

AC-Chrysler 2.2 Turbo

Panteramerica upstages the G-24

Steve Hitter and Barry Gale have some kind of act going. A bit like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, they finish one another's sentences, contradict one another, give rhetorical answers to rhetorical questions. All very amusing.

The two met about 20 years ago as members of a car club. The T-Timers, it was called. In fact they claim to have founded the West Hollywood branch, which just about survived their membership. Just a couple of car-nutty California kids growing up in paradise. The growing up got done, but the car-nuttiness never went away, which is how these two guys came to be the prime movers behind Steve Hitter & Associates and Panteramerica, the first, an advertising agency, the second, the importer of De Tomaso autos and parts. Hitter graduated from Art Center College of Design (1969) with a degree in transportation design. Gale got an M.A. in communications from Cal State Northridge about the same time. Which explains why Hitter

by Len Frank

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runs the ad agency and Gale messes with the cars. Of course.

Panteramerica was once called Gran Turismo—it was owned originally by photographer Rick McBride (of Auto Expo fame) and Ray Geddes, once of Shelby American. Geddes bought McBride out, Gale and Hitter bought Geddes out. That was 1977. In 1980, though Geddes (and others) thought it impossible, Panteramerica began to bring in complete, sort-of-legal Panteras. Although negotiations begin with De Tomaso in Turin, the cars are actually delivered to Panteramerica by the De Tomaso distributor in Belgium—who also happens to be the AC distributor there in the Lowlands.

AC Cars, Ltd. is a company that could only have existed—and since 1904 at that—in England. Since the mid-'50s AC has

used prototypes designed by others as the basis for its "production."

The latest bought-out design came from Peter Bohanna (an ex-Ford, ex-Lola body designer) and Robin Stables (ex-Lotus dealer) who had designed a car called the Diablo, using British-Leyland and Maxi transverse engine and drivetrain in exactly the manner later used by Fiat in the X19.

The Diablo had a square tube frame with the deep side rails between the wheels boxed in sheet steel. Steel bulkheads are used at firewall and cowl. Radiator is front-mounted, gas tank ahead of the engine, well forward of the rear end. Suspension front and rear is by fabricated tubular A-arms supported by coil-over-shock units. Naturally rack-and-pinion steering, naturally 4-wheel disc brakes. All very neat, heavily triangulated, strong, designed to meet the EEC safety regs. Bohanna and Stables had the finished glass-bodied prototype at the London Racing Car Show in 1972. The design was bought by AC soon

