

# The GTO

## FERRARI NEVER BUILT

Inspired by an unrealized factory concept, this 348 expands on the tradition of the 288 GTO and F40.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ZACHARY MAYNE



**W**ith its unpainted carbon-fiber wing, F355 alloy wheels, competition-style interior and twin-turbocharged V8, this 1989 348 ts (s/n 82640) attracts more than its fair share of attention. “At the one show I’ve taken the car to, it was parked next to a 288 GTO and an F40, and it got all the interest,” says owner Robert Taylor. “Nobody had ever seen anything like it. They were blown away.”

At first blush, most people think this modified Ferrari is all about speed. To Taylor, though, high performance and art are inseparable when it comes to the cars from Maranello. “It’s about the beauty of the thing,” he explains. “Every Ferrari I’ve ever seen looks like an artist did it. They’re head and shoulders above everything else.”

The Gold Beach, Oregon enthusiast takes the idea of Ferrari as art not only as a belief, but as a way of life. For

as long as he has been able, he has mixed his two biggest passions—fine art and Ferraris—creating large oil paintings that feature the Italian cars. Taylor’s artistic background includes attending the California School of Fine Art in San Francisco and studying with such luminaries as Salvador Dali and Rene Magritte. “I’ve got the last letter that Magritte ever wrote,” he says. “He died the day after he sent it to me. I’ve been offered \$25,000 for it, but I’ll never sell it.”

That sentiment also applies to the 348, which, as we’ll see, has its own artistic connections.

**T**aylor’s love of automobiles stretches back to his teenage years, when he owned American iron ranging from big-block Corvettes to a hot-rodded 1940 Ford Coupe. In his late twenties, however, he was introduced to Ferrari. “A friend told me that Ferraris were some of the best driving cars around,” he

remembers. “I decided to see for myself if it was true.”

A short time later, Taylor acquired a 1971 250 GTE in an unusual color combination: metallic brown over tan. “It was gorgeous,” he says. He wanted something sportier, however, so within six months he was driving a short-nose 275 GTB. “That’s the car that really got me into Ferraris. It was fantastic!”

Since then, the artist has bought, sold and traded dozens of Ferraris, including a 166 MM Barchetta, a 250 GT “Tour de France,” a 500 Superfast, several 275s, a 330 GTC, a 365 GT 2+2, a Dino, a handful of 308s, a 400, a Mondial, a Testarossa and his current daily driver, a 550 Maranello. “I like to experience different models, but I couldn’t afford to keep them all,” he says. “I would keep one for six months and then change to a different one.”

After some thought, Taylor says his favorite Ferrari was probably 250 GT SWB s/n 2643GT.

Under its 400 Superamerica-like skin, the car was a prototype for the 250 GTO.

It was this passion for the marque that took Taylor and wife Hassie to Maranello in 1988. That was the year Enzo Ferrari passed away, and Taylor decided to pay homage by giving the factory a painting. “The painting was the front of a 275 GTB with Enzo reflected in the headlight, as though he were standing in front of the car,” he says.

When he arrived at the factory, Taylor recalls, “I told them about the Ferraris that I had owned and showed them the painting, which they accepted as a gift.” In return, the Ferrari representative asked if he would like to tour any particular area of the factory. “My first choice was the race shop, but they wouldn’t let me in there. So I asked if I could see the art department.”

As he was walking through Ferrari’s design office, a sketch hanging on the wall caught his attention. It was a drawing of a



348, one that lacked the model's distinctive side strakes but had a rear wing, bigger wheels and a racing stripe down the center. "When I asked what it was, they said it was a concept of a 348 GTO that was to be twin turbocharged," says Taylor. "When I got back to my hotel, I drew a picture of the car in the drawing while it was still fresh in my memory. I knew if they ever made it, I would own one someday."

Ferrari never did build the "348 GTO," but Taylor never forgot about the concept. Eventually, he decided to make his own. "I was on eBay one night in 2005 looking at cars for sale, and I found a 348 with twin turbos that

**Right: Twin-turbo 3.4-liter V8 engine produces around 500 horsepower. Above, l-r: External fuel filler will soon be recessed into body; custom passenger footrest; aerodynamic carbon-fiber spats.**





**Top left: Sketch of Ferrari "348 GTO" concept. Above left: Interior features Recaro seats, new pedals and lots of carbon-fiber trim. Above: Removing 348's side strakes took 50-60 hours per side.**

had been built by Bob Norwood," he remembers. After reading the description, he knew it would be the perfect starting point for the project.

A deal was soon struck that saw Taylor trade his Mondial Cabriolet plus cash for the car. When the 348 arrived in Oregon, Taylor was happy to discover it was exactly as the seller had described. "It was in perfect condition," he says. "The minute I got it, I called

Norwood. The more I talked to them, the more I knew the car was something special."

According to Norwood Performance owner James Patterson, the 348 was built for a customer around 1995.

"Originally, it was just the stock motor with twin turbos," says Patterson. "That lasted about two weeks, until the head gasket blew." The car then returned to Norwood, where copper head gaskets were installed for a stronger seal between heads and block.

A few years later, after being sold several times, the Ferrari arrived back at Norwood for a full engine rebuild. The stock crank was polished and balanced, while new ARP rod



bolts connected it to forged JE pistons, which Patterson says have a 9.1:1 compression ratio. In addition, the cylinder liners were modified to accept O-rings to better handle high boost pressure.

The turbos themselves, a pair of Turbonetics T3/4 hybrid units, were left alone, but a custom air-to-water intercooler, which utilizes a dedicated radiator in the left rear fender, was installed. The stock Bosch ignition system could not deliver enough spark, so Norwood fitted eight ignition coils from a C5 Corvette, controlling them with a custom Motec engine management system. A Tubi exhaust was fitted to both reduce back pressure

and increase sound.

Patterson says the twin-turbocharged 3.4-liter V8 puts out around 500 horsepower in its current configuration, which tops out at 15 psi of boost. "It could easily make 750 or 800 horsepower with the right boost setting and a few electronics changes," he notes. "The engine and turbos can handle it."

Somewhere along the line, the 348 was fitted with adjustable Koni shocks and what Taylor thinks are springs from a 348 Challenge race car. The aforementioned F355 wheels replaced the original alloys, while the brake system was also modified. "There's a very nicely integrated power

brake booster in the front trunk," says Taylor. "Since Norwood was putting in a more powerful motor, he also made the car safer. It stops really well, better than most of the other Ferraris I've driven."

The cockpit had received an extensive carbon-fiber makeover, ranging from most of the dash to the center-console face and instrument-panel surround to the door panels. In addition, a smaller-diameter steering wheel had been installed, along with drilled pedals and an aluminum shift knob.

The only interior change Taylor made was to fit a pair of Recaro seats. "I put those in because the car in the drawing had F40-like seats," he explains.

Driver and passenger are restrained by five-point harnesses.

**T**he outside of the 348 still looked stock, aside from the wheels, so it was time to create the factory's vision. Taylor sat down at his drawing board and elaborated on the sketch he had made in Italy almost 20 years earlier. He then took these drawings to his favorite body shop.

First up was the removal of the side strakes, which turned out to be no small task. "It had to be done very carefully, as the side rails are made of stamped aluminum," says Taylor. "I think we spent 50 or 60 hours on each side. I wanted to make it look like they were never there."



Once the strakes were removed, the lower doors were painted with silver accents like the concept. At the same time, silver stripes were painted down the center of the car. "I'm not sure if they are exactly like the ones in the drawing, because I couldn't get exact dimensions," he says. Two rectangular black accents were painted onto the rear bumper, also mimicking the concept, though Taylor admits he's unsure if they were intended to be actual openings.

The shop also installed the external fuel filler, but the result wasn't at all what Taylor had in mind. The assembly, which should have been recessed into the body, ended up standing well proud of it. He is planning to fix it when a planned fuel cell is installed.

Taylor next found a fabricator in Southern California who

made the carbon-fiber rear wing and the small carbon-fiber spats mounted on the outside edges of the front bumper. "The wing was red on the car in the drawing, but I liked it better without paint," says Taylor. "Both the wing and the spats were designed on a computer, and they do make a difference. I can feel them lowering the car at really high speeds."

As a final exterior touch, Taylor himself painted two generously sized Ferrari shields on the front fenders. Unusually, the brush strokes are clearly visible upon close inspection. "I was in the museum at the factory, looking at all the old race cars, and saw that all the shields were painted on by hand," he explains. "I decided to do the same as a tribute to Enzo."

Since the GTO transformation has been completed, Taylor has been driving the car

regularly, including a trip from Oregon down to *FORZA*'s offices near San Francisco. "No matter what kind of Ferraris I've had, I've always driven them," he says. "I even drove that prototype GTO every day for a year and a half."

The 348 may be reasonably practical, but it's also as fast as its numbers suggest. "I find no difference between this car and an F40 or a 288 GTO," says Taylor. "I've been driving Ferraris for over 37 years, and this one is in the top ten; it's even better than my 550, which I think is the best, most usable car the factory ever built. Plus, I don't think I've heard a better Ferrari in my entire life than this 348. I'm 71, and it still gets me excited!"

So does his next Ferrari project, a 330 P4 re-creation. "I first saw a P4 more than 30 years ago, and I've wanted one

ever since," says Taylor. "You can't just go out and buy one, but a few years ago, I ran into someone in England who had restored a P4. He had made an extra body, so I bought it from him and decided to build my own car. It will have a six-carb V12 and a tube-frame monocoque chassis. I even have a set of original P4 wheels."

Purists will no doubt decry both the "348 GTO" and the upcoming "330 P4," but Taylor is adamant that he's not trying to cheat the marque. "The P4 is not a replica, but a re-creation that is intended to pay homage to the originals," he insists. "I'm not trying to fool anyone with my cars. I just want to have fun and spread my passion for Ferrari." ●