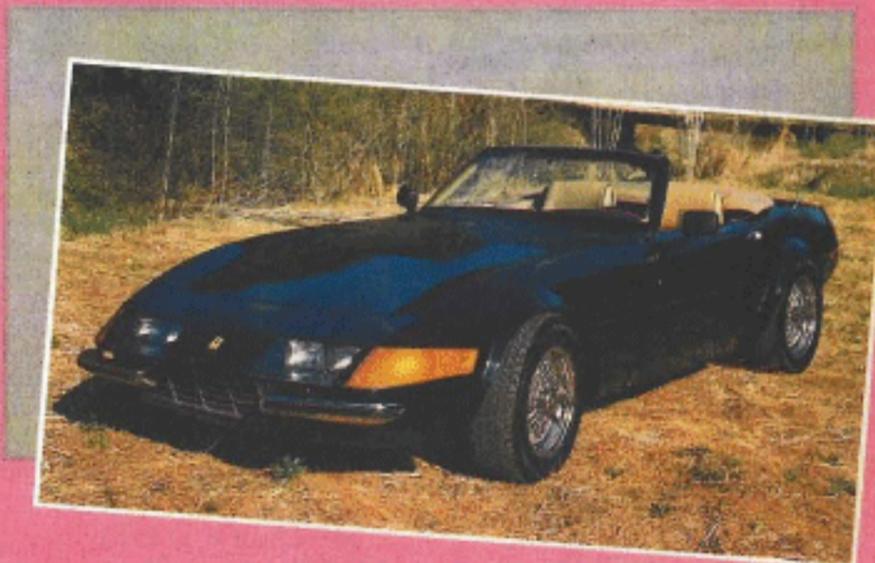
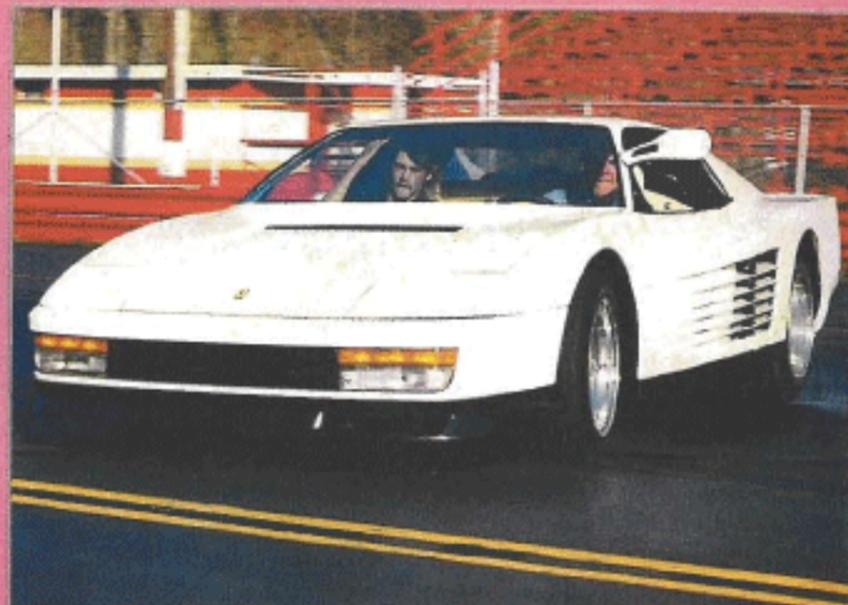


TWICE AS VICE



IN MIAMI, "TWO FOR THE ROAD" MEANS TESTAROSSA AND DAYTONA SPYDER

By Kevin Spaise

What are two of the most luminous star-cars in Hollywood history doing nestled in the eastern Tennessee hillsides? "Sometimes I wonder myself," marvels kit maker Carl Roberts, who parks the original "Miami Vice" Spyder and this season's white Testarossa stunt car at his Kingsport manufacturing facility.

Crockett, as usual, is as smooth as the crease on his pastel pants: "Okay pal, how do I know that thing's loaded," he asks, casting a skeptical eye

toward this week's scummy adversary, a sweaty drug-runner toting a manacing grenade-launcher. Grinning wickedly, the scofflaw takes aim at the gleaming black Ferrari Daytona Spyder, and in a brilliant flash of fire and fiberglass, the jazziest set of wheels on the box is reduced to smoldering rubbish.

Incinerated with the car, reasoned the brain trust of Universal Studios, producers of the television show credited with more broken Friday night dates than any

other time-slot in TV history, was a sticky situation much too entrenched in reality for their tastes. The Ferrari hierarchy, it seemed, was incensed at the weekly bastardization of the regal name; the Daytona portrayed on "Miami Vice" was a *kit* car, more dog-and-pony than prancing horse. Together, the pinstripe suits at Ferrari and Turbo Sunglasses of Hollywood cut a deal. They'd blow the svelte impostor out of the consciousness of the American public.

Play the tape of that episode back at half-speed, and it's entirely possible you'll see the slightest trace of a grin curling Don Johnson's lips as the car burns on the horizon. As he peered through the shimmering image of surface heat that hovered over the melting wreckage, pictures of horses—real ones, affixed to the posterior of a gleaming white Testarossa, courtesy of the folks at Enzo's place—were likely dancing through his head.

The four-lane that weaves around Kingsport, Tennessee, flirts with the North Carolina and Virginia borders, guiding one through a picturesque swath of the northeastern most part of the state. The taxi driver identifies an imposing piece of factory apparatus, which belches voluminous puffs of smoke into the crystal sky, as part of Eastman Kodak's sprawling facility. "They kill some fish, what with their dumping into the river. But they're 12,000 jobs," the driver reasons.

Upon learning of the visitor's occupation as an autojournalist, the Ramada security guard, a chain-smoking septuagenarian, is anxious to make conversation. "The guy who owns the original Batmobile on TV lives in Bristol, just a few minutes away," he marvels.

The thought occurs to the visitor, casting a long glance upward at the flawless, starry Tennessee sky, just how far removed he is from the plastic surrealism of Hollywood.

Yet it is not the Batmobile—or the treelined, national-stature asphalt dragstrip carved through a canyon dubbed Bristol Raceway—that the visitor has come to see but two of Hollywood's own. He has come to



Roberts Motor Group began as a general automotive service center, evolved into a Corvette specialty house and now is headquarters for two of the world's most exotic cars. Roberts's entry into the crowded Daytona kit market—which becomes more populated by the month—has generated considerable interest in the marketplace. His shop is well equipped to produce Ferrari replicas, although he has made no plans to mass-market Testarossa clones.



Kingsport, proud home of Moonshine pure-aged honey, to chase a Hollywood ghost and to verify the local existence of yet another rolling Italian super-clone: the "Miami Vice" Testarossa stunt car.

Even as the several million "Vice" addicts mistakenly thought they watched the Daytona's meltdown, the car was actually on its way to the unlikely timberland of Tennessee. On this warm day in April, the Ferrari replica—which has slowly earned celebrity status among locals, though many seem skeptical of its purported past—drew its usual sporadic flow of gawkers.

Parked next to the famous convertible in the gravel driveway of the Carl Roberts Motor Group (2596 Bloomingdale Pike, Kingsport, TN 37660) is an angular, Blanco-white copycat of Crockett's latest boulevard-prowler. How did the BF Goodrich rubber on the doomed Daytona and the albino redhead come to rest in the sleepy burg of Kingsport, clearly among the least likely of environs for a pair of high-tech glitter-cars?

"Sometimes," marvels Carl Roberts, a spirited entrepreneur known perhaps equally in these parts as square dealer, skilled Corvette surgeon and P.T. Barnum-ish dreamer, "I wonder that myself."

The answer gives the visitor pause to consider the common thread weaving through this story,

a saga of enraged Italian carmakers, \$300-an-hour New York barristers, Hollywood producers and Miami repli-cops: That very little is truly as it seems. And as the conversation with the 39-year-old tinkerer of cars, who was born and bred in eastern Tennessee, deepens, the visitor begins to realize that Roberts knows exactly what the cars are doing in these parts.

Although Tom McBurnie is commonly credited with planting the Daytona Spyder in the general public's mindset, in truth it was Al Mardekian, a legendary Southern California importer of gray-market exotics, who originally sold "Miami Vice" a pair of turn-key Ferrari look-alikes for \$49,000 a copy. (Mardekian has earned endeared status in automotive inner circles; this enthusiasm is not shared by the federal government, however, which recently impounded a batch of his cars because of questionably lenient federalization conversion.) McBurnie was hired to build the bodies for the Corvette-chassised cars. "It was an extremely fortuitous coincidence," he admits, "that I was even involved in the 'Miami Vice' show." Nonetheless, he did what any savvy businessman would do in similar circumstances: He promoted to the hilt.

Ironically, it was this aggressive marketing approach that ultimately provoked the wrath of Enzo, who reportedly grew weary of his name



For two seasons it was the glitziest car on the streets of Miami: The original Daytona Spyder replica, built by Tom McBurnie, now tours the two-lanes of eastern Tennessee. "I'll probably never sell this car," croons Roberts, who now markets a Spyder conversion kit based on a Corvette chassis.

and styling being used to sell McBurnie's kits and others like them. Ferrari filed a lawsuit, asking McBurnie and four others to stop producing and selling Ferrari replicas. "Miami Vice" producers wanted none of the legal backbiting: They accepted Ferrari's offer of two Testarossas, gratis, on the condition that the fakers be demolished.

Prior to Don Johnson's conspicuous vehicular tradeup, Roberts had—through dogged determination and unflagging enthusiasm—entertained "Vice" executives with the possibility of his company building two new Daytonas for the '87 season. "I left Miami," reminisces Roberts, "convinced I'd be building two Daytona Spyderys."

When Roberts learned of the Daytona's impending incendiary fate, he shifted strategic gears, proposing a trade: the cast-off car for a Testarossa twin, a combination stunt car and camera burro. Why beat a real Ferrari to death with power slides and 180s or mar its flawless skin with camera mounts for tight driver's shots when a stand-in stunt car could do the job quite nicely?

Roberts's original plan, he says, was to pull the Daytona skin from the Vette structure and replace it with Testarossa body pieces. He used an '85 Ferrari to fashion mold plugs for the individual hood, fenders, doors and panels but found the Corvette chassis unsuited to the task.

An exhaustive exploratory donor

search yielded futile results until Roberts took the measuring tape to a '72 Pantera he had taken on trade in a recent Corvette transaction. "It killed me to cut that car up," winces Roberts, referring to the bright yellow Ford muscleclassic, which had only a few thousand miles logged on its odometer.

Completing the car became an obsessive challenge for Roberts's entire crew, which was becoming accustomed to working minor miracles within meager time frames. "To say I underestimated the enormity of this project would be to make your classic understatement," admits Roberts.

Automotive stunt duty, which entails airborne scenes and high-impact landings, calls for substantial suspension rigidity and frame strength. Hall Pantera engineered the car's shock and spring components, and it was raised an inch and a half for additional ground clearance. Kent Anderson, a Roberts tech hand who was pivotal in engineering much of the car, used 2½-inch wall-thick square tubing to prevent potential roof buckle and added a reinforcing railing that doubles as a skidplate.

Anderson also installed an auxiliary braking system designed to assist drivers in controlled spins. The stunt car's master cylinder was positioned in the brake line, which feeds its rear wheels, enabling the driver to lock the aft end on command. The auxiliary master cylinder utilizes the original master

cylinder's reservoir and is installed in series with the outlet of the original master cylinder port leading to the rear wheels.

Therefore, when the stock brake is applied, fluid passes freely through the stunt master cylinder inlet port and compensating port and out the exhaust port to the rear wheels. When the stunt brake is applied, the piston in the master cylinder blocks off the compensating port to the exhaust port and pressurizes the rear brake system, cutting off the original brake master cylinder beside the compensating port in the stunt brake.

BF Goodrich TAs were added for enhanced stick, as were Tilton brake calipers. The improved traction required installation of a hydraulic inline brake power booster lifted from a Volvo P-1800. It operates on engine vacuum to aid in breaking loose the pavement-hugging TAs.

To further enhance the 351's considerable growl, the Roberts team opted for installation of an NOS port-injected nitrous system, which will later be replaced with a plate-type configuration. Roberts also switched carbs, discarding the stocker for a Predator, which seems to reduce fuel lag. A Modine all-aluminum four-core radiator was enlisted to guard against the Miami rays, while liquid Auto-Meter gauges monitor the temperature.

Although Roberts admits he has no licensing agreement contracts at this time, his plans are to exhibit both cars at a series of events and shows beginning this summer. Showing the cars and promoting sales of his Spyder kits (in deference to Ferrari, he says that at this point there are no plans for a Testarossa package although he is certainly tooled to build one) should keep the bustling Roberts facility operating at full speed.

Talented Roberts illustrator/designer Nick Lawson, whose elaborate Testarossa stunt car cutaway drawing was commissioned by Hearst Publishing for a recent appearance in *Popular Mechanics Magazine*, found himself immersed in a tedious 100-hour artistic marathon session crunched by a one-week editorial deadline to finish the drawing. "Full speed for Carl," he says wistfully, lending credence to the above optimism, "is quite unlike full speed for anyone else I've been around." **KC**