

A SPORTS CAR NAMED DESIRE

by **Claudia B. Flisi**
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What most men desire are the fastest and sexiest sports cars in the world, a desire that begins and ends with “i’s” and “0’s”:

- “I” (the pleasure-seeking narcissist in each of us) drives our primary desire for a high-end auto. Dr. Caterina Zaiontz, an Italian psychotherapist, explains that there is a neuropsychological basis for desire, an area of the brain linked to pleasure-seeking behavior. “Culturally speaking, men have a special attachment to their cars,” she elaborates. These feelings can be termed sensual, because a car -- although an object -- elicits complex sensations, psychologically speaking. One can control it, travel with it, and feel empowered by possessing it.
- “I” is found at the end of the names of many of the world’s most-coveted autos. Bugatti, Ferrari, Maserati, Lamborghini, and Pagani all reflect the Italian heritage of the men who created them.

(Bugattis are produced in France, Lamborghini is owned by Volkswagen, and Horacio Pagani was born in Argentina, but all these cars trace roots to Italy).

- The “0’s” can’t be forgotten, since you need a **lot** of zeros in your bank account to afford an extravagant auto. According to research from Rolls-Royce, there are 80,000 people in the world with disposable incomes of more than US \$20 million, the threshold to purchase a dream car costing many times the price of an “average” luxury car.

Italians have been inordinately successful at producing dream vehicles since 1909, when Ettore Bugatti -- son of an artist, trained as an artist -- produced his first racing car. His models came to dominate auto racing between 1925-1938. The date 1909 is significant because it marked the beginning of the Futurism movement in art, which originated in Italy and took technology, speed and modernity as its inspiration. These themes find their fullest expression in automobile design, where Italian creativity and entrepreneurial drive flourish.

In 1914, Alfiero Maserati convinced five of his six brothers to join him in an auto engineering business. Twelve years later they built their first sports car, which finished first in its class. Maserati was the first European manufacturer to introduce hydraulic brakes, and the only Italian constructor to win the Indianapolis 500 -- two years running.

Fast forward to 1947, when longtime Alfa Romeo driver Enzo Ferrari produced his first sports car under his own name. The company's first World Championship title followed four years later, and the Ferrari myth was fanned. "Ferrari's marketing genius lay in the fact that he decided early on to export abroad, notably to the US. And he linked his car to the red racing color," points out Mauro Tedeschini, director of *Quattroroute*, Italy's leading car magazine.

Lamborghinis made their first appearance at the Turin Motor Show of 1963. Legend has it that Ferruccio Lamborghini, a successful tractor manufacturer, was treated dismissively by Enzo Ferrari, and decided to build a better sports car to retaliate. In contrast with Ferrari's symbol of the prancing horse, Lambo took its emblem and the names of its models from the world of bullfighting. The car's reputation was not built on racing, but on its over-the-top styling and power.

Argentinian-born Horacio Pagani worked in Italy for Lamborghini, then was drawn to create his own car, which debuted at the 1999 Geneva Motor Show. The flashy Pagani Zonda has a V12 engine and goes from 0 to 60 mph in 3.3 seconds. Ole!

All these cars were based on passion, not profit, at the outset: they were built to go fast and/or be beautiful rather than to make money. That helps explain their continuing allure, claims Mr. Tedeschini. They were all originally designed by one man (or family) rather than by committee, and were created in a country steeped in artistic tradition.

It is worth noting that the Italian word for "car" is "la macchina", a feminine noun. By contrast, the German, Swedish, and English words for "car" are gender-neutral. Does this explain why Italian cars have such sensuous curves and lines that, claim some auto experts, deliberately suggest a woman's figure?

They are as exclusive as they are sexy. While Porsche and Jaguar build 80-90,000 cars a year, Ferrari and Maserati build 5,000 each, Lamborghini and Bugatti about 2,000 each, and Pagani several hundred. There is a waiting list from months to years, and the resale value holds up remarkably well (not that a billionaire who owns an average of eight cars is counting).

The combination of engineering excellence and exclusivity plus success in speed and styling is heightened by the framework of Italy's lifestyle appeal. "People are drawn by the myth, which is something indescribable. The myth exerts the power," explains Lorenzo Carraro, head of marketing for Corsorossa, a Milan dealership selling Ferraris and Maseratis.

Paolo Catalfamo, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Italy, notes that trendy people he meets all over the world -- from India to Japan to the US -- are mad for Made in Italy. "They love Italian style in cars, clothes, and cooking," he says, "especially cars."

"We have a great lifestyle, art history, the beauty of our countryside, the Latin character, our food. Our luxury cars are signed by their designers as if they were works of art, because they are," elaborates Antonio Ghini, worldwide communications director for Ferrari.

Customers for supercars are divided into three categories: status-driven, collectors, and passionates. The status-driven have the money to show off and buy supercars purely as objects. They represent about one-third of supercar buyers everywhere but the US, where they are about 40 percent. Non-Italian luxury cars don't have the same panache, suggests Phil Patton, auto design critic for the *New York Times*. "A Ferrari has always stood out for the high roller, a Maserati offers a way to stand out from one's wealthy neighbors with their BMWs and Mercedes," he observes.

Another one-third of buyers are collectors. They buy for love, just like collectors of paintings or antiques. This is as true of the buyer of one Ferrari as of a large collection, says Mr. Ghini. He knows several owners who keep their Ferraris in their living rooms, treating them as *objets d'art*.

The final third are passionates. They also love their cars but they don't want simply to admire them; they want the emotion of driving them. For example, Ezio Vergani, a business entrepreneur, owns a Maserati. Its performance, power, and maneuverability leave Porsche in the dust, he says,

and he finds it more comfortable than driving a Ferrari. A few times a year he takes his car to a racetrack to run it flat out, an experience he relishes.

To all three kinds of buyers, “We are selling a dream,” Mr. Ghini admits. For them, to be at the wheel of an Italian supercar, taking the spins and curves of the Amalfi coast, en route to a hilltop villa where a bottle of Brunello awaits, can only be a dream come true.

Sidebar: HORSES OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

105 words

Mario Moretti Polegato, founder of Geox, is one of the world’s richest men. A passionate horseman with his own stable, he also has a stable of a different color – a red Ferrari 360 Modena Spider F1, and two Lamborghinis, a Diablo and a Countach. Why does a man who loves horsepower choose these supercars? “They represent the cutting edge of technology and performance,” he explains. “They are unique automobiles, produced in limited numbers, with high artisanal content. They are more than mere cars, they are living works of art, able to transmit emotion, please the eye, and call attention to themselves as they go by.”

Sidebar: SUPERCAR HIT PARADE

365 words

The most expensive cars in the world, according to the 2006 rankings by Automotive Industry News, include four cars with Italian bloodlines, among them the top three rankings, as follows:

1. Bugatti Veyron, which AIN calls the “most powerful, most expensive, and fastest street-legal production car in the world,” with a top speed of over 400 km/h. \$1,700,000
2. Ferrari Enzo - a 12-cylinder technological wonder, with carbon-fiber body, F1-style sequential shift transmission, and carbon-ceramic brake discs. \$1,000,000
3. Pagani Zonda C12 F - tops in braking and power-to-weight ratio, the Pagani has a top speed of over 374 km/h (225 mph). \$741,000

4. Koenigsegg CCX - this Swedish speedster can run on petrol or biofuel, and is engineered to comply with US regulations, though its 32-valve V8 engine is not designed to comply with US speed limits. \$600,910
5. Porsche Carrera GT - in road testing, this GT has surpassed its claims of 0 to 100 km/h (62.5 mph) in 3.9 seconds and maximum speed of 330 km/h (206 mph) \$484,000
6. Mercedes SLR McLaren - this British-German co-production boasts a 5.5-liter V8 that goes from zero to 60 miles per hour in under 3.8 seconds, and a top speed exceeding 200 mph. \$455,500
7. Maybach 62 - DaimlerChrysler makes 57 and 62 decimetre versions of the Maybach; the latter is designed with a chauffeur in mind -- a very happy chauffeur driving a twin-turbo V12, generating 550 hp. \$385,250
8. Rolls-Royce Phantom - not meant as a racing car, the Rolls represents the ultimate in British luxury, though the car is a subsidiary of BMW, as its powerful engine attests. \$320,000
9. Lamborghini Murcielago - the gull-wing doors, mid-mounted V12 engine, permanent four-wheel drive with central viscous coupler, and new carbon-ceramic brakes all assure the superb road handling one expects of Lambo's latest coupé. Speed and power are *sine qua non*. \$279,900
10. Aston Martin Vanquish - although this car can't vanish as the James Bond film version did, it disappears down the road faster than any previous Aston Martin, with a maximum speed exceeding 200 mph (321 km/h) and a 6.0 litre V12 engine producing 520 horsepower. \$255,000

http://www.automotoportal.com/article/Top_10_most_expensive_cars_in_the_world

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