



The “I Don’t Spend Money on my Car When it is Running Well” Theory or Two High Performance 308 Ferraris

In the late 1970’s just after the 308 Ferraris came out (this particular car was 1975 308 GT4) we had a customer whose automotive maintenance philosophy was “I don’t spend money on my car when it is running well.”

At the time Ferrari’s recommendation for timing belt replacement was every 5 years or 30,000 miles whichever came first. This vehicle was Ferrari’s first engine to use a timing belt.

Our customer, who I will call Mr. No Maintenance came to our shop when his Ferrari needed some repairs. Over the course of the next year we satisfactorily performed several repairs on Mr. No Maintenance’s Ferrari.

I begged him to replace the timing belts for over a year and he kept reiterating his no maintenance philosophy to me.

Alas, the timing belt snapped and caused a catastrophic collision of the pistons and valves.

After removing the rear cylinder head we discovered that the head was so badly damaged it was not repairable. The pistons were also damaged. We contacted our customer and he said “as long as I’m going for my lungs, lets do something fun with the engine.”

At the time (1980) Ferrari paid 150 hours warranty time to remove, replace, and rebuild the engine. It was not a task to be undertaken lightly! The replacement cylinder head in 1980 was \$2,000!

Getting the engine/transaxle out of the engine bay was quite a feat. There was a lot of equipment in a small place especially when you consider it was designed and built in 1975.

I made some phone calls to research the availability of high performance parts for the engine. I found and ordered high compression pistons which originally came from the Daytona, a European exhaust system which was supposed to bolt on, but in reality required adaptor plumbing to fit the American style of exhaust manifolds which basically were European ones wrapped in asbestos shrouded in sheet aluminum and A.I.R. injection nozzles added. A European distributor (the American versions used two distributors, with an extra set of points in each distributor that was used to retard the timing at idle and was triggered by a microswitch on the throttle linkage) with a more aggressive advance curve was sourced and installed. “They” tried to sell me a set of four “European” camshafts that would provide more power. I asked for some specifications for the camshafts and there was a lot of hemming and hawing. Finally, they admitted the European specification camshafts were the same as the American ones. The only difference is that they were referenced (timed) differently. They were willing to sell them to us for only \$3,0000! What guys!

Anyway, we carefully rebuilt the engine checking all the internal clearances and setting them to the center of Ferraris tolerances, commonly called blueprinting. All rotating and reciprocating components were balanced. We installed the high compression Daytona pistons, retimed the cams to European specifications, set up and installed the single European distributor.

The engine was installed on the transaxle and as they say in shop manuals "installation is the reverse of removal."

The 308's were really neat cars. They had plenty of suspension and brakes but were underpowered. We were hoping that our modifications would equalize the equation. The results were impressive! The Ferrari finally had the power it needed to match its wonderful sound and gorgeous looks.

Another of my customer's wandered into the shop with a 1977 308 GTB with 7,000 miles and I said let's go for a ride. He said "how much and how long?"

I was a bit shocked but quickly recovered my equilibrium and replied "10,000 dollars and 2 months." Please remember, this was 1980!

D.B. our customer with the 1977 308 GTB then proceeded to purchase a brand new 1980 Porsche 911 SC to drive while the Ferrari was "down" for modifications. We raced the Ferrari and the Porsche and the Porsche was faster. After the engine modifications and post engine break in we raced them again. This time the Ferrari was just faster.

The moral of the story; when your mechanic cajoles, pleads, and begs you to replace the timing belt on your car, please listen! If you don't and the timing belt breaks, do something fun!

Respectfully submitted,
Mark R. Weiner