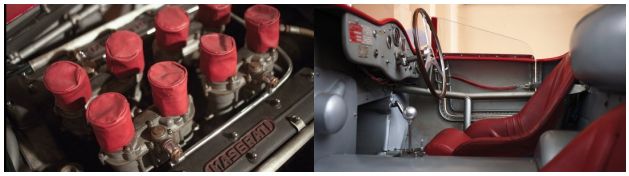
Going once, going twice... Two racing Maseratis head to auction

Lead
Maseratis are the cars to have this year, given the marque's 2014 centenary, and no doubt historic race organisers will open their arms wide to racing versions of the Trident. Two such cars of particular interest are coming up at auction very soon...

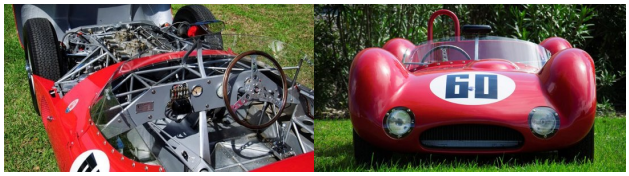
Maserati 450S, RM Auctions - estimate €4m - 5.5m



Given that so few (8 or 10, depending on whether you count single-seaters and rebodies) of the fabulous 450S racers were ever built, not one of them could be considered 'ordinary', but the car on sale by RM in Monaco on 10 May is particularly special: the 450S prototype by Fantuzzi. RM Auctions has a reputation for honesty when it comes to a car's provenance, hence it is the auction house itself that states the car's history is, to say the least, not entirely straightforward. Take the chassis number, which is given as a slightly confusing '3501/4501/350SI-10'. Apparently, Maserati used chassis number 4501 no fewer than three times from 1956 to 1958, giving rise to "much debate amongst marque experts".

RM, with refreshing clarity, gives a full explanation of the complex history of this racing car on its website. This honesty reassures us that when RM claims it is satisfied with the documentary evidence of the car's identity, then so are we. And that identity is very impressive: the car was the Works entry at the 1956 Mille Miglia – piloted by no less a pairing than Stirling Moss and Denis Jenkinson. After a long (and chequered) history, the car was restored with full factory consultation in 1987, hence its not-unreasonable estimate of 4m to 5.5m euros.

Maserati Birdcage, Motostalgia - estimate $2.1m - 2.4m



Another car with a much-debated history is the 1960 Maserati Tipo 61 'Birdcage', on sale at Motostalgia's 'Keels & Wheels' auction on 2 May in Seabrook, Texas. While some sources suggest that this car – chassis 2459 – was entirely destroyed in a racing accident, others call it a 'restoration'. It is in the nature of racing cars that – in their day – the teams that ran them would think nothing of switching not just a panel or bonnet, but the engine, transmission, full bodywork – even the chassis itself. No one knew how valuable they would become 40 or 50 years later, they were simply tools to win races.

Nowadays, it comes down to the apocryphal tale of George Washington's axe. If you change the head, and then the handle, is it the same axe? The only real rule is that the buyer needs to know the truth behind the history of the car: then they can decide what it is worth – to them. Motostalgia feels that, despite its controversial history, this Birdcage is worth 2.1m to 2.4m U.S. dollars. We'll find out if the buyers agree on 2 May.

Photos: RM Auctions & Cymon Taylor / Motostalgia

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