

Day in the Sun

After a long winter, the Cavallino Classic kicks off the concours season.

STORY BY STEVE KITTRELL
PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN GILBERTSON



*Fiducias incredibiliter
fortiter prae muniet optimus gulosus quadrupei,
wekjtsrk hbergkhebgr*

A snowbird's pilgrimage away from the doldrums of winter, when cars in Northern climes have been squirreled away in their garages, you'll find one of the most significant Ferrari events in the United States. Every January for the last 27 years, John and Alicia Barnes have hosted the Cavallino Classic in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Cavallino offers track time at Palm Beach International

Raceway and a plethora of opportunities to meet your fellow Ferrari enthusiasts, but the real draw is the concours, held on the lawn of The Breakers hotel. I've attended the event numerous times, and my trip there this year was my second as a judge.

I've been around concours in a professional capacity for many years, and was lucky enough to connect with some of the best minds in our scene.

Then, in 2015, I was pulled aside and told that I was going to learn to judge—end of discussion!—by judge Tish Thinesen of the Pacific Region of the Ferrari Club of America. That's when I got a look at the other side of these exciting events, which I, like a lot of other spectators, hadn't fully understood.

While Cavallino is judged just like every other FCA concours, to rules laid down by the

International Advisory Council for the Preservation of the Ferrari Automobile, the stakes, as you'd imagine, are much higher. This is the big league, and everyone showing a car is well aware of that fact. Plus, it's the first event of the year, which always leads to a little anxiety.

From the moment I stepped off the plane in Florida, I was caught up in a whirlwind of judging collaboration—which had actually begun weeks ear-



lier. About a month prior to the show, the senior judges are given the list of cars and owners. These are then passed down to the class judges, who perform any preparation needed and start the conversation with their teams. This process ensures that all available research, pictures, and back stories are presented ahead of time, and gaps can be filled regarding the true history of each car.

I served as one of three judges in a class comprised of seven 275 GTBs. It was truly a mix of the best examples of nearly every variation built from 1965 to '67: an early two-cam three-carburetor model, a two-cam six carb, an alloy-body two cam, a steel four-cam, and a four-cam six-carb competition car.

We had our work cut out for us, and were lucky to have an excellent chief judge, David

Olimpi, to lead the way. When it comes to concours judging, this former IMSA racing driver, photographer, and broker is as senior as it gets; he has decades of experience. Also judging under Olimpi was John Whittington. Whittington is a Ferrari restorer who trained under Classic & Sport Auto's David Carte, himself an expert on preservation and returning cars to factory-original condition.

Each judge in a class focuses on one specific area. In this case, I judged the cars' exteriors, while the others looked at the engines/chassis and interiors, respectively. Each of us carried a scoring sheet detailing 11 categories of things to look for; this ensures consistency across classes and establishes a base line for what's important. We also each received a flow sheet for deductions in these categories, in order to know

how many points should be taken off.

"It really does take years of experience to notice the understated details of these cars, and what is correct for the model year," Olimpi told us before the event. "Is that Pininfarina badge supposed to be bright or brushed aluminum? What year did the bumpers change and

would that work for this particular model? We have to know these things, but also rely on the entrant's documentation to justify it all."

Documentation can be crucial for determining whether a component is original or not. As a result, most entrants prepare binders packed with period photographs, ownership

history, repair and maintenance invoices, and so on, ready to show to the judges on the field.

"With 275s we are looking for the correct layout in the engine bay, OEM parts or satisfactory available replacements, complete and period-correct tool kits and owner's manuals, along with acceptable fit and finishes for paint and body," continued Olimpi. "The big deductions come from items being completely missing or inconsistent for the period without proven documentation. How it runs is just as important as how it looks, so steadiness of the idle, oil pressure and temperature gauges are always surveyed closely."

Without talking about deductions given to particular cars, which is kept private, one potential problem area when judging any Ferrari exterior is wheels and tires. Up to three points can be deducted in this area (all cars are presumed perfect, 100-point examples until proven otherwise) for things like a wheel size inconsistent with the model; that would be a one-point deduction. Add in a non-original rim color or incorrect valve stem caps and you might deduct two points.

"With 275s, it's about going the extra mile consistent with other 275s," explained restorer and experienced judge Rex Nguyen (who wasn't judging at Cavallino because he was showing a customer's car). "At the same time, I wanted our car to not be over-restored and stay with the period finishes; preserving more original parts like cassis hoses with the manufacturer etchings, or the hard-to-find Cheney clamps, and not using as much reproduction stuff. That's how I create the quality I'm after."

It's tough to judge a judge's car, so afterward I asked Nguyen about his experience. "My experience this year was fair and well done," he replied. "Each judge had their criteria but really seemed to talk to each other and was open about their concerns. They asked

questions directly to the owners if they weren't sure, and we all discussed the car together."

At this level of perfection—four of the 275s received Platinum awards, for earning 97 points or more, and one was rated a perfect 100—it's easy to nit-pick about condition. However, given the belief baked into the rules that Ferraris are meant to be driven, it's important to note that not all flaws are problematic. Many cars drive to shows, and stone chips can happen along the way—so be it. Not every crease in the interior's leather will be perfect—fine, as it almost certainly wasn't when it left the factory 50 years ago, either.

What we judges focus more on is answers to questions like these: Does the car operate like it should? Do all the lights work and gauges function correctly? Has the car been over-restored (i.e., made noticeably better than it would have been when it first left the factory)? In the case of the first two questions, owners always have a 15-minute window to correct something that has stopped working. It's not unusual for a turn signal or horn that worked when the car left the shop to fail on the concours field. Needless to say, serious contestants always bring tools, spare bulbs, and fuses.

During judging, we spend 15 minutes on each car, each of us taking notes, and regularly huddle together to discuss things we've seen. Nothing is set in stone, however, until the final review and discussion back in the judge's room.

After the decisions are made, the scoring sheets filled out, and the awards presented, it's time to return home—but that's not the end of the story. The concours season is just getting started, and the judges take what they learned at Cavallino and apply it to local and regional events throughout the rest of the year. Then, when it's time to park your Ferrari for the winter, just remember that it'll soon be spring again, and time to return to Cavallino. ●



ABOVE
Wheels and tires account for three points of a car's score.

BELOW
Author Kittrell inspects a 275's engine bay.

