

# In Gear with the Ghibli

“... Try walking down Fifth Avenue in a \$400 suit with a \$150 cordovan attaché case. Nobody looks at *you*. Then drive down the Avenue in a Ghibli. They look—a lot...”

By Leo Levine

Some cars don't look expensive, at least not at first glance, but this one looks like a bloody fortune: that's the whole point. It's a Maserati—specifically, a Maserati Ghibli (say GHEE-blee), named for the wind that blows across the Sahara. It costs \$18,900.

The Ghibli is, at present anyway, *the* car. It comes by this distinction primarily because of its looks and its exclusivity. The fact that it happens to perform well and has some sophisticated mechanical attributes is of practically no importance to most of its owners, who wouldn't know an overhead camshaft from third base.

Designed and executed by the house of Ghia, in Turin, the Ghibli is one of the great styling triumphs of automotive history. It is long, low, even sensual, and seems to be going at least 100 miles an hour when it is parked.

The styling is what sells it, because compared to some of the other high-performance, mostly race-bred exotics such as the Ferrari, the Lamborghini and the Aston Martin, the Ghibli is more difficult to drive. Its transmission is rather hard to manipulate, visibility from the chaise-longue seat is poor when maneuvering in close quarters, and the four (four, man, four) overhead camshaft V8 has a tendency to run rough at low speeds. But the average buyer is not going to know all this, and when he finds out he'll be damned if he'll admit it.

It is sleek, beautiful and even fitted with such amenities as air conditioning and electric windows as standard equipment. If you don't want the five-speed gearbox, they'll throw in an automatic transmission for \$700 more.

Most important, it is exclusive. There are only 50 Ghiblis in the U.S. and perhaps another 50 in the rest of the world. Henry Ford II bought the first one to come into this country and Wilt Chamberlain got the second (the only alteration necessary for Wilt's was to substitute a smaller steering wheel, enabling the 86-inch Wilt to make it into the 45-inch high Maserati and tuck his legs into the proper position). Now Henry and Wilt, they have a lot of charisma on their own, and for them, perhaps, the Ghibli is something else; when *they*

walk down the street, people look at them. Try walking down Fifth Avenue in a \$400 suit with a \$150 cordovan attaché case. Nobody looks at *you*. Then drive down the Avenue in a Ghibli. They look—a lot. Try it on a summer's evening on First or Second Avenue in the 60s or 70s. You might not make it past the third block before being swarmed under by broads (a lot of guys have spent more than \$18,900 to achieve the same effect—with less success).

The view from the bridge, or pilot's seat, gives the first real indication of what this is all about. Enclosed in the pigskin upholstery, you are staring at a surprisingly small wood-rimmed steering wheel, a myriad of dials and switches almost reminiscent of a 707, and four pedals (the left one does nothing except give you a place to rest your foot when it isn't operating the clutch). There are eight dials, including such things as a rev counter, speedometer (reading to 180 m.p.h.—the Ghibli will do about 160), oil pressure, oil temperature (when was the last time you worried about your oil temperature?), water temperature, ammeter, fuel gauge and a clock—plus about a dozen switches and seven “idiot” lights that will glow when something is amiss. There is also a minuscule glove compartment, just big enough for a fat checkbook. There are even two ignition switches, one being an anti-theft device, although the thought of anyone escaping unnoticed in this chrome, aluminum and pigskin creation is a ludicrous one.

Sitting in the car is the first return on your investment. The second comes when you turn the key and hear all those whirry-clicky noises . . . whirrick . . . whirrick—none of your old-fashioned pocket-apocketa nonsense, Mr. Mitty—or even a pocketaqueep; *this* car whirrs and clicks. You could do better than old Walter without even half trying.

In motion, the car is something else. The whirrickwhirrick changes to a harsh gurgle and suddenly you are not conscious of the vehicle any more, but of the attention it attracts.

They stop, and they look.

The kids: Some of them stare, some of them even cheer— (continued on page 41)



Car of the Year,  
the Maserati  
Ghibli.  
Price: \$18,900.  
Only 50 are  
presently  
in the U.S.

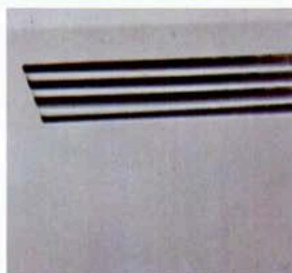


The Ghibli's big feature is Style—its body, by the House of Ghia in Turin, is long, low and sensual.

Fur coat worn with pants complements the Maserati Message. Designer Emeric Partos created the outfit as a unit: tunic, pants, long Persian lamb trenchcoat.

On the bench: Sharon Rote; standing: her husband Kyle Rote, NBC-TV sports announcer and ex-Giants flankerback, in brown broadtail—also a Partos idea for Bergdorf Goodman.





It's what's out front that counts: hidden headlights, high-style hubcaps, etc. score high with the fashion-conscious.



Karen Rote, wrapped to the ears in George Kaplan's red fox pants-coat, banded and hugely scarfed in red and white stripes of fox. The man behind the Maserati, Kyle Rote, in Kaplan's printed marmot stadium coat.

View from the  
Bridge: rich  
pigskin seats,  
wood-rimmed  
steering wheel,  
myriad dials  
and four pedals.



**Emeric Partos**  
sees his long  
Russian raccoon  
coat just so, over  
glen plaid pants,  
long tunic.  
If you see it his  
way, you can buy  
the entire kit  
and kaboodle,  
made to order in  
Bergdorf Goodman's  
fur salon. Kyle  
Rote, lending his  
support to Karen,  
in Partos' curly  
lamb greatcoat.



(continued from page 36) they stand at the side of the road and applaud. It is a purely visceral reaction.

Other drivers: "What is it? Oh yeah? Great! Great!" They have satisfied themselves by their own approbation.

The girls: If they are under 30, they stop and give it a good look. If you are sitting behind the wheel—and for some reason especially if you are wearing sunglasses—with the look you get *The Message*; you get *The Message* a higher percentage of the time than you'd believe possible. It really works.

Even taxi drivers look at it, and so do ladies in station wagons filled with runny-nosed youngsters.

Doormen give it the grade-A treatment: you have not only arrived, you have also Arrived. You have mystique, you have charisma, and all for \$18,900, plus tax.

There are four Maserati dealers in this country, one in Beverly Hills, another in Philadelphia, another in Tacoma, Wash., for some obscure reason, and there is Bob Grossman in West Nyack, just across the Tappan Zee Bridge, who takes care of the New York area and who has sold about 25 Ghiblis. Grossman is also a Volkswagen and Porsche dealer and has a large used-car business that handles such items as Rolls Royces, Ferraris, Mercedes and the like, but the Ghibli is his pet. To him, mystique is a synonym for money.

"When a photo of the car first appeared in *Playboy*," he says, "I got four phone calls in two days. They just said 'I want one,' and they sent their checks. It's the easiest car to sell—for a high-priced car—I've ever had."

Most of them are the property of cloak and suiters, and two were even birthday presents for teenagers (usually the most in persons do not buy the most in cars; they don't need them). The Ghibli sells so well Grossman has not found it necessary to turn one loose for anything less than the list price; most domestic car dealers would have trouble remembering the last time they got full list for an automobile ("I get this happy millionaire type—the new millionaire—and they're so overjoyed with the whole world that they couldn't care

less about the money").

The first one that actually came into the showroom (Ford's and Chamberlain's were flown to their owners from Italy) went for considerably more than list. "When it got here I fell in love with it," Grossman said, "and I wanted to keep it around not only as a demonstrator, but also to use for myself. Then a few days later this guy came in and saw it and he wanted it—not the next one, but *that* one. When I told him he couldn't have it, he said, 'Everyone's got his price, what's yours?'"

"I told him it wasn't for sale"—Grossman is far from destitute—"but the next day he called back and offered me—I'm not going to tell you how much, but it was *so* much I just couldn't refuse him. He came over with a check and that was that—except the next day I bought his old Mercedes, and he didn't seem to care how much I gave him for it.

"Most of the guys who buy these aren't sports car enthusiasts or would-be racers. They're married men with families; they have a Cadillac in the garage at home and a mistress in New York. They've got money and they're looking for something different, and we give it to them."

"I think some of them might even hate the car—but they drive it, because it represents something different and exclusive, and the more you tell them how hard it is to get one, the more they want it."

If you don't want (or can't get delivery) on a Ghibli, your other avenues to Nirvana are in Providence, R.I., where Jake Kaplan's Lamborghini East is located (it sounds more like a discothèque than a dealership) or in Greenwich, Conn., where Luigi Chinetti sells Ferraris. Both of them have a more or less standard model that sells for \$15,750, including the air conditioning, both of them have V12 engines which are considerably smoother than the Maserati's V8, and neither is hurting for customers (Freddie Barrette, Kaplan's general manager: "The only thing they ask me is 'Will it overheat in traffic?' So I let them drive it through traffic and see for themselves").

But neither the Lamborghini 400 2+2 or the Ferrari 330 GTC, for all their edge in cultivation and refinement, has anything

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like the Ghibli's styling. Some persons even consider the Lamborghini's shape to be somewhat ugly, and the Ferrari, especially with a dark paint job, appears conservative (the days of the flame-red street Ferraris with the straight-pipe exhausts are a thing of the past). In fact you can drive either one of them down the street and no one will even turn around.

And that's not the point of conspicuous consumption.

Of course there are some people who don't get the message—or maybe they get it all too well. Like the lady down the street whose husband has a Cadillac in the garage next to which she parks her Barracuda.

When she saw the Ghibli the first thing she said was, "It has a fastback—just like my Plymouth."

And a few minutes later, after taking a good look at what Italy's finest hath wrought, she said she liked her Barracuda better.

Maybe she knew what would happen if her husband ever started running around in a Ghibli. ■