personality to go around.

The original Gran Turismo Omologato was a classic coupe. The Reaction Research (formerly VR Engineering) Velo Rossa resembles the original design but is a distinct original in that it is a roadster. It is a Ferrari-inspired car without being a Ferrari replicar. Since Ferrari never made this car--they only made coupes in this incarnation--there has been no Enzo-litigation, making VRs a no-sweat, high-profile, exotic build-and-drive. Reaction Research, as VR Engineering had taken a hiatus from its business operation, is now back and in production, under the watchful tech-artistic eye of John Washington.

Non-Ferrari or not, this is one beautiful Z-based kit car, worthy of a long look. And you can look four times, as there are two optional soft tops and a removable hardtop available, or the rebody kit is available as a fixed-roof coupe. The package is designed to fit '70-78 Datsun 240Z, 260Z, and 280Z bodies. The kit includes a one-piece front end with hinge mechanism, rear tub, cheek panels, doorskins, fuel filler door, trunk lid with pre-bonded inner panel, bonnet cooling duct panel, and header cap for the top of windshield.

The lightweight, one-piece, tilting front end makes the installation easy because there are none of the hassles associated with trying to align the front hood with the front fenders. It also allows for easy accessibility for engine tuning or replacement. Just pull the two hinge pins and remove the entire front end.

The owner/builder of this beautiful car is Jimmy Williams. He fell hopelessly in love with the lines of this GTO Ferrari-inspiration when he first saw an earlier model on the cover of the September '99 issue of KIT CAR magazine. While having some experience making modifications to other vehicles, mainly engine swaps, this was his first attempt at a kit car rebody. He started by removing the top off a stock '78 Datsun 280Z. Concerned that removing the top on a unibody construction car would show up in the flexing of the chassis, he reinforced the stock chassis and made it stiffer. He welded in 3/4-inch x 1 1/2-inch rectangular tubing between the framerails in three locations. He also used the crossmember behind the door to weld in the rollbar supports (the rollbar is not included in the kit). This part of the buildup was inspired by the Porsche Boxster and the BMW Z3, which also inspired the paint job--PPG paint mixed to a shade similar to BMW M3 Steel Blue. Williams installed individual rollbars for each seat, as he likes the way they balance the car.

Contemplation Time

It took Williams 14 months to build the car, but only around 9 months in actual construction. He explained, "I spent a lot of time looking at the car and thinking. There are not a lot of these cars out there, and that makes the car special. This was going to be my interpretation of the theme. I thought a lot about what I was doing to the car. When you do that, the car becomes part of your personality."

Some of Williams' personal changes included replacing all the stock suspension bushings with urethane bushings. He replaced the stock suspension springs and shocks with Motorsport Auto springs and Gabriel shocks. The sway bar and struts are original Datsun. The original front disc brakes were single-piston sliders, so he replaced them with Toyota four-piston calipers to gain better clamping power. They bolt right on the stock spindle. The rotors are stock as are the rear brakes.

Williams powered his project with a stock Datsun 2,800ci motor. The only engine modifications were the addition of Monza headers, a Walker turbo muffler, an extended intake tube, and a K&N cone air filter. The transmission is the stock Datsun five-speed.

Hot Seat

The interior offered more opportunities for personalization. Because the Datsun seats were not compatible with his body type, Williams spent time sitting in different car seats that looked like they would fit into the Datsun and his backside. He settled on seats out of a Fiero that had a little lumbar support. Williams wanted to sit up higher in the car than he did in the stock Datsun, so he built his own, taller seat supports. The seats were reupholstered in a light blue cloth, because when you live in Phoenix, Arizona, and get in the car in the

the distinctive hump in the hood that was needed for the Ferrari 12-cylinder engine. It also works well for the Datsun 6-cylinder motor.



The air flows around the cab so there is no need for side window spoilers or a rear deflection screen found on some convertibles.



The single-piece nose incorporates the hood and fenders for ease of installation on the chassis. It also makes it easy to install and work on the engine and front suspension.

summertime, you do not want to leave a layer of skin on leather seats.

Driving in the dry heat of Arizona, you need a constant supply of liquid refreshment. Williams soon discovered that cars built in 1978 did not have cup holders. This gave him the opportunity to design a custom console to house a couple of cup holders, a storage compartment, and his built-in stereo sound system.

During his contemplating stage, Williams looked hard at the exterior of the car. The kit comes with a gas access door, but he wanted a more racy look, so he went with a Le Mans-style flip cap. To add to the nostalgic look, he added custom-built wire wheels, which are a VR Engineering option. They are a powdercoated-simulated knock-off wheel.

While sitting in the car, Williams noticed that if the mirrors are close to the door, all you see are the rear fenders and nothing behind the car. He needed a mirror that extended out far enough to see behind him, but that did not look ridiculous. He looked around his garage and pulled the mirrors off his Kawasaki Ninja motorcycle.

Before finishing the exterior of the car, Williams drove the car around town when it was still in primer. He wanted to get a sense of the airflow around and in the cab. He wanted to see if he needed to build some foils over the windshield header or add any side vents, like some of the Cobras have, or if he needed a windscreen like some of the late-model BMWs have behind the rollbars. He found he needed none of it because the air flowed around the cab so well. The car was now ready for the final paint application, the striking BMW M3 Steel Blue look-alike we see on these pages.

First-Time Winner

The car is impressive. At Williams' first public display, last year's AHA Knott's Berry Farm kit car show, the event's judges liked the fit and finish of the car, so much that they awarded the car First Place in the Manufacturers Ferrari class. That is ironic because Reaction Research never uses the "F-word" ("Ferrari"), nor did they as VR Engineering. They sell the car as a rebody replica and have never sold, or encouraged people to use, Ferrari badges. Ferrari does not have a problem with the Velo Rossa because it is not like the original GTO. It is not a Ferrari. It is a thinking man's personality applied to a classic automobile design, and now that Reaction Research is back in business, this model is one non-Ferrari that will garner as many admiring looks as a genuine Enzo would. KC

SOURCES

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