



# Thunderbird news

DECEMBER 2010 VOLUME 12, #12

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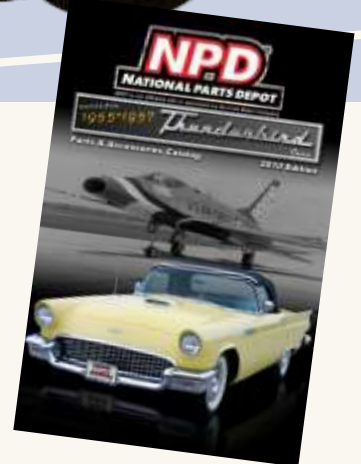
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*Thunderbird*  
news

# EDITOR'S REPORT



## MORE NEWS ABOUT THE MILLE MIGLIA

As of today, I have no sponsor for the Mille Miglia. If there is not a change in the sponsorship I won't be going to the race.

## FLORIDA VINTAGE CAR RALLY

There will be a vintage car rally on March 26<sup>th</sup> Rally will have a cocktail party on the 25<sup>th</sup> at the Sofitel Hotel, will depart from the Hotel on the 26<sup>th</sup> early in the morning and will finish with another cocktail at 6.00 pm approximately  
More information will follow

## MEMBERSHIP

It is time again, please send your check for \$35.00 for the 2011 year, don't forget to fill all the registration

See you next month

## CTCI DRIVE

Have you joined the CTCI yet?

We need to have all the members of our club enrolled in the CTCI. Remember that we are a CTCI branch. Please fill out the application and mail it directly.

What about driving our cars to Virginia  
Convention in June, 2011?  
Anyone interested?

## CAR & PARTS FOR SALE

1956-57 thunderbird Petronixs electronic ignition \$60.00. Call Norm Gabe 954-850-5024

Felipe Cos

## REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

Our next monthly meeting will be on December 11th (HOLIDAY PARTY) at Daisy Hernandez home at 6:00 p.m. Please call her for reservation 305 613-6775 before the 8th No Cost to members but you need to bring a \$15.00 gift per person New slate board will be elected that day.

## CLASSIC THUNDERBIRD CLUB OF SOUTH FLORIDA CTCI CHAPTER #114 DECEMBER 2010 VOLUME 12 No.12

### BOARD:

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### Past Presidents:

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Andre Fournier 2003-4

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Connie Danluck 2008

Ed Brown 2009

This Newsletter may have some misspellings and mistakes, but it is written with my heart. I could write it without errors in Spanish, but only a handful of you would be able to read it.

Please help me to make it even better.

Felipe Cos Founder & Editor  
George Bishopric - Proofing

Photos by Felipe Cos

## INTERNET PAGE

Have you seen our internet page? We need to update it. Does anyone know how to do it?

If you can update it call me.

Our page is as follow: THUNDERBIRDCLUB.US

You may have your own individual email, mine is as follow: FCOS@THUNDERBIRDCLUB.US If you want your own just send a note to me. Please follow the previous format in doing so. It is free, no charge. This is another advantage of your club. Any ideas for the page?

This page doesn't cost the club a penny for yearly subscriptions, I'm doing it through my business company web.

Please call Felipe at (305) 661-5170

## THUNDERBIRD INFORMATION SUPER HIGHWAY:

Take note that we have changed our web page name, it is now WWW.THUNDERBIRDCLUB.US to get there don't look at it with a search engine, look at it only with www.Thunderbirdclub.us

Our Club's web page: \_\_\_\_\_ www.thunderbirdclub.us  
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## HAPPY BIRTHDAYS FOR DECEMBER

CRISTINA COS	2 <sup>ND</sup>
CHARLES FRITZ	3 <sup>RD</sup>
THERESA MCNEAL	6 <sup>TH</sup>
KRISTINE FRITZ	9 <sup>TH</sup>
REBA MILLER	12 <sup>TH</sup>
KATHY DOSORY	15 <sup>TH</sup>
YOLANDA RODRIGUEZ	18 <sup>TH</sup>
MABEL ALFARO	19 <sup>TH</sup>
HILDELIZA PEREZ	23 <sup>RD</sup>
ROBERT MILLER	28 <sup>TH</sup>
DAISY HERNANDEZ	29 <sup>TH</sup>

If your name is missing, it is because you did not give it to us. Please send it now so we can congratulate you.



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 VMCCA Sun Coast Chapter. President David Bobbitt 305- 661-1340  
[bobbitt@comcast.net](mailto:bobbitt@comcast.net)  
 Model A Club: Tom Zannis 305-281-9192  
 Car show promoter: Russ Gagliano 954-560-5412 [merkivr@msn.com](mailto:merkivr@msn.com)  
 AACA Miami Region President Greg Paiewonsky 305-724-7639  
 Car show promoter: Gerry Perez. 786 344-4228 email  
[gerrycarshow@bellsouth.com](mailto:gerrycarshow@bellsouth.com)  
 Magig Mustang Club, Frank Alonso 305 775-3307, [fadatec@aol.com](mailto:fadatec@aol.com)  
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Second Friday, Hollywood Beach Boardwalk Cruise Night 7 to 10 PM 954 779-1420

Every Friday from 4:00 to 7:00 pm at 8<sup>th</sup> St. & 30<sup>th</sup> Ave in front of Home Depot in Miami.

Every Sunday Crabby Jack's

Every Friday night a Cruise night reunion at Towers Shop in Davie (595 & University) This is one of the biggest cruise nights in South Florida. (from 5:00 pm to 10:00)

First Saturday of every month, BETSY (old Fuddrucker's) from 6:00 pm to 10:00

First Saturday steak & Shake in Sawgrass Mills mall 6:00 to 9:30

Saturday of every month Steak-N-Shake, Sample Rd. and U.S. 1 behind Wal Mart. Coconut Creek. 8:00 to 12:00.

Second Saturday of every month the Dania Beach Cruise Night. Free admission 6:00 to 10:00 for information 954 924-3626

Second Saturday Car meet at Shorty's 2401 N.W. 87<sup>th</sup> Ave Jack 305 409-2614

Second Saturday from 5:00 to 9:00 in Homestead at Krome Ave

Third Saturday Denny's Restaurant Bird Rd, between 86<sup>th</sup> & 87<sup>th</sup> Ave

Third Saturday Roadhouse Restaurant Sunset Dr. & S.W. 117<sup>th</sup> Ave

Every Saturday a car show from 6.00 to 11.00 pm at K-Mart in 49<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Ave Hialeah. Only cars 20 yrs or older, No charge

First Sunday of every month: Downtown Hollywood car show, 10:00 to 3:00. Dave 954 926-3377

Every Sunday at Crabby Jacks, 7001 Federal Hwy, 2 miles North of Yamato, Boca Raton. 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Also night cruise at Coral Way & 97<sup>th</sup> Ave, 5:30 to 8:00 305 553-2228

Third and fifth Saturday of the month from 3:00 to 7:30 at Wall's Ice Cream in 8075 S.W. 67<sup>th</sup> Ave

Third Saturday of the month, cruise-in at Miami Springs Circle 7:00 to 10:00 P.M.

Third Saturday; at Gotrocks Restaurant, Hillsborough and Wine Rd. in Coconut Creek from 6 to 9


Third Saturday at Dairy Queen Tamarac Square North of McNab Rd. 6:00 to 9:00

Third Saturday OC's Raw at 18415 S. Dixie Hwy 6:00 to 10:00

Also Miami Wings. 19145 S. Dixie Hwy. 5 to 10 Info. Gerry 305 786-344-4228

Second Tuesday at World Ford 15551 South Dixie Hwy 7:00 to 10:00 pm Ford cars only Francisco Mederos 786 229-7361

Third Saturday at the Cove in 10730 NW 25th St Miami. Gerry 786-344-4228



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## FUTURE EVENTS

**DEC 11TH** HOLIDAY PARTY AT DAISY'S HOME 305-613-6775

**JAN. 24TH** MEET AT FELIPE'S HOME FOR PREPARATION OF CAR SHOW

**JAN 30TH** OUR TROPICAL PARK CAR SHOW

**FEB. 27TH** THUNDERBIRD CRUISE EASTERN CARIBBEAN [DATE????]

**MARCH 26TH** FLORIDA VINTAGE CAR RALLY [FELIPE 786-554-5200] JUNE

**15-19TH 2011** CTCI REGIONAL CONVENTION RICHMOND VIRGINIA

**AUGUST 24-28TH 2011** CTCI REGIONAL CONVENTION OMAHA NEBRASKA

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NEWS

COURTESY OF





# Ford's First Sports Cars – The 808XF

## An Italian-American Wedding

By **Dennis Adler and Urs Jakob**  
Photos by Guy Schiele



**Above:** In profile with the convertible top raised the lines are sleek, but it is also evident the problem Vignale designing a streamlined Italian sports car body to fit the larger Ford chassis. The beautifully integrated headlights were covered with Plexiglas lenses.



Singer Perry Como with the two Vignale prototypes.

**Far left:** The restored Vignale-bodied Ford-Cisitalia 808XF convertible has an ominous look when seen from the front. The lines are reminiscent of several Vignale bodied Ferraris of the 1950s.

Three years before Ford unveiled the Thunderbird, and one year before Chevrolet introduced the 1953 Corvette, Ford Motor Company built its first sports car. It was not a secret project or an auto show styling exercise, it was exactly what Nash was doing with Donald Healey and Pinin Farina, building a hybrid sports car comprised of American and European designs. The Ford project brought together one of America's oldest automakers and an Italian company born after World War II that, through the efforts of Battista Pinin Farina, redefined sports car styling in 1948 with the Cisitalia 202.

The Cisitalia 808XF convertible was the offspring of this Italian-American wedding between Ford and *Consorzio Industriale Sportivo Italia* – or as it was more popularly known, Cisitalia. The Italian firm sprang from the ruin of Italy's prewar automotive industry, which had been a national obsession in the 1920s and 1930s led by Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Lancia, and others. Cisitalia was created after World War II to build small, affordable Fiat-based racecars, the Tipo D46 Monoposto. Financed entirely by Italian industrialist Piero Dusio, by 1947 Cisitalia believed that the same process used to build its winning competition cars could be applied to sports cars. The 202, commissioned by Dusio and designed by Battista Pinin Farina, was to become the forerunner not only of the 808XF but of almost every European sports car designed in the 1950s, including styling elements for the Nash-Healey bodied by Pinin Farina. The sporty Nash models were unveiled at the February 1952 Chicago Automobile Show.

Always with a watchful eye on European design (much like his father Edsel Ford), Henry Ford II had been one of the first Cisitalia 202 owners and when he drove up to his design department in the Italian two-seater he had only one question for his stylists, why couldn't they design a car



as beautiful as this? It was not the first time he had asked the question. Ford also had a 1952 Ferrari 212 Touring Barchetta that was given to him by Enzo Ferrari. This car was already being studied in Ford's styling studios.

While Henry couldn't get Ferrari to build sports cars for Ford, he could, he believed, get Cisitalia to do it. This marriage of convenience would remedy his frustration. Cisitalia would design and see to the coachwork for the Ford sports models, while the arrangement would help to ease the Italian automaker's financial troubles, having spent more money on development than it was making on actual sales. Piero Dusio had kept spending until he was broke in 1949. Cisitalia desperately needed a source of revenue to stay afloat. It hoped that sales of the 808XF through Ford would provide them with that much-needed capital.

It was a big wedding, even for Italian standards. Present were luminaries from both sides of the Atlantic. In attendance at the ceremony were Henry Ford II, and R. Peter Sullivan II, who was Ford's son-in-law and the owner of a Ford dealership in New Jersey. On the other side of the aisle was Carlo Dusio, the son of Cisitalia founder Piero Dusio; the great Italian engineer Giovanni Savonuzzi, who would build the first chassis for the 808XF and design the first prototype; representatives

from Carrozzeria Ghia, which would build the Savonuzzi cars; and Alfredo Vignale, whose company would design and build the Ford-based 808XF convertible and coupe. Also among the luminaries lining up to greet Ford was Giovanni Michilotti, and even dapper Italian-American crooner Perry Como showed up to sing his hit "Love Me or Leave Me".

Unfortunately, two years later it was "leave me." When the relationship ended Cisitalia crashed financially for the second and final time. Piero Dusio had sold out in 1949 and left the country headed for Buenos Aires with the much vaunted 12-cylinder, four-wheel-drive Formula 1 Cisitalia Grand Prix racecar in tow. It had been designed by Ferry Porsche for Dusio and legendary Italian race driver Tazio Nuvolari. Dusio's son and his financial backers tried to keep the company going and might well have succeeded had Ford not pulled out of the arrangement.

Ford, having gained something from its first sports car venture, went on to successfully produce the 1955 Thunderbird designed by Frank Hershey and his team at Ford Motor Company. Whatever Ford stylists and engineers had learned from the Ferrari 212, the Cisitalia 202, and the 808XF prototypes certainly influenced the Thunderbird and helped make it a far more successful car in the early 1950s than the 1953-1955 Corvettes.



The rear design is similar to a number of Italian sports cars of the early 1950s with handsome speedlines over the trunk lid and graceful, recessed taillights.



## Prelude to a Wedding

The romance between Ford and Cisitalia had started in 1951 when Carlo Dusio learned from a newspaper article that Henry Ford II was coming to Europe. Ford already owned a Cisitalia 202 coup and convertible. Arrangements were made for Dusio and Ford to meet in April 1951 at the Hotel Plaza in Paris. The two men wasted no time, and in short order a joint venture agreement between Ford and Cisitalia was drawn up.

Cisitalia was to build the cars in Torino using Ford engines, transmissions and suspensions. The intent was to pair both the reliability and availability of spare parts for the Ford engine with Italian styling, and yes if this is beginning to sound familiar, it was essentially what would happen, successfully, a decade later with Ford, Lee Iacocca, AC Cars in England and Carroll Shelby. For the 808XF a Ford 6-cylinder (3.7 liter) engine and Mercury V8 were to be used. Cisitalia was to tune the Ford engines with its own manifolds, carburetion and exhausts. A top speed of 200 Kilometers per hour (a little better than 120mph), was expected from the V8-powered models. Ford was to market and sell the 808XF's in America, while Cisitalia would do the same in Europe. And again, if this sounds a little familiar, it was very much like the arrangement between Chrysler and Ghia in the 1950s for the Chrysler Ghia Specials and GS-1.

Such an arrangement was not unusual for Cisitalia either, since the 202 was essentially a custom-built Fiat. Dusio proposed to produce 500 cars per year. Initially four or five prototypes were to be built and sent to the U.S. for inspection. When he returned to Dearborn Henry Ford II authorized the project and organized Ford's payment of development money to Cisitalia along with the shipment of Ford running gear to Torino. In August 1952 Carlo Dusio, full of hope, left on the ship *Independence* bound for New York to deliver the first prototype. Upon seeing the car, Henry Ford II pronounced, "This is the best Italian car I have ever seen!" His engineering department, however, was not as enthusiastic. Their report read: "The general opinion of our engineers is that the appearance of the car is excellent, we feel that there are a certain number of material defects which ought to be remedied once and for all before putting a car of this type onto the market."

They went on to mention that the break pedal was too close to the accelerator, that the gasoline filler should be on the outside and not in the trunk, the fuel pipe was too close to the ground, the bumpers were too thin, the steering wheel was too large, the radiator was positioned too far from the grille, and the list went on. All of the issues were typical of Italian sports cars. Ford appointed son-in-law, R. Peter Sullivan II, to supervise the 808XF project,



The Carrozzeria Vignale emblem on the body gave the 808XF convertible a certain cachet that Ford's rarely had.



One of the Cisitalia Ford's distinguishing characteristics was the bold grille which Vignale drew from the company's many Ferrari designs but emboldened with the cross hatched grille design and full width center bar.

and he took a fresh approach. To reduce construction costs, instead of using the Cisitalia frames designed by Savonuzzi, Sullivan proposed mounting Cisitalia bodies on Ford chassis and assembling the cars in New Jersey, rather than in Italy. At a February 1953 meeting with Dusio at Ford headquarters, it was agreed that four other 808XF prototypes would be produced on Ford chassis. By June 1953 a coupe and a convertible sports car prototype had been designed and built by Carrozzeria Vignale.

The task of designing a body for the Ford based convertible was an interesting challenge. The Ford chassis were considerably higher off the ground and wider than those of the small Italian cars such as the Ferraris that Vignale was also styling at that time. The problem for Vignale was how to attain a sleek, sporty look on a body that needed to fit on such a large American chassis. Vignale rendered what he thought an American sports car should look like. The result was a car with aggressive, muscular lines, and a sleek profile. Although the styling was Vignale's, the look was also somewhat non-Italian.




Present were design features not seen on any of Vignale's other cars, before or after. His signature eggcrate grill was Ferrari race bred. However, here Vignale used a cross hatched grille instead of his usual squares. He placed a chrome bar over the radiator grille as if it were an airplane propeller.

In June 1953 Dusio again sailed the Atlantic now bringing the new Vignale convertible and coupe with him. The Vignale prototypes were, in effect, the very first two-passenger Ford sports cars. The previous models by Ghia had been larger, four passenger sports coupes. When the Vignale cars arrived in Long Island they were scrutinized by Ford engineers, who again found fault with the engineering and estimated cost of production. The gas filler was still in the trunk instead of being on the outside and the bumpers were still unworkable by American standards. The problem was, in large part, cultural. Different forms of production. Ford's process was assembly line mass production and standardization. Each part was exactly like the previous. Cisitalia's production was that of artisans building cars by hand, one at a time. Each car differed slightly or not so slightly from the next and quality varied. Sometimes the dimensions of the driver's door were different than that of the passenger's door. Being hand-built bodies, each craftsman made his panel fit where it belonged, and the man working on the right side of the car was often not the man working on the left! For Ford's mindset of assembly line standardization, the inconsistencies of handcrafted bodies was unacceptable. Ford had a reputation for quality and dependability to uphold, it was in serious competition with GM who had gained the lead. Ford could not place the

808XF on the market as they were presented by Cisitalia. Yes, these were prototypes, but this was the second time around and the gas tank filler was still in the trunk. It was believed that these problems could be resolved by Cisitalia simply providing Ford with bodies only. But the real problem with the relationship was something unspoken.

By late 1953 Ford realized it needed something to level the playing field with Chevrolet, not indulge in a costly, limited production import. Although there was probably no agreement on exclusivity, in a way Cisitalia was being two timed. In February 1953, while Ford was still in discussions with Dusio and Sullivan had proposed the use of Ford chassis, leading to the two prototypes delivered in June, Ford's Production Planning Committee had already approved development of a two-passenger sports car to compete with Corvette, and it wasn't the Cisitalia.

What really killed the 808XF? To compete with GM Ford needed to produce reliable sports cars in large numbers and Cisitalia could not deliver. Ford estimated that it needed to manufacture at least 15,000 Thunderbirds per year. At that time Cisitalia's best case scenario would have been 500 cars per year. Less than three cars per day – all hand built. Even though the development of the Cisitalia Fords was financed by Ford Motor Company and directed by Henry Ford II, the 808XF prototypes were developed with the clear intent to produce them in large numbers, that it did not happen was simply the result of events set into motion by General Motors in 1953 and the need for Ford to build a car that would be a direct competitor to the Corvette. The 808XF would not have been that car. 



Pictured at right is the prototype 808XF built by Carrozzeria Ghia to Savonuzzi's design. The car at left is a Lancia Aurelia, a relatively sporty Italian car for 1951, yet it seems large and cumbersome compared to the sleek design of the first 808XF coupe. (Ford motor Co. archives)



**Below and right:** The curved windshield has a very low profile. The wipers had not yet been put on the car when this studio shoot was done. All 808XF models, except one, had automatic transmissions.



## The Vignale Ford 808XF Convertible

A Personal Journey  
By **Urs Jakob**

Can a car make you a better man? The 808XF did for me. The restoration of a classic automobile becomes a personal journey, an exploration. With each car restored one learns something new about one's self; patience, for example. In classic car restoration, if you don't have patience, you will learn it or walk away. Sometimes you need to play the role of a detective, at other times you need to be a revisionist historian. Simply the fact that one is working on a "classic" car, one will learn something about history and maybe the lives of former owners, designers, engineers and possibly racecar drivers. You may need to learn how to be bold. Last week I hiked into the African bush, looked an aging gorilla general – holding a machete – in the eye and asked, "Where is that 1930's Mercedes hidden"? It paid off. He answered – "Which one?"

When I purchased the 808XF Vignale Convertible from Evan McMullen's showroom in Seattle, I was not sure what I had bought. I was told that the car was a "one off" Cisitalia with bodywork by Vignale. I was told that newspaper columnist and television star Ed Sullivan at one time owned the car. It was also stated that there was a Ford connection. However, it was not clear what Ford's involvement with this car was. "This car is unique," I thought, "obscure and somewhat of a bastard." I liked that. I liked the fact that the car, like me, was by culture; in the car's case, both



Adventurer and car collector, Urs Jakob searches the world for rare and unusual cars. This one, however, he found in the wilds of Seattle, Wash.!



American and Italian. This was the kind of car that I wanted to own. There was history to be revealed. There was a story there to be told.

A restoration project puts you in touch with many different people with whom one sometimes builds close bonds, certainly with the persons restoring your car. In my case this was with Richard Grenon of Montreal, Canada. The restoration, like the car, was somewhat of a joint venture. The working relation that Richard and I developed was that he was to do the physical restoration; I was to do the historical restoration – play Sherlock Holmes and piece together the car's history. For Richard to be able to do his work I needed to determine what the car looked like when it was delivered to Ford by Cisitalia in 1953. I needed to find lost photographs and descriptions of the car.

Getting a copy of the Cisitalia *Catalogue Raisonne* was not so easy. Like the car, the publication was also obscure. A classic car bookshop in Los Angeles found a copy for me. The catalogue revealed that my car was a joint venture concept car developed by Ford and Cisitalia. The car was ordered by Henry Ford II for Ford Motor Company and Ford paid for its development. Further, I learned that there were several cars built under the 808XF joint venture, including a sister car, the Vignale coupe. It became certain that there was only one convertible built – mine. The catalogue confirmed that Ed Sullivan owned the car at one time. There were three pictures! I tend to get a bit excited when I find photos of the car at an earlier part of its history. What was the original color? How had the car been altered over time? Did previous owners appear in the photos? What did they look like? There was a picture of the front of the car. For the first time I saw what the original grille had looked like, that it had a unique bar mounted across its center horizontally. The bar looked like an airplane propeller. I now understood that the car originally had Plexiglas headlight covers. These gave the front of the car a much racier look than I had imagined and with the big mouth grille turned the somewhat ugly duckling into an Italian screaming eagle. The second picture was of the engine. I now could verify that the original carburetors were side draught Zeniths. The last photo showed the convertible top, nothing new here. That there was no picture showing the car from the side was troubling.

The catalogue was a good start, but I needed more photographs, I needed a description of the original paint and I needed a side view. I was missing history. I started an internet search and came up with little that was useful. I was told by a European Vignale club that De Tomaso destroyed most of Vignale's drawings and documents when he bought the Vignale factory to produce the Pantera. The Cisitalia sites contained little useful information on my car. It was like my car did not exist. Most unusual and completely unexpected was that a baseball type trading card featuring my car was being traded on eBay. Most bizarre! Apparently a Las Vegas auction house had made cards picturing every car to be sold. I immediately purchased it and gave it to Richard as a present. A further internet search found that the car was featured in the Christie's catalog of the West Palm Beach Lassiter Collection auction. My car had just notched up in the prestige section.



The Vignale 808XF used domed chrome wheel covers.



Seen in profile, the Ghia prototype fits nicely over the Savonuzzi designed chassis, which was later abandoned in favor of a much larger Ford chassis. (Ford motor Co. archives)





**Left:** The ashtray mounted on top of the dashboard features the stylish Vignale V.

**Top Left:** It may have been a Ford underneath but the body bore the Cisitalia script signature.

Making no further progress sitting in front of my computer, I contacted the Henry Ford Library in Dearborn with the hope that they had original documents and photos. I made an on line application requesting them to search for information on my car in their archives. The response arrived a couple of days later; it was at first a disappointment. There was nothing in their archives on any of the 808XFs. No photographs, no documents. Possibly the Ford Archives held something, but the library had no access to them. "Could you give me the contact number?" "No, the archives are not open to the public, and 1953 has not yet been catalogued." The librarian did mention that it was not Ed Sullivan the TV star that had owned my car, the Italians had got it wrong; it was Henry Ford II's son-in-law, R. Peter Sullivan II, who had managed the 808XF project. That was interesting, because the car had essentially stayed in the Ford family. Then came even better news, the librarian conveyed that they did have a book entitled, "Ford Design Department Concept & Show Cars" by Jim and Cheryl Farrell. She went on to say with enthusiasm that the book contained an entire section on my car! Now this was really exciting. I waited impatiently for the book to arrive. With anticipation I checked the pictures first. Farrell's book contained two new photographs. They were taken at the Long Island Ford dealership of R. Peter Sullivan II. A front corner view of the car revealed that it originally had a two-tone paint job, dark on top, a lighter color below the chrome trim. We also noticed the domed chrome wheel covers. As the car was photographed on the lot alongside other contemporary Fords, the difference between the Italian styling and those of the Ford Design Department was startling. The other Fords seemed bulky and heavy in comparison to the Vignale's streamlined, stylish body. Looking back, it looked ahead of its time. What really put a smile on my face was a picture of crooner Perry Como in a dapper white jacket, leaning over my car and placing his two-tone shoe on the bumper. Was he an interested buyer or was he just getting in touch with his Italian-American roots? Celebrity connection to your car is always fun. Among other things Como gave my car connection to the culture of its time and took on some of Como's Celebrity status.

Then I read the text, Farrell's book told the 808XF story as seen from this side of the Atlantic. The Italians had written the catalogue from Cisitalia's perspective. Farrel told the story of Ford's involvement with the car. I now had



The Ghia body for Cisitalia was more than a little reminiscent of the Chrysler Ghia Specials. One can only speculate how the project might have gone had Ghia built the bodies instead of Vignale. (Ford motor Co. archives)



documentation that the 808XF was officially a "Ford Motor Co. Concept Car." For me this was a paradigm shift. My alliance switched, the 808XF was no longer a Cisitalia, rather it was a Ford Concept Car with bodywork by Carrozzeria Vignale. Just as important, Bob Farrell's book covered the story of every Ford concept car from 1932 – 1961. It put the 808XF into historical perspective. The 808XF came after the sporty cars built by Edsel Ford in the 1930s and before the Ford Thunderbird. It became clear that Ford Motor Co. had not produced a sports car before the 808XF. The three previous sporty concept cars had been private ventures of Edsel Ford without his father's or other official Ford Motor Company approval.

If this was correct, then my car, the only sports convertible 808XF, would be positioned as the first sports car ever built by Ford. Now this was worth celebrating with a good bottle of wine. The question now became, what wine was Henry Ford II drinking at that time?

I needed further documentation to

validate my car's position in history. I made a personal pilgrimage to the Ford Library and was directed to a book on the relationship between designer Bob Gregorie and Edsel Ford. (*Edsel Ford and E.T. Gregorie* by Henry Dominguez). It covered in detail the history of each of the three sporty cars developed by the two. This book again documented that these earlier sporty cars were private ventures and did not have Ford Motor Company approval. Further, the book spoke of Henry Ford's strong disapproval of the sporty type cars his son was building. It explained why others at Ford were not warm to the idea of producing a Ford sports car. I felt like an archeologist, I had just unearthed an important historical artifact. That was nice, but I still needed to complete the restoration.

I did find a photo showing a side view of the car, in a new Italian book on Cisitalia, (*Un Sogno Chiamato Cisitalia* by Mario Simoni). In addition, it featured a photo of the sister car, the Vignale coupe, stripped down to the metal lying in a New Jersey backyard looking sad.

I became intrigued and then possessed with the thought that the two Vignale cars should be reunited and displayed together. I hired a detective agency to trace down the owner of the car. They were successful. I purchased this vehicle four weeks ago. I am now attempting to get in touch with R. Peter Sullivan III hoping that the coupe was also photographed in his father's car lot. My next project is to find photos in Europe. The Italian books have pictures of some of the cars in Italy. The questions now become: Are there more, who has them now? Who do I contact?

Acquisition and restoration are only the first part of the adventure. Next come presentation and use. I am looking forward to going to Pebble Beach and showing in Europe. Valentino Balboni, Lamborghini's senior test driver, after swapping Ferrari jokes over dinner, told me that if my car got accepted to the Mille Miglia he would drive. I wonder. All 808XF's had automatic transmissions with the exception of the Vignale coupe, which had a manual gearbox. Shall I install a period Ford gearbox for him?



CLASSIC THUNDERBIRD CLUB OF SOUTH FLORIDA  
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Sunday, January 30th 2011 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.



*Thunderbird*  
NEWS





President Daisy Hernandez opened the meeting at 8:40 p.m. after members finished supper which ended with two fantastic desserts hostess Christy Cos provided.

Treasurer Felipe Cos reported we have about \$2,000 in the treasury, plus the club's Certificate of Deposit.

Felipe also reported he has spoken to county officials about the club holding its annual car show at Tropical Park on January 30 and that the officials agreed they will charge us the same fee they charged for our show last January. He said he has been talking to "two good connections" at Headquarter Toyota and at The Collection and both have expressed interest in being sponsors of the show.

Daisy stressed that we need "everybody's help" to assist with organizing the show and publicizing it to attract both participants and spectators. Last January the event attracted only 120 cars, but the weather was "kind of rainy" the day of the show.

Felipe said the show is "our main source of revenue for the club."

Past President Ed Brown said our car shows are "very good and we have a good reputation in the community." He said members of our club have to attend car shows put on by other organizations and tell them about our show. He said he, Felipe and Gary Stump will put together a list of some of the other shows being held in the area before ours so our members can go there to publicize our Jan.30 event.

Ed introduced three new members to the club; Frank Jones and Bridget Hagood who have a peacock blue 1957 and Lynn Campanile who has a torch red 1955.

He also said it is time for club members to start thinking about officers for the coming year. "We need new people to step up and do things."

Peter Klein distributed the invitations to join our club which Secretary Poppy Madden had suggested and written. Peter arranged for the printing of the cards which club members can place on any Thunderbirds they see anywhere – or give to the drivers, if the drivers are with the cars. The cards give a bit of information about our club and tell prospective members how to contact us.

Daisy said the invitations can be extended to the owners of any year Thunderbird – they don't have to be the '55s, '56s and '57s.

"A 'Bird of any year can be in our club. T-Birds are gone; they don't make them anymore. We'll have a bigger, better club," she said.

Daisy also said members have to vote, probably at the next meeting, to amend the club by-laws. A copy of the by-laws and the proposed changes will be sent to all members in time to review them before the vote.


Past President Brown, who recently served as a regional director of the Classic Thunderbird Club International (CTCI) made a motion that the club pay the annual CTCI dues for the our club's president, first vice president, secretary and treasurer. Our club is Chapter 114 of CTCI which has about 6,500 members. The motion passed unanimously.

Ed explained that CTCI provides us with insurance for any shows we have and insurance for members when they drive to and from club meetings, and other related benefits.

Ed also said he may be able to arrange for the Miami-Dade County display helicopter to be at our Jan. 30 show at Tropical Park. He also noted that the Leon Medical Clinics have supported past shows and that possibly the company could have someone at the show to "do free blood pressure tests or cholesterol tests, or something."



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