

## 1953 Siata 208S Spider Competizione by Motto

Chassis No. BS 503

Engine No. BS 077

- The third prototype and pre-production example, and the first car fitted with aluminum coachwork; the third of 35 total examples built
- Personal racing and promotional car first owned by the legendary Southern California-based importer, racing driver, and mechanic Ernie McAfee
- Front cover car of the magazine Road & Track
- Documented period racing career, including participation in the 1953 Carrera Panamericana
- Retains its matching-numbers Fiat *Tipo* 104 V-8 engine and five-speed competition gearbox, and the complete original drive-train
- Extensively researched body-off restoration by the renowned Quality Cars in Italy, with full rebuild of mechanical elements by Roberto Di Checchi of Motor Holding, completed in 2014
- Very well-documented with period magazine articles, period photos, restoration photos, and extremely well described with many period pictures and featuring the front cover in Tony Adriaensens' seminal volume *Otto Vu*
- Invited and presented at the 2022 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance
- The most historically significant 208S Spider ever built; beautifully presented in correct 1953 Carrera PanAmericana livery
- Eligible for all major concours and historic rally events such as Mille Miglia, Targa Florio, GP Nuvolari, Tour Auto etc.. Accompanied by FIVA ID card

Founded in 1926, the Societa Italiana Auto Trasformazioni Accessori, or SIATA, initially specialised in providing performance components for racing automobiles. The 1948 introduction of the Amica marked Siata's full ascension to independent manufacturer, and a series of sporting roadsters and coupés soon followed, including the Daina and the 300 BC racing *barchetta*.

In 1953 Siata was contracted to assist in the build of Fiat's Otto Vu model, a flagship supercar equipped with a unique 70-degree V-8 that is now widely recognised as a mechanical jewel. Although approximately 200 examples of the 8V engine were built, Otto Vu chassis production only reached 114 cars, and 50 motor units and drive trains were acquired by Siata for its 208 CS Coupe and latest sports-racing model, the 208S Spider.

The latest evolution of Siata's lightweight racing platform featured mechanical advancements like all-wheel independent suspension, offering stunning roadholding and driving capabilities

and a perfect home for the 8V engine. The new chassis was clothed in breathtaking spider coachwork penned by Giovanni Michelotti and realised in aluminum by the Turinese *carrozzeria* Motto. Built in a sparing quantity of 35 examples, the 208S soon became a potent contender in SCCA competition, in no small part led by a shrewd wunderkind mechanic from Southern California.

Ernie McAfee was one of the better-known names in SCCA racing of this period, and his career began during the 1930s as a teenager, when he was employed part-time at various garages while indulging his fascination with dry-lake racers. During these dry-lake excursions he met the famed playboy/collector/speed enthusiast Tommy Lee, who soon hired the budding mechanic to manage his garage of exotic European performance cars.

Eventually falling in with John Edgar's influential stable, McAfee opened his now-legendary sports car shop in Hollywood in 1950 with aspirations of importer status. Though he was weaned on the straight-line sprints of dry-lake racing, McAfee quickly learned the ways of sports car racing, and his 5th-place finish at the 1952 Carrera Panamericana while teamed with the equally well-known (but unrelated) Jack McAfee marked a star on the rise.

In early April 1953, Siata introduced its prototype 208S Spider at the International Motor Sports Show in New York City. As documented in *Otto Vu*, the seminal work by marque historian Tony Adriaensens, Ernie McAfee may have viewed the prototype in New York, prompting him to visit the Siata factory in Italy shortly thereafter. In any event, he was accompanied by independent builder Bill Devin to Italy, and both men attended the Turin Salon of late April/early May, where Devin was so impressed with the second prototype on exhibit that he bought the car on the spot.

An enthusiastic McAfee saw potential in the American market, and arranged for the purchase of 25 spiders and before long the first of these, chassis number BS 503, just the third example built, was delivered to him in Southern California. As the third prototype and equally the first special ordered pre-production example (the prototypes had a steel body and only one door!), it was the first car built in aluminum, and it was specified for high-speed competition with a five-speed gearbox. The dash board was different in form making the right and left door asymmetric in form. The fire wall was different in shape and contained the battery on the top right hand side. Contrary to the following production cars, BS\*503\* had no traffic indicators, needless on a car to be used only for racing.

Chassis number BS 503 immediately became Ernie's personal competition car, participating in 10 Southern California-based races during his ownership over the following two years. Most of these outings were sponsored by Union Oil scion Bill Doheny, the Beverly Hills-based sports car enthusiast.

Soon after taking delivery, McAfee contacted *Road & Track* editor John Bond to offer a test drive, and BS 503 became the subject of a performance evaluation that later appeared in the March 1954 issue. The spider had impressed the test driver and was featured on the front cover of the magazine, demonstrating the ultimate expression for appreciation.

The 208S then made its first racing appearance at an annual gymkhana at the Oxnard airport in road races during a weekend in Santa Barbara. While the car was entered in stock configuration on the first day to unremarkable results, during the ensuing hours McAfee removed the bumpers and replaced the windscreen with a Brooklands-style unit, surely contributing to an 8th-place finish in the Sunday race.

Ernie was impressed by the driving capabilities of BS\*503\* and together with his business partner Bill Doheny decided to enter the car in the 1953 Carrera PanAmericana race. Over the next two months, McAfee went to work on the Siata, reducing weight by relentlessly drilling and perforating as many non-stressed members as possible. The final result was quite impressive and made Ernie decide to nickname his spider “Staccio Volante” (= Flying Sieve), which he proudly marked on the front nose section. He also cut cooling vents into the rear wings, lending the car an even more distinctive appearance. In November Ernie entered his finished product as race #165 in the fourth annual Carrera Panamericana, the legendary eight-leg Mexican road race. The beautiful spider competed gamely over the first leg managing fifth place in the Sports Class classification at the end of the day. On the second leg, from Oaxaca to Mexico City, Ernie moved up briefly to first place and was passed on the straight by the later winning Porsche 550 spyder of Jaroslav Juran. With the road getting curvy again, Ernie was pushing hard on Juhan once more when he went too fast into a blind dogleg and slammed into a small cement marker post. The only, hardly visible, damage was at the steering and the front cross-member, but making the car undrivable and out of the race. Ernie however had proved to be very competitive with the spider.

BS 503 only needed a short time for repair and was already present at the 1954 Palm Springs Road Race in January, one of seven starts during the course of the 1954 season, and with its unique drilled appearance the Siata began to gain a fearsome reputation. Repainted in black and yellow Ernie had freshed up his spider for the 1954 Pebble Beach Road Race but retained his favorite race number 165 whenever possible, eventually becoming known as “Holey Terror” (as profiled in a feature article in the March 1954 issue of *Car Craft*). Competing in several SCCA races and after a final race at Palm Springs in May 1955, McAfee sold the Siata to a college student named Hamilton Vose III, who returned the car to Palm Springs in December. Unfortunately a blown piston during practice prevented the car from starting.

Following the installation of a Buick V-8 (a reasonably common practice in 1950s American racing) and a repaint in metallic green, the 208S participated in the Santa Barbara races in September 1956, finishing 2nd overall in race number nine. The spider was scheduled to run Palm Springs two months later but never arrived, and this appears to mark the conclusion of the car's period racing career.

Before long the Siata (accompanied by the removed and disassembled engine, gearbox and drive train), was sold to Peter Bluebaum of Kentucky. The rare 8V engine and factory-equipped five-speed gearbox and drive train were later sold to a Connecticut-based collector named Jean Hecht, and in the mid 2000s the esteemed Italian car historian John De Boer acquired both the complete original drivetrain and the car, reuniting them for the first time in decades.

In 2007, Mr. De Boer sold the Siata to a European collector of significant post-war sports cars. He commissioned the highly respected restoration firm Quality Cars of Italy to repair the frame and refinish the coachwork. The frame had been modified in 1956 by Bluebaum in an attempt to build a sprint car, and needed intervention and new parts to correct. Roberto Di Checchi of Motor Holding was entrusted with a full mechanical rebuild of the chassis and engine. Great effort was taken to consult historic images of the car at various events, particularly the 1953 Carrera Panamericana. Those efforts have resulted in an incredible level of authenticity, from the proper Carrera Panamericana livery to details such as the secondary fuel tank with anti-roll bar (especially mounted for the long Carrera legs), the periscope-style cowl-mounted footwell vent, and proper stickers including the uber-rare "Ernie McAfee Foreign Cars" stickers.

Following completion of the magnificent restoration in 2014, the Siata was privately enjoyed before being displayed at the 2022 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. Now offered from 17 years of dedicated single-owner care, and continuing to benefit from the high-quality Italian restoration, this spider is almost certainly the most historically significant 208S ever built. As the great Ernie McAfee's personal car, with genuine period racing history including the mighty Carrera, and the first pre-production example built, BS 503 is also notable for being the first car bodied in aluminum and equipped with the ultra-rare five-speed competition gearbox. Furthermore, mechanical stampings matching Tony Adriaensens' research show the car retains its matching-numbers engine and gearbox.

As worthy of museum display as it is capable of vintage racing performance, this painstakingly restored Siata spider is the benchmark example of the 208S model, offering a rare opportunity for any serious collector of significant Italian sports-racers.

## Race History BS 503:

- 1953, aug 23: Oxnard Airport gymkhana - E. McAfee
- 1953, sep 5/6: Santa Barbara Road Race - E. McAfee
- 1953, nov 19: Carrera PanAmerica Mexico - E. McAfee
- 1954, jan 23/24: 6<sup>th</sup> Palm Springs Road Race - E. McAfee
- 1954, mar 21: Bakersfield Road Race - E. McAfee
- 1954, apr 11: Pebble Beach sports car Road Race - E. McAfee car painted yellow with black.
- 1954, may 9: First Willow Springs Road Race - E. McAfee
- 1954, Jun 5/6: Golden Gate Road Race - E. McAfee
- 1954, sep 4/5: Santa Barbara Road Race - E. McAfee
- 1954, nov 27/28: Torrey Pines 6h.race - E. McAfee/Doheny/Wheeler
- 1955, may: Palm Springs Races – George Putnam
- 1955, dec 3/4: Palm Springs Road Race – Hamilton Vose III piston blown during the race. After the race, the car was repainted green and a Buick V8 was installed by Peter McCluskey.
- 1956, sep 1/2: Santa Barbara Road Race - Hamilton Vose
- 1956, nov 3/4: Palm Springs 1<sup>o</sup> National Championship - Hamilton Vose

