

BUILD ME A TEMPERO

LEFT: Rod wields a damping hammer to shape a panel. THIS PAGE: building cars like this 250 GTO Ferrari is something that inspires him and keeps him working late into the night. He believes the sports racing cars of the 1950s and '60s are in a class that cannot be matched by anything made today. "The vehicles in that era had a coolness about them because they're one-offs and because the people who owned them could walk the walk. That's what made them cool. Steve McQueen raced his own cars in films and on the track. So did James Garner and Paul Newman. The people who have that kind of money these days are not cool."

IN A LITTLE HOLLOW on State Highway 1 just 500 metres south of Oamaru's 50-kilometre zone, there's a cluster of long, corrugated-iron sheds and grain silos surrounded by paddocks where a few sheep and cattle graze. Chickens strut and skite among the huddles of ducks that shoulder up to the sheds to soak in the reflected heat from the hot North Otago sun. All told, it looks just like the battery-hen-farm-turned-lifestyle-block that it is. There's a dirt road winding up through a pine plantation to the log cabin on the hill where Rod and Carolyn Tempero live with their 16-year-old daughter Soraya.

The only thing that indicates the true nature of the business carried out on the property is the black-and-white chequered flag flying from a pole. Even so, what you don't expect to find inside the sheds is a collection of classic sports racing car replicas in various stages of construction and three generations of the Tempero family, artisan coach-builders, quietly going about their work.

Rod's father Errol (77), himself a second-generation coach-builder, would get rid of the poultry that have a fondness for the workshop if he had his way. Not professional, he thinks. But to Rod and Carolyn, they're part of the 4.4-hectare lifestyle block where their coach-building business is located, and they like having them around so... Errol shrugs.



ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF OAMARU A HENHOUSE-TURNED-GARAGE SHELTERS SOME OF NEW ZEALAND'S MOST EXPENSIVE CUSTOM-MADE CARS

WORDS NATHALIE BROWN PHOTOGRAPHS BRIAN HIGH



His father doesn't like you to mention them but it's hard not to notice the ducks, chickens and sheep hanging around the workshop where Rod Temporo builds some of the most prestigious cars in the world.

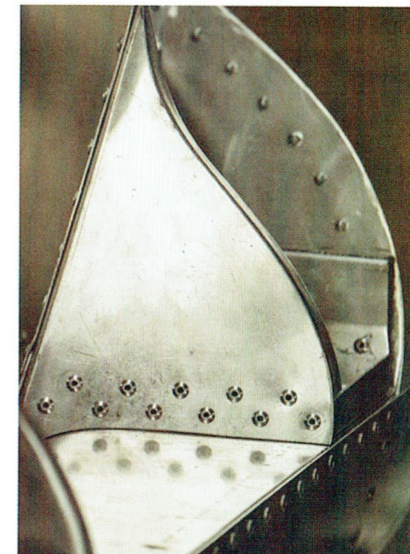
He keeps his hand in by working alongside Rod on a semi-regular basis and Rod's son Caleb (24) is also there, learning the trade. These three, together with Carl Newton, a highly skilled employee, build some of the most beautiful and expensive cars that come out of New Zealand. Some are commissioned by well-heeled Kiwi car enthusiasts but more are custom-made for clients in faraway places. Rod mentions Houston. Dubai. Auckland.

There are seven projects underway in the workshops: Jaguar, Maserati, Lister, Lamborghini and a couple of Ferraris, most notably a 1954 735 MM Ferrari Rossellini Coupé. The original was built for Roberto Rossellini, the ace Italian film director of the 1950s who famously had a long and very public affair with the Swedish actress Ingrid Bergman.

Rod recounts the story of the coupé. "Rossellini wanted a car that could go fast. In those days a normal passenger car would do 60mph while the sports racing cars went at 170mph. If you wanted to own a fast car you had to have it custom-made, which meant commissioning someone to build a racing-car chassis and engine and then paying a coach-builder to make the body. Anyone wealthy enough went to Ferrari for the first elements and Ferrari then shipped these to Scaglietti, Zagato or one of the very few other prestigious coach builders.

"There are some very expensive cars out there because there may have been only one or possibly two of that model built. And it depends for whom they were built. A 275 GTB Ferrari sold recently for \$10.5 million because it was owned by Steve McQueen. And one of the original Ferrari 250 GTOs built from 1962 to 1964 sold last year for \$52 million because there were only 33 made and this model has become the quintessential racing Ferrari. So there are people who want only the originals, but it's like buying an original Rembrandt. There are only so many of those around and only so many people who can afford them."

A long-time friend and client, orthopaedic surgeon John Rietveld, says Rod is following in the tradition of Enzo Ferrari. True, he says, Rod is copying the Ferrari design (or the Maserati or Jaguar, dependant on the work commissioned) and detailing, but the chassis and running gear are original in every instance and his body work is peerless. The 250 GTO Ferrari Rod delivered to John at the beginning of this year has the original Ferrari engine that was built in 1968; it has the 1968 Ferrari chassis and suspension. ▶

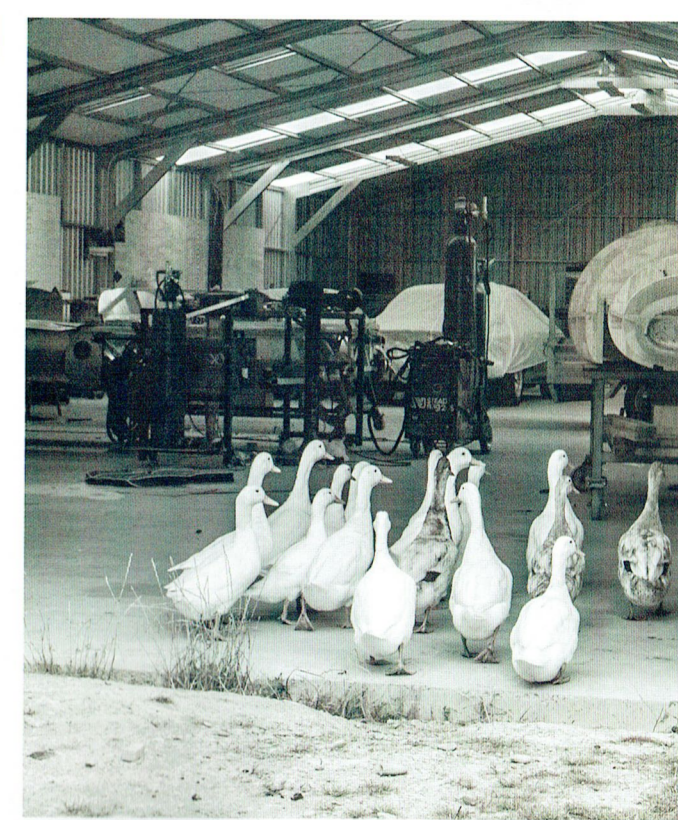


A work of art

Client John Rietveld: "Unless you're passionate about the vehicle you've commissioned it's wasted on you. You need to view it like a piece of art. You watch Rod at work and you know you're watching an artist. Those XJ13s they built in the 1980s have been featured in *Top Gear* magazine. Jay Leno rang Rod from America to enquire about one so he's known all round the world and yet he works out of a chicken shed in Oamaru. If you look at the old books that show the 250 Ferraris being built, you'll see a team of people involved. But here there's just Rod with Carl and Caleb and Errol helping him, and that's the whole team – yet they come up with a car that's as good as if not better than the original. To me this is art. I commissioned Rod to build me a 250 GTO, the most recognisable and desired Ferrari, having admired his work since 1994. While he was working on it I never asked when it was going to be ready because it takes as long as it takes. You don't interfere in the process of an artist. You let them do it the way they want to do it. So the fact that it took four years from the time I first talked to him about it is irrelevant."



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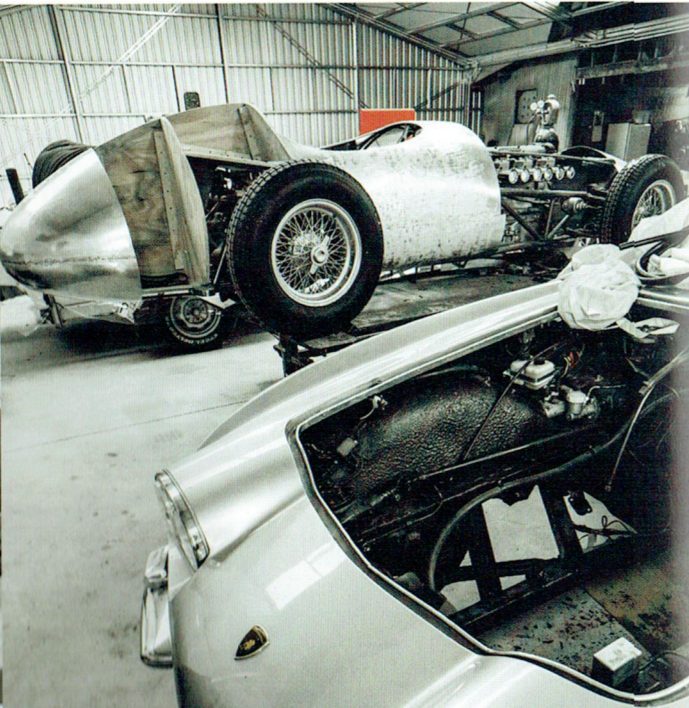
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A Series I 250 GTO (foreground) and a Series II 250 GTO under construction; a 250F Maserati under construction; part of a D-type Jag's structural skin known technical as a monocoque; ducks coming in for a gander.



A family of coach-builders

The Tempero name is possibly Portuguese but the family can trace its antecedents back to 1660 in England. One of Errol's grandfathers was a wheelwright, the other a blacksmith. Alan Tempero, Errol's father, was a coach motor body builder who learned his trade in Oamaru and Timaru before World War II. Errol was apprenticed to him in 1952 and took over the business in 1970 at the end of the metal body era when fibreglass was being introduced. "Terrible stuff," says Errol. "We had been building ambulances and buses and were looking for something

to use our skills in the trade. I had five or six staff at the time and in the late 1970s Rod came into the business as an apprentice." Rod wanted his own car so Errol suggested that he should build one and together they built a D-type Jag. After a photograph of the car was published in an Australian book aimed at sports car owners, they received an order for eight D-types from a single client and the business grew so that they were making Aston Martins, XJ13s and Ferraris. Most of the cars went to overseas buyers.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: At work on the wooden buck; everything in its place; the front wheels of a 375MM Scaglietti coupé with the blackboard drawing in the background; three generations of the Tempero family: Caleb, Errol and Rod; a 400GT Lamborghini and a 250F Maserati.

"The difference between an original and this replica is that the body work has been built by Rod Tempero rather than Carrozzeria Scaglietti," says John. "But it's still a car that is very, very rare." It takes Rod about two and a half to three years to build a car. "Maybe as long as four years from the time the client first comes into the workshop and we start talking about it," he says. He attracts a fee in the broad realm of \$350,000 to \$1million for each car. "The components are expensive; it takes a lot of work and there's a huge amount of research before you even start drawing on the blackboard."

Drawing on the blackboard? Mm-hmm. From Rod's perspective, computers are absolutely useless for this type of work. "Computer operators can make little things but they haven't yet got the machinery to make a 3D body buck – and even when they get to the point when they can, you'll still need someone to put it together. At this point the cad-cam programmes can't do the detailing for chassis and bodies so the only place to get that information is out of period books."

Talk to any man about Rod Tempero's work and the first thing he wants to know is what sort of running gear he uses. Once satisfied as to the authenticity of the chassis and engine, he then wants to know how Rod deals with the copyright. Turns out intellectual property was not the big deal in the 1950s and '60s that it is now. "They never imagined that anyone would copy what they were doing so there are now no restrictions on making replicas," Rod says. "Back in the day when Ferrari was producing the 250 series, they built only a thousand, which is why they're so expensive. And each one is so well documented it's impossible to try to sell a replica as an original."

Ask Rod what he would design and build if he were to create his own unique sport racing car and he smiles, shakes his head. There's not the money around these days. People just want a ready-made car. John Rietveld has often suggested to Rod that he should create his own design. "He has an idea of what he'd do. I know he likes the new Maserati. He likes that shape, and I can imagine him building something along those lines."

Rod isn't closed to the idea by any means. "It would be really cool to have someone very wealthy come along and say, 'Here's a Ferrari chassis; build me a new design for it.'" Too right, Rod. Fabulously cool. Build me a Tempero.



There is very little machining – most of the work is done by hand; John Rietveld's GTO 250 Ferrari 1962 which he drives only on rare occasions and treats as a work of art. John says other coach-builders in New Zealand doing work similar to Rod's might build five or 10 of the same car while Rod is building one-offs and the more unusual the better.

How to build a Ferrari

Rod: "Technically, the cars we build are Ferraris because they've got the Ferrari number. They're just re-bodied Ferraris. We buy an old Ferrari and wreck it; that's where we get the Ferrari engines. That's quite a bit of thinking involved in how we put the chassis together. There are the bump steer and spring rates to make sure it doesn't under-steer or over-steer. "The engine is sent out of our workshop to be reconditioned; we buy in brand carburettors. If we have to make any like sumps or manifolds or other items on the motors I use a pattern-maker in Christchurch. He sends me down the pattern and I get that cast and machined in Dunedin. The auto-electrics are done in Oamaru. Everything else is what a proper, old-school coach-builder is trained to do. We do the woodwork and upholstery, although the seats are done elsewhere because, even though we can do them, it's just not economic. We do the head linings and internal and external trim in the workshop. Technically I can build the car and put the badge on it. The customer is the one who can do that."

