

Spyder vs OSCA

By Phil Carney

Porsche's Small-Bore Nemesis

From the left in this December 1934 photograph, Bindo, Ettore, Ernesto and Mario Maserati. In 1937 the Maserati brothers sold their car building company to Adolfo Orsi and went to work for him in a new factory in Modena. Ten years later they returned to their original facility in Bologna and started a new firm under the name OSCA. Their mission was to build the best small-displacement sports car they could imagine. (The Spitzley Zagari Collection)

One of the first persons to make other SCCA racers pay attention to the OSCA name was Miles Collier who eventually owned three of the cars. At the February 1953 Mac Dill AFB sports car races in Tampa, Florida, Briggs drove a 1500 OSCA in the feature race and finished first. He beat both a 2.7 and a 4.1 Ferrari, his Cunningham C-4R driven by John Fitch and a Porsche 356 SL driven by Karl Brocken. (Photo courtesy of Revs Institute)



The sports car that finishes a race first overall generally receives the most attention from journalists and hence from the general public. In most cases it is the car with the biggest engine if all other factors are equal. This is one of the reasons Ferraris had such high recognition during the 1950s and '60s. (Other factors include the fact that Ferraris had gorgeous red Italian bodies and sported a price tag that made them the exclusive toys of the well-healed.)

Knowledgeable enthusiasts however are well aware that racing sports cars should be evaluated within the class of cars in which they compete. These classifications are generally along the lines of engine displacement but also consider such things as production rates and modifications. Between 1951 and 1964, Porsches competed in the under 1.1, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6 and 2.0 liters classes. While Porsches generally finished races well up in class ranking, they initially were constantly looking over their shoulder at a small Italian car maker who today is often overlooked. The car maker was O.S.C.A. and it enjoyed swatting at Spyderys.

Officine Specializzate Costruzioni Automobili

The Maserati brothers were involved with automobiles from the beginning of the 20th century - about as long as Ferdinand Porsche. Three brothers started their careers at the Italian coach firm Diatto, building 2 liter Grand Prix cars but when the firm decided to get out of the racing business, the brothers began their own company. One of the first cars, a Maserati 26/1.5 driven by Alfieri Maserati, won its class in the 1926 Targa Florio. Alfieri died in 1932, but three other brothers, Bindo, Ernesto and Ettore, continued building winning 4, 6, 8 and 16-cylinder race cars.

In 1937, the Maseratis sold their company to Adolfo Orsi who moved the company to Modena where it is still located today. The brothers remained with the company after the sale and continued engineering work on race cars. Their cars were often considered competitive with Germany's Silver Arrows but one the greatest Maserati achievements was winning the Indianapolis 500 in both 1939 and 1940.



An OSCA moment in the sun. On March 7, 1954 at Sebring, an SCCA / World Sports Car championship event saw four 550s and one 356 on the grid in the sport 1.5 class while six MT4 OSCAs showed up in engine sizes of 1100, 1350, and 1450 cc. The race results shocked almost everyone. The MT4 driven by Stirling Moss took first overall. The other OSCAs were equally impressive with second and third class placements. The best Porsche Spyder finish was tenth overall (fourth in class) behind a 1.1 liter OSCA. (Photo courtesy of Revs Institute)

After their ten-year contract with Orsi elapsed in 1947, Ernesto, Ettore and Bindo Maserati formed their own firm. The new company was officially registered as Officine Specializzate Costruzioni Automobili - Fratelli Maserati SpA (Maserati Brothers' Specialized Workshop for Car Construction) but is most often known by the nicknames O.S.C.A., OSCA or Osca. They located in San Lazzaro di Saveno just outside Bologna in an abandoned portion of the original Maserati factory. Together with nine employees, the brothers began construction of 1.1-liter sports racing cars; a category in which they were very capable.

The first model, the MT4 (which stood for Maserati Tipo 4) had a cycle-fender, roadster body. The power plant was based on Fiat hardware, displacement was 1,092 cc and 72 hp was produced at 6,000 rpm. OSCA raced three times in 1948 with two DNFs followed by a first overall at the I Gran Premio di Napoli (first Grand Prix of Naples). Not a bad start for three highly skilled brothers with only a handful of employees.

In 1950 a new version of the MT4 began making a big impression in sports car racing. The engine had been updated to dual cams and the wheels were now enclosed. A class win was taken at the Mille Miglia that year followed by a 1-2 finish at Monza. By the end of the '51 season OSCA had 21 wins in 39 starts.

Other models followed because the Maserati brothers always strived to build the most competitive, small-displacement race car. This resulted in a near bewildering set of car designations all produced in very low volume. Before going out of business in the late 1960s, approximately only 257 cars had been built. Although total OSCA output was a small fraction of Porsche production during the same period the diminutive Italian cars nipped at Porsche's heels when they both appeared in the same race.

World Sport Car Championship

Race fans beamed with pride when journalists debated who the "best" man on the track was and then a driver from their country won the race. So the International Sporting Commission (C.S.I.) of the Federation de l'Automobile (F.I.A.) started a Driver's Championship series in 1950. Similarly a European Touring Championship for rallies was begun in 1953. And at the Monte Carlo Congress in February of 1953, the C.S.I. also initiated the World Sports Car Championship (WSC) to recognize manufacturer achievements. The first WSC competition was the 1953 Sebring 12 Hours race held just a few months after the C.S.I. announced the series.

The WSC is generally broken up into five periods

From top: • The first MT4s had cycle-fenders and were known as siluros or "torpedoes". This style was soon replaced by bodies having attached fenders. Chassis 1112 was the second MT4 2AD built. In 1951, Luigi Fagioli drove the car to a class victory at the Mille Miglia. Recently restored, it is regularly vintage raced. (conceptcarz.com)

• The most curvaceous style and the one more commonly seen today is the barchetta or "little boat" which came out in 1952. This is a nice close up of Al Coppel's 1,098-cc OSCA at the 1954 Pebble Beach race. At that time, the MT4 was the sports car to be racing in class F or G. (Julian Graham photo, courtesy Robert Devlin)

• 1953, change on the horizon. After the war, MGs were the most common car to be seen at racing events but the first OSCAs were also showing up in America. Here Henry Wessells in the #60 OSCA has finished passing Bob Holbert's #14 MG TD. Wessells took second behind George Moffett's OSCA. (Alix Lafontant © Carl Goodwin)

• This wonderful shot was taken at the soaked Pebble Beach Cup race in the spring of 1955 although the order of the cars is not indicative of the final results. Chick Lesson piloting OSCA #117 was second in the FM class beaten by Ken Miles in an MG Special. The other cars in this photo are the #23 OSCA raced by Al Coppel (5th in FM) and #25 MG R-1 driven by Cy Yedor (3rd in class).

(Photo by William C. Brooks, courtesy of Robert Devlin)





The first OSCAs were brought into the U.S. privately in 1952. The Momo Corporation and Luigi Chinetti started importing them officially soon afterwards. In the western U.S., Edgar Fronteras became America's distributor/dealer with business associates Bumpy Bell and Chapman at ALMAR Motors in Tucson.

Vid Hit
Two videos from the 1954 Sebring 12 Hour Race can be seen on YouTube. They're grainy and short but give a marvelous feel for the scary simplicity of racing in that era. Search "Sebring 12 hour 1954" at YouTube.



Whoops, a little spin by Rees Makins driving one of his MT4s at Watkins Glen in 1954. This car was equipped with a 1,092 cc engine and ran in G MOD. The deviation cost Makins dearly and he crossed the finish line behind two Siatas. (Alix Lafontant © Carl Goodwin)



and for the purposes of this article about Porsche and OSCA only the first period is significant to the story. Only sports cars with large engines captured the WSC title during this time frame with Ferrari holding the title seven times in the first nine years. That was because the point system was biased towards overall winners instead of class winners. Some race organizers recognized this skew and awarded additional recognition aimed at leveling the notoriety. For example, both Le Mans and Sebring bestowed an "Index of Performance" reward to the car that achieved the highest actual mileage compared to a preset distance that was a function of engine size. While such an award may make sense to the technical community, it never really caught on with the general public.

First Match Up

The Argentine Grand Prix was first held in 1953 and was sufficiently successful that the C.S.I. decided it would open its 1954 WSC season with a 1000 Km (621.4 miles) race in Buenos Aires. It was the first opportunity for OSCA and Porsche to battle head-to-head in the series. There were a total of six Type 550s entered and four were equipped with new four-cam engines. Two MT4 OSCAs were on the starting grid but one was powered by an 1,100-cc engine while the other housed a 1,350 cc power plant. All of the cars, Porsches and OSCAs, were classified in the under-1.5 liter sports category. It is unsurprising that Porsche took the class win with a Spyder entered by Jaroslav Juhan – a part-time factory driver and the man instrumental in making the Porsche brand known in South American. The spoiler in the pudding was that the 1.1-liter OSCA took 2nd place in the same class with four other Spyderys trailing in the 3 through 6 positions. Should Porsche have taken this as an omen? Definitely.

The next WSC race was just six weeks later in Sebring, Florida. Both marques were out in force and the combatants could not have been more evenly matched. Four 550s and one 356 were on the grid in the sport 1.5 class while six MT4 OSCAs showed up in engine sizes of 1100, 1350, and 1450 cc. The race results shocked almost everyone. Not only did Briggs Cunningham's MT4 driven by Stirling Moss win its class, it also took first place overall. Briggs was subtly proud simply stating, "It pleased all of us to win over so many larger cars at Sebring." Other OSCA results were equally impressive with second and third S1.5 class placements. For OSCA, the icing on the cake was that their group took the top four spots in the Index of Performance. The best Porsche Spyder accomplishment was tenth overall (fourth in class) behind a 1.1 liter OSCA. *Road & Track* in their review declared "the OSCAs stole the entire show."

The next matchup was the Mille Miglia. As described in the past March issue, the team of Herrmann and Linge campaigned their 550 spectacularly taking the S1.5 class win. Twenty minutes behind them was an MT4 that had been driven single handedly the entire 1,000 miles by Giulio Cabianca. The Le Mans race a month later should have been very telling. The Porsche factory entered three Spyderys and the Maserati brothers entered two MT4s in the same class. Although two Spyderys dropped out with engine problems, Porsche took the class win. As for the OSCAs, one of their cars was DNF due to an accident while the second was disqualified for receiving outside assistance. Statistically it was still difficult to figure out the better car. The last WSC 1954 race was the Carrera Panamerica. Six Porsches were entered in the Sport 1500 class; four 550s and two 356s. Three MT4s were in the same class. The Mexican race results seemed to provide a clearer picture of the Porsche-OSCA competition. Spyderys finished in class 1-2-4-5. One OSCA occupied the third position while the other two were DNF. The year 1954 might be considered a draw between the two rivals. Perhaps 1955 would provide a more definitive answer as to the best racer in the 1.5 liter Sports Car class.

Left: There were a lot of OSCAs and Porsches at Watkins Glen in the fall of 1954. Frank Bott takes the checkered flag driving one of a Rees Makins' MT4 1500 in the Queen Catherine Cup race. (Alix Lafontant photo, Carl Goodwin collection).



During 1954 the most common race tracks were SAC Air Force bases made temporarily available while the bombers were off on a "training" flight. At Lockbourne AFB, Rees Makins is being congratulated by Col. T. K. Field who was serving as a race official. Based on the car's distinct fenders, it is obvious that Makins owned one of the very earliest OSCAs made.

(Alix Lafontant © Carl Goodwin)



At Watkins Glen in 1955 Briggs Cunningham was leading at the beginning of the race but fell victim to a broken axle on lap nine. The Porsche Spyders of Art Bunker and Fred Procter finished second and fourth. The winner was a Siata Special driven by Bill Weldon. Lotus was also giving Porsche some competition at the time. A Mk IX was running in G MOD during the race and it managed a finish between the two 550s. (Alix Lafontant © Carl Goodwin)

And Rematch

In the six World Sports Car races during 1955, Porsche and OSCA went head-to-head in three events. The first rematch was at Sebring in March with the contestant scale balanced; six Spyderys versus six MT4s. Remembering the previous year results at Sebring, Jeff Cooper of *Road & Track* had this advice for Porsche, "An OSCA will get you if you don't watch out." The S1.5 class favorites were Cunningham's OSCA against the Porsche work's 550 driven by Herbert Linge. What might seem curious is that Briggs Cunningham was a co-sponsor of the factory Spyder meaning he was sort of competing against himself. However, in context it made perfect sense because Briggs loved racing and he loved race cars of all breeds. For the 1955 Sebring he also brought along a D-Type Jag and his own Offy-powered C6R.

There was quite a bit of controversy about the race. First, the F.I.A. had defined a production model as one with 25 examples having been built. The OSCA was therefore considered a production car (as was the 356) but the Type 550 would not arrive at that sales figure until later in the year. The beginning of the race was also a mess when six reserve entries took off during the Le Mans type start along with the eligible cars. Before the offenders could be flagged off the

track, an unauthorized Renault crashed and caused a favored Ferrari to also crash taking it out of the game. To make matters worse, the race ended with even more confusion. The two leading cars were a 3.5-liter Jaguar D-Type driven by Mike Hawthorne and Phil Walters up against a 3.0-liter Ferrari 750S Monza driven by Phil Hill and Carroll Shelby. For 12 hours the two cars were never separated by more than seven minutes. The Ferrari was flagged the winner but the Jag team was called to the victory stand. It was a full week later before Cunningham's Jag was officially recognized as the overall winner at Sebring.

But what about the S1.5 class (or the "F" class as Americans referred to it). As in the previous year, Cunningham's MT4, this time driven by Bill Lloyd and George Huntoon, took home the honors. The Porsche/Cunningham 550 driven by Huschke von Hanstein was second. Another OSCA placed third and another Porsche took fourth in class. As for the often overlooked Sebring Index of Performance award, Ferrari was number one, OSCA second, Jaguar third, a 2.7 liter Austin-Healey fourth and Porsche fifth.

The next WSC encounter between Porsche and OSCA was two months later at Brescia in the May Mille Miglia where Porsche had achieved a narrow victory the previous year. For 1955 in S1.5 there were four 550s, three MT4 1500s, three Siatas, two Alfa Romeos and one each Peugeot, Gordini, and Ermini. Again Porsche came out victorious (first in class, eighth overall) with the OSCA 21 minutes behind (second in class and 14th overall). Although there were no Porsches entered in the S1.1 class, it is worth giving OSCA honorable mention, for it won in this class against 13 competitors of eight different marques. The 1955 score was now tied.

The competition fulcrum, as the reader might suspect, would be Le Mans in June. There were four 1.5 liter 550s up against a single OSCA. In the 1.1 class there were another two Spyderys but surprisingly no MT4s competed in this category. The Porsche Spyderys took spots one through three at Le Mans in 1955 with the sole MT4 entered by America Edgar Fronteras in fourth.

After Le Mans there were two more WCS races. In September Porsches won their class in the Dundrod Tourist Trophy but no OSCAs challenged them. Similarly, at the Targa Florio in October, OSCAs won the S1.1 and S1.5 class but Porsche was a no-show.

The Debate Continues

The horrific and highly-publicized tragedy at Le Mans in 1955 had a number of ripple effects. Although figuring prominently in the Le Mans tragedy, Mercedes-Benz won the WSC championship in 1955. Despite capturing the title, after the season closed the company announced it was withdrawing from both Grand Prix and sports car racing. Another surprise was that the Automobile Club de l'Quest, the organization that officiated at Le Mans, announced several rule changes for 1956 and one of these restricted prototypes to 2½ liters. This conflicted with WSC rules which caused the F.I.A. to exclude Le Mans from the manufacturer's title series that year.

In 1956 there were six WSC events scheduled but the final one, the Carrera Panamericana race, never materialized. Porsche and OSCA directly confronted each other in only two events, the Mille Miglia and at the Nürburgring. In Italy's 23rd Mille, Porsche's appearance was dismal. Four Spyderys ran in the Sports 1500 class and three retired. The surviving 550 driven by Rolf Knoch finished fourth in class its arrival was bettered by an OSCA MT4 and two Maserati 150Ss. An 1100 OSCA MT4 also took its class win. The German Nürburgring proved more fertile ground for Porsche because there Spyderys came in first and second and the lone MT4 experienced engine failure.

Seven WSC competitions were held in 1957. The Sveriges Grand Prix in Kristianstad, Sweden had been added the year earlier and, to extend the season, the Grand Prix of Venezuela was added in November. OSCA began the series on top with a class win in Buenos Aires but for the rest of the year there were Spyderys in the victory circle. At Caracas Porsche introduced their new 718 RSK and it made life for the Maserati brothers even more difficult.

During 1958 Porsche Spyderys won every WSC encounter against OSCAs. Looking at the detailed results makes one wonder if Ernesto, Ettore and Bindo had lost focus as they added several new, small-displacement variants including the F2, S750, S750 TN, S1500 and 1500 TN. OSCA was still a very small firm and to explore so many design alternatives seems diluting in retrospect. Admittedly, OSCAs were still Porsche's best competition in class but they were now consistently playing a disappointing second fiddle in every encounter. The years 1959 through 1961 proved no better for OSCA in WSC races.

Competition Among Amateurs

When there was a world championship title at stake, manufacturers wanted to provide the best opportunity for success. Therefore Porsche, OSCA, Ferrari, and many other builders entered cars the factory had specifically prepared for each specific race. For various reasons, it was also not uncommon for a car company to authorize private teams to represent the builder but in these situations, the private party received excellent factory support. *Continued*



When car racing got into full swing after the war, some wealthy owners ran cars from different marques so that they were especially competitive in different classes. This is a picture of two cars in Jim Kimberly's stable. Up front is his OSCA 1500 and partially seen behind it is his 4.5 liter Ferrari. (Alix Lafontant © Carl Goodwin)



Although they were fierce competitors during the mid 1950s, it is difficult to find a frame in which an OSCA and a Porsche are battling mano a mano. This Ron Ferreira photo was taken at Fifth Annual Stockton Lions Club Sports Car Races in March 1957 when OSCA's glory was fading under a Porsche onslaught. Spyder #12 is being driven by Ed Beagle who finished 3rd. OSCA #10 was a 750 cc S-187 model piloted by William Bell who was not part of the podium. This model and a few other OSCAs were not usually contending directly with Porsche Spyderys or 356s. (Courtesy Robert Devlin)



In the 1956 Mille Miglia, Hans Herrmann (right) was teamed up with Werner Enz (left) but Herrmann's fortunes that year were not quite as good as in the past. Giulio Cabianca in his OSCA MT4 1500 produced a first in S1.5 class and 9th overall. (Courtesy Porsche archive)



At the 1957 Italian Mille, Umberto Maglioli did a repeat performance of his previous year's accomplishments in Italy's Targa Florio. He produced a first in class and a 5th overall. There were over a dozen OSCAs in the race. In the S1.1 and S750 classes they dominated but were DNF up against the Porsche Spydors. (Courtesy Porsche archive)

So what about battles between drivers without direct factory support? It is a bit difficult to draw real objective comparisons in many of these situations because some owner/racers had a distinct advantage over others. In the 1950s the sport evolved from gentleman drivers to professionals who expected to be paid for their skill and services. Some owners were very wealthy and could therefore afford the best drivers supported by a highly skilled group of mechanics. The majority of "amateurs" did not have bundles of money to spend on racing. Despite these caveats, it is nevertheless interesting to compare Porsche and OSCA results in American's SCCA battles.

SCCA Competition

If you look into early 1950s SCCA results you will notice that there were many makes of cars on the track. It was not a foregone conclusion that Porsche would become a dominate player on and off the track. In fact, looking only at race entries, one might guess that MG was the manufacturer that would lead sports car racing enthusiasts into the

next decade. Such a conclusion was correct in terms of sales with almost 400,000 MGs sold in the United States through the late '70s. MG, however, would not be the competitor to be feared on the track.

The first OSCA versus Porsche battle occurred at Bridgehampton in May of 1952. Rees Makins brought a 1.1-liter, cycle-fendered MT4 roadster that he had just imported to the race. Porsche was represented by two of its finest race 1.5 liter cars, a 356 SL owned by Ed Trego and Glöckler-Porsche #2 owned by Max Hoffman. Max took an early lead but had an unhappy incident with some hay bales that slowed him down. This allowed the OSCA driven by Frank Bott to win the Mecox Trophy Race. The 356 SL was driven by Karl Brocken and it failed to finish after an off-course contact. That race put OSCA on the scoreboard first and although driver skill played a part in the race, OSCAs were not going to be easily defeated by Porsche for several years.

MT4s clearly dominated their classes in SCCA races through 1954. The man that led the charge was Briggs Cunningham who owned both a 1,092 and a 1,342-cc car. This was the last year that Air Force Bases would be made available for SCCA racing and there was plenty of action on those runways. The first race to show the merits of the OSCA was the Florida National Sports car Races held at MacDill AFB on January 31st. In the F-Modified (FM) class there were three OSCAs up against an equal number of Porsches. In this 50 mile race the MT4s finished in the top three spots with Ed Crawford and Gordon Lipe's Spydors in the number 4 and 5 slots. Cunningham was a good driver and finished in third place that day. However, as is described above, when his OSCA was put in the hands of an exceptional driver like Stirling Moss, the results were quite astounding as seen at the SCCA/WSC Sebring race of 1954.

An uncommon matchup (because it was on the West Coast) occurred at Pebble Beach in April. John von Neumann was driving 550-03 and was plagued by brake fade on the twisty course and had to be satisfied with a second place finish behind Chick Leson's OSCA. Later that year, von Neumann sold his Spyder to Sherwood Johnston where it competed against an OSCA at Thompson, Connecticut and the results were the same.

The National Capital Sports Car Races at Andrews AFB should have been a great opportunity for comparing cars. There were lots of OSCAs and lots of Porsches but the marques raced in the different F-Modified and F-Production classes. Still a couple of anecdotes are applicable. In the second

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race, Rees Makins' 1.1-liter MT4 bettered all of the 1.5 liter 356s. In the final featured race of 200 miles, the 1.5 MT4s of Briggs Cunningham and Sherwood Johnston (the same guy who would later buy 550-03 from von Neumann) finished third and sixth overall. Considering that their competition was three, four and five liter Ferraris, Jaguars and Aston Martins, the OSCAs put on quite a demonstration.

It would be possible to identify many more instances where OSCAs dominated the SCCA events of 1954 including Offutt AFB, Lockbourne AFB, and March AFB. The bottom line can be clearly shown by looking at the SCCA FM class standings at the end of the year: Cunningham/OSCA 4375 pts, Stewart/OSCA 2750 pts, David/OSCA 2500 pts, Black/Lester MG 2375 pts, Moffet/OSCA 2250 pts, von Neumann/Porsche 2250 pts, Simpson/OSCA 2250 pts, Crawford/Porsche 1875 pts. Of course there were not many four-cam Spyders in the States at that time so 1955 results might be more insightful.

OSCAs Against Four-Cams

The 1955 SCCA season started with the WSC Sebring race (described above) and OSCA was out in front. OSCAs and Porsches were entered in the April Pebble Beach races; however it is difficult to draw comparisons since each brand performed admirably in different classes. In the May Cumberland second race, Norm Christiansen's 550 bettered J.R. Johnston's OSCA but later on in the tenth race, Phil Stewart's OSCA shut down the Spyders campaigned by noted drivers Herbert Linge, Ed Crawford, Fred Procter and Evans Hunt.

At Bakersfield in May there was a bit of confusion with the rules and SCCA bookkeeping (which was not that uncommon during this period). Skip Swartley's OSCA was considered as FM but Don Britton's Spyder was considered F-Production (go figure). Well Swartley finished 4th overall but that was not the big surprise. James Dean in his Speedster (truly F-Production) took the win over Britton's Spyder which was racing in the same class.

In SCCA racing, things began to get brighter for Porsche at Iowa City. The fourth race was defined as "Sports & Production Sports" and included both 550s and an MT4. That weekend the Spyders of Davis and Crawford took 1-2 while the MT4 of Phil Stewart cleaned up in 3rd. At the June Lawrenceville, Illinois, Sports Car Races, the Spyders of Ed Crawford and Art Bunker bettered the OSCAs of James Johnston and Phil Stewart. A week later in Milwaukee Frank Botts' Osca bettered Bob Ballinger's Spyder. During the first week of September Walt Hansgen in a Spyder beat the pants off Cunningham in an OSCA at Thompson. A week later at Elkhart Lake, Bott and Cunningham's MT4s bettered Crawford and Davis' Spyders.

So it went for the rest of the season. A Porsche was in the winner's circle in one race and an OSCA in another. When the SCCA tallied up the scores in January, John von Neumann and his 550 was on top scoring 4,250 points. Briggs Cunningham racked up 3,750 points which was composed of 750 points driving his Spyder and another 3,000 points behind the wheel of his OSCA.

A couple of preliminary conclusions can be drawn after looking at SCCA race results that year. First, it was certain that having a four-cam instead of a push rod in a Spyder was a vast improvement. Second there were many more Porsche Spyders being built and sold in the United States than OSCA MT4s. If 1955 SCCA results in FM are analytically examined today, it seems as clear as mud whether one should bargain with Max Hoffman in New York to get a 550 or Edgar Fronteras in Chicago to buy an MT4. Sports car enthusiasts of the time however apparently had a more lucid vision.

The Winner Emerges

SCCA results show that as the year 1956 progressed, fewer OSCAs were being entered in races and none were able to overcome Spyders in competition. Speaking with those who were involved with the sport during that

time frame, there appear to be multiple reasons for OSCAs fading into the background. First, the earliest Spyders were delivered with 1500 Supers engines and a gear set that put them at a disadvantage on shorter course. For example at Sebring, the longest straight was insufficient for Spyders to peak in top gear. As development progressed, Porsche made other ratios available that gave the better acceleration so necessary on twisty courses.

Another factor at play was sales. The Maserati brothers made very few cars and there was always a long waiting list. No matter how well their cars sold, the brothers were not to be rushed into any process other than methodically hand-building cars one at a time. Porsche on the other hand was building 356s on a volume basis and, as a result, knew how to apply more efficient production methods to race car building as well. In addition to producing a greater number of Spyders, Porsche was capable of selling them over 30% cheaper than the Maserati brothers could price their MT4s.

The website www.RacingSportsCars.com provides some interesting statistics. Including all models, OSCAs were involved in some 838 races around the world between 1948 and 1970. MT4s were the most popular model representing about 50% of the entries. OSCAs managed 165 overall wins and an additional 187 class wins during their careers and as you likely suspect, the majority of this activity was in Italy in the hands of Italian pilots although U. S. activity is a close second.

Differing Business Plans

In the mid-twentieth century it was difficult to find a workable business plan that included racing. Ferry Porsche felt that success on the track was publicity that produced showroom sales. Manufacturers like Mercedes-Benz, Alfa and Jaguar, to name just three other car builders, apparently endorsed this same business plan. Enzo Ferrari had a somewhat similar but not identical model. He was addicted to building the ultimate race car and he sold just enough street cars to support his addiction. His cars were exceptionally successful in racing and this certainly contributed to private party sales – particularly since his cars were often given the greatest publicity by finishing first overall. David Brown, Briggs Cunningham and Lance Reventlow used a far different business plan. Simply put, deep pockets allowed them to do what they wanted.

The Maserati brothers' business plan seems more hobby than commerce and they did not have unlimited wealth upon which to build their enterprise. Theirs was an austere endeavor of forging high performance cars that satiated the racing dreams. Very few OSCAs were built specifically for street use and the Italian brothers completely disdained the notion of building cars on a production basis.

Whether building cars or making computers, it is difficult for small companies to compete against larger ones. There are points where economies of scale come into play and make a significant factor in success. In 1956 OSCA employed less than four dozen people and produced just 20 cars. In 1956 Porsche employed several hundred and built over 3,500 sports cars and several dozen race cars. And not to forget, Porsche was receiving major royalties from VW sales at the same time their customer cars were selling beyond their expectations. Certainly the disparity in resources between Porsche and OSCA was a factor in achievements on the track.

According to *Sports Car Market*, a nice driver MT4 1500 is valued around \$1.0 to \$1.3 Million. There were only 35 built so good luck finding one. As for 550 Spyders, the same reference quotes \$900K to \$2 Million and there are over a hundred 550/550As still around from which you can choose.

There has not been a lot of information published on OSCA, with only one book, *OSCA, La Rivincita Dei Maserati*, by Luigi Orsini and Franco Zagari, and it is in Italian. As a result it took some excellent support by others to produce this article. The author wishes to thank Robert Devlin, Carl Goodwin, Paul Kierstein, Peter Vack and Hugues Vanhoolandt for their help.

