

When the iconic prancing horse of Ferrari comes to mind, discretion is not one of the words that usually depict such a “look at me” kind of marque. However, in an alley off a main thoroughfare in Redondo Beach, California, a nondescript set of buildings house the shops of Fast Cars Ltd. This inconspicuous location stores, race-preps and repairs some of the finest examples of exotic autos and vintage motorcycles in Southern California.

The moment we arrive, founder Steve Tillack excitedly pulls us back to his machine shop to see fabrication on a new set of valve domes for a late 1960s Honda CB160 motorcycle. Machinist Ken Hilton is busily creating the new domes in the aluminum block—manually—on a machine press. The first impression is *artistry*. You do not see this kind of craftsmanship in this age of Computerized CNC and digital CAD. Not to say Fast Cars does not have the most modern equipment—they do. But when working on and fabricating components for such automotive masterpieces, sometimes the difference between a good part and a great part is merely TLC.



The shop is kept very busy as these in-process restorations show.



The service bays can handle several cars at the same time.



Mitch Terry grinds away at original Pininfarina leadwork.

This same enthusiasm for mechanical beauty and craftsmanship runs deep throughout the crew in this group of buildings that include an engine shop with a full dyno facility, a body shop, repair and maintenance, and storage for a revolving number of amazing classics belonging to individual customers and some 300 collections managed by the firm.

“We all enjoy what we do, we are all very passionate,” comments Craig Calder, the next-generation chief of the operation. “We all put an effort into our customers’ cars as if they were our own. We have great relations with a rather large customer base, so you really need to have that confidence in what you are doing.”

Founded 33 years ago by Pioneer Electronics whiz kid Steve Tillack, Fast Cars was not the restoration, race prep and maintenance behemoth that it is now—it was a car stereo installation shop.

“I was employed in the ’70s by Pioneer Electronics,” Tillack explains, “and they built an ad campaign around me as the world’s foremost car stereo installer.” After being let go in a late 1979 management shakeup, he started his own shop doing high-end stereo installations. “At the same time I had people bringing me Ferraris to do small electrical jobs. Then there was a car pulled out of a failed restoration shop that I put back together. I realized the stereo guys were grinding me something fierce, but these guys with the Ferraris were lining up at the door—and I saw the writing on the wall.

“So it evolved very fast out of the car stereo business into the Ferrari business. I was very fortunate. I got some very good advice early on. I had a wonderful guy come to work for me—Harold White (former Gurney AAR mechanic). Each individual department has evolved as a necessity.”

Walking into one of the smaller garages on the property revealed an Abarth 204A Motto Spider, an Abarth 2000 FIA sports racer, Niki Lauda’s 1974 Ferrari 312 B3 and a Ford GT40 among others, and it was like being transported to Wonderland





Enthusiast craftsmen
put their experienced
TLC into everything
done here.

BY TOM STAHLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE BURT

FAST CARS LTD.



Front row: Craig Calder, Joe Cano, Andrew Calder, Shea Wells, Jeff Freeman,
Steve Joseph, Jonathan Gonzalez and Bobby Alldread.
Back row: Mitch Terry, Kenny Hilton, Francisco Puga, Ramon Garcia,
John McKay, Tommy Adam, Kevin Felix and Marco Piehl.



An Abarth 204A Motto Spider flanks Niki Lauda's 1974 Ferrari 312, Abarth FIA sports racer and a GT40.



Kevin Felix inspects the engine of a 1950's Allard.

without having to drink from Alice's bottle.

"This Ferrari is what put Niki and Ferrari back at the front of the grid," proudly trumpets Tillack as we admire the scarlet 312 B3 steed. "While this isn't the car that they won the World Championship with, it was a great car that put them back on the map. It won two Grands Prix, had four pole positions and five fast laps—Lauda really tore it up in this car."

A favorite memory for Tillack was driving that 312 at Watkins Glen. "I don't get to own most of these cars, but they get left with me and I get to enjoy them and make them a bit better and have some fun with them."

It is obvious that some automotive pieces cause Tillack displeasure. Before our photo shoot of a group of cars, Tillack has a couple of his crew remove an early 20th century Hupmobile from the room while explaining, "This was a guy's three-martini indiscretion—being drunk at an auction and probably paying three times what it is worth—and finding out the engine is beyond repair—then deciding later that you are going to replace the mechanicals with modern hot rod type stuff. But by doing that you have deflated the price paid value even further."

A visit to the metal shop is fascinating, as stripped to bare metal are a Pegaso-built Berlinetta, a Ferrari Lusso and a Pininfarina Cabriolet. Tillack points out original Pininfarina leadwork covering weld seams and declares, "It doesn't matter that they were Ferraris, they were still building cars to make a profit. So they were doing the fastest, least-expensive things to produce the car. They weren't thinking of longterm restoration. In most cases we go back and clean up the metalwork a little bit better."

While grinding away lead from the Lusso, one of the apprentice metal fabricators, Shea Wells—probably the youngest guy we had yet come across—proclaims, "The minute you remove a dent or strip the paint off a car, you remove its soul." Not exactly character befitting of the words—particularly from a guy who does just that. As it turns out, this body and fender guy is also a technician for GM in the Formula Drift Series. His opinions are well



Marco Piehl fabricates a component in the metal shop.



Francisco Puga (at computer) and Bobby Alldread hunt for part numbers.



Jaguar E-Type low-drag coupe is in final prep for paint.

grounded though, as at the auctions, survivors tend to bring a premium over their restored brethren.

Fast Cars' customers are not the argumentative types you find at the service desk of your local Ford dealership, they are cheerleaders who in one case confided, "I wouldn't own these cars without a place like this." The customer whose daily-driver Dino was getting a tune-up continues, "Coming here is like the new car experience you get at most high-end dealerships." This enthusiast mentality from both sides of the counter, in combination with unlimited automotive eye-candy, shines a scarlet light on this otherwise group of nondescript buildings.

Needless to say, a great Ferrari and exotic workshop in Southern California has a plethora of customers that reads like a who's who of L.A./Orange Counties' rich and famous. The discreet nature of the buildings carries through to the anonymity of the customer base. Tillack has always maintained a low-key setting and vehemently protects his customer list. "I have always served my clients by maintaining their anonymity unless it is their desire to have themselves out there in front." Tillack would not reveal a single famous customer to us—even when pressed.

As we go through a myriad of work areas, we are treated to a living archive viewing some of history's greatest sports cars in various stages of repair and restoration.

Steve Tillack now looks forward to retirement, but his legacy is well-preserved in passing the torch to well-established shop manager, Craig Calder. Calder grew up near Oulton Park in the Northern English Province of Cheshire. Some of his favorite childhood memories were going to the British Touring Car races at Oulton with his father.

After emigrating to Southern California in the late 1990's Calder began working in the parts department at Fast Cars in 1999 and moved up to running the shop. He maintains a grateful attitude as he takes the reins of the reputable business and speaks of the rewarding nature of being at Fast Cars: "I really have loved having a number of '50s and '60s prototype Ferraris that we have had the opportunity to do restorations on—then take to Pebble Beach. There has been a lot of cool cars over the years that continue to come in the door here that we have been fortunate enough to work on—and we are looking to keep that going."

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Ferrari service clients keep the shop buzzing with activity.



Kenny Hilton bores out vintage Honda motorcycle cylinders.



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