

De Tomaso of Dale Eriksen's 1973 Pantera Gr3 Story and Photos by Mike Drew

Dale and Monique Eriksen have been well-known De Tomaso enthusiasts for many years. Dale has been a member of POCA for 22 years, and spent ten years serving on the national board in various capacities, including POCA president. Monique has also been active in the club, serving on the board several times as POCA Newsletter Editor, and later Treasurer and club store manager.

Dale has always been a racer at heart, running Mustangs in the SCCA during the '80's. Going into racing semi-retirement, he ran his '74 Pantera (most recently seen on the cover of the 1999 No. 4 *Profiles*) and occasionally a '70 Mangusta in POCA track events a few times a year, and for a short time served as a test driver for Honda Research and Development. In 1997, Dale was bitten by the vintage racing bug, and has been racing a pair of MGB's with both Vintage Auto Racing Ass'n (VARA) and Historic Sportscar Racing (HSR.)

But Dale's first love has always been the Pantera, and for several years, he has been intrigued with the notion of vintage-racing a Pantera. While it would always be possible to buy a run-of-the-mill Pantera, install safety gear and hit the racetrack, such a car would not meet the narrowest definition of "vintage race car", as it would not have been an *original* race car, but rather a street car that was reconfigured later in life.

In order to run at the most

prestigious vintage race events on the west coast, events organized by Steve Earle such as the Wine Country Classic at Sears Point, and of course the Monterey Historic Races, the automobile must have a historic racing provenance. Thus, if Dale was to make his dream come true, he would have to find and purchase an original European race Pantera.

The De Tomaso factory built a handful of full-race Panteras to compete in FIA Group 4, featuring a host of chassis and suspension modifications. The characteristics of these cars have been fairly well documented in the past, including the Fall 1996 *Profiles*. Due to their limited numbers, finding an original Group 4 car for sale is next to

impossible, and those cars are fantastically expensive when they do trade hands, which isn't often.

What many people fail to realize is that De Tomaso also built less-radical race cars to compete in FIA Group 3, either for road-racing or on- and off-road rallying. Comparatively little is known about these cars, as they received considerably less publicity, but after doing some research, Dale decided that a Group 3 Pantera would fit his needs perfectly.

While a Group 4 Pantera is a dedicated, purpose-built race car that used Pantera architecture but a unique chassis and suspension, the FIA Group 3 rules were far more restrictive, as the FIA intended for this class to consist



The Gr3 Pantera #4803 undergoes scrutineering at the start of the 1974 Giro D'Italia. Note the Carello driving lights, flat blade front spoiler, and the two holes for the missing L-model front bumper (one occupied by a tow hook.) Curiously, a non-standard radio antenna has been installed on the roof

the Quarter

solely of essentially stock, unmodified production sports cars. Initially, modifications from standard, production-car specification were few, mostly relating to pure safety issues, but after a few years, as the series evolved, the list of allowable modifications grew for all cars competing in Group 3.

Unlike the Group 4 Panteras which were built utilizing special components, all Group 3 Panteras were constructed from ordinary, production-line European Panteras. As they were all built to individual customer order, it's difficult to generalize about them. Furthermore, the nature of bespoke De Tomaso automobiles makes it even more difficult to differentiate between different models, since it was possible for any European customer to order each of the components used to create a Gr3 Pantera directly from the factory, and modify a standard car to that specification after the fact and then race it.

It was also possible to order a Euro GTS and then have it built with all the Gr3 components at the factory. So there



Showing perfect form, the Gr3 Pantera charges into a corner

is a very fine line between a factory-built Gr3 race car, a Euro GTS fitted with Gr3 components, and a race car converted to Gr3 specs by a private party. While the De Tomaso factory public relations personnel are extremely

helpful, and are capable of answering a query to determine if a specific car was constructed as a Gr3, at this time they don't have a complete list of all Gr3 cars made, but they have committed to researching the information for the next edition of the De Tomaso registry.

The process of building a Gr3 Pantera started in the engine room. De Tomaso certified the Gr3 Pantera with either a standard cast-iron intake manifold and Motorcraft carburetor, or an optional aluminum Ford manifold with a Holley R-4777 650 cfm manual-secondary carburetor. The stock oil pan was replaced with a large (8 liter on early cars, 10 liter on later cars) pan with an integral windage tray and an optional removable chassis crossmember.

Standard exhaust manifolds, and later European GTS exhaust headers were fitted (consisting of 4-into-2-into-1 headers with a 2 1/2



#4803 runs second in this trio of Gr3 Panteras ahead of a Renault Alpine A110, with another Gr3 Pantera fighting its own battle in the previous corner



The engine is virtually stock except for the aluminum intake manifold and Holley carburetor. The roll cage requires the water bottles to be relocated, as it fights past the engine screen to bolt to the inner wheelhouses. The air conditioning system is missing

inch collector), and the 2 1/2 inch tail-pipes fed into either low-restriction ANSA GTS mufflers, or the so-called Gr3 mufflers (GTS-style muffler cans with no internals, and hence no sound-reduction capabilities.) Finally, the entire muffler assemblies could be deleted and replaced by simple straight exhaust pipes. One would hope the engines were thoroughly checked over and received careful blueprinting and hand-assembly at the factory, but there is no evidence the De Tomaso engine-builders weren't simply affixing these bolt-on parts to otherwise-standard engines.

The radiator was unmodified, although optional 8-bladed fans replaced the standard units.

The chassis received only subtle tweaks initially. The same Ariston adjustable shocks fitted to conventional Panteras were standard on the Gr3 version, but there were two levels of Koni shock upgrades available. The first featured internal rebound adjustment only, while the top-of-the-line shocks had a threaded aluminum body with ride-height adjustment, and external controls for compression and rebound ad-

justment, with over 100 different combinations available. The top-of-the-line shock package cost an additional \$1,000 back in 1973, quite a serious investment when you consider you could buy an entire street Pantera for under \$10,000!

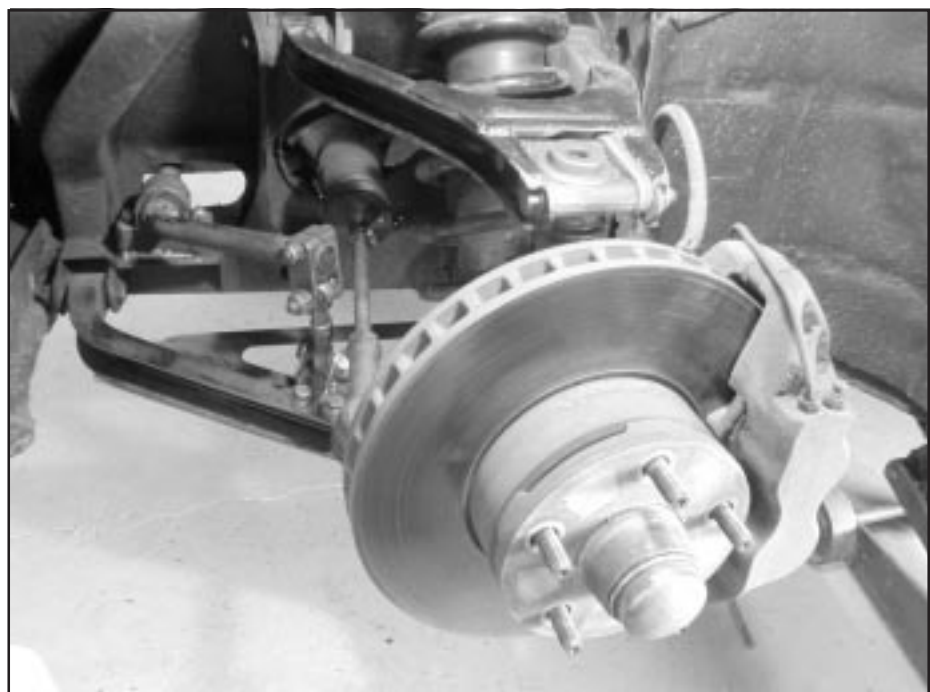
The Gr3 Panteras were equipped with the same springs as the European

GTS, with only one optional spacer listed (presumably for rally cars.) The steering rack was repositioned using spacers to alleviate bump-steer concerns, but the control arms and sway bars were the same as those fitted on production Panteras.

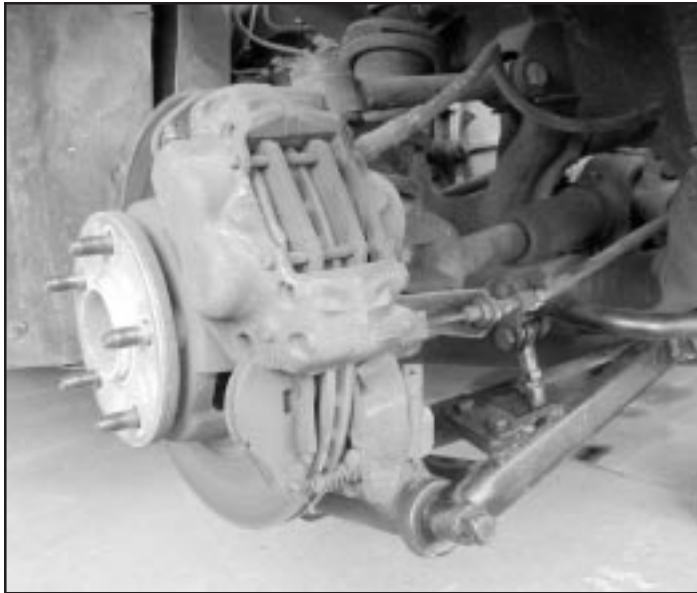
The brakes consisted of standard Pantera calipers squeezing ventilated discs measuring 282mm in diameter and 20mm thick, and actuated by a standard master cylinder; this was a common option for Euro GTS Panteras as well. Standard 7- and 8-inch Campagnolo wheels and Michelin radial XWX 185/70 and 215/70 tires were fitted.

In 1974, the FIA approved further modifications to the suspension. The rear hub carriers and front spindles were replaced by heavier Group 4 units, and the brakes were changed by using a larger master cylinder, larger cast-iron three-piston front calipers with 288mm x 31.75mm front rotors, and larger cast-iron three-piston rear calipers with standard GTS vented rotors and stronger axles with heavy-duty wheel studs.

Although similar in appearance, these were not the same brakes as used on the Group 4 Panteras, but this system later became standard issue on the GT5 and GT5-S. Small auxiliary rear calipers with their own small pads were



The later Gr3 front brakes became standard issue on the GT5 and GT5-S, but the adjustable swaybar system was unique to the Gr3



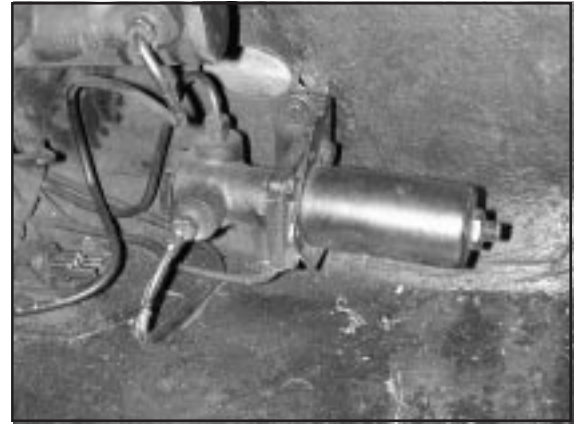
The rear brakes use a curious three-piston caliper (one piston inboard) and vented discs. Note the parking brake system which uses its own small pads

used for the parking brake.

The stock sway bars were replaced with an adjustable system, philosophically similar to, but mechanically different from, the adjustable bars featured on the Group 4 Panteras. The then-common 10-inch Campagnolo Euro GTS wheel was allowed for fitment in the rear, and 8-inch wheels were issued for the front.

The interior of the Gr3 Pantera was

the two-pod dashboard, while later cars received either the one-piece molded USA L-model dashboard, or the similar-appearing two-piece upholstered Euro GTS dashboard; all were fitted with metric gauges and European switchgear. The stock seat belts were retained with a race harness installed for the driver only, and the standard Pantera seats were supplanted by one-piece racing bucket seats, the same as those



An adjustable proportioning valve fitted under the master cylinder allows fine-tuning of the front-to-rear brake balance

surprisingly mundane. Earlier cars had

in the Group 4 Panteras.

(Interestingly enough, these one-piece racing seats were actually constructed from the remains of the prototype Pantera's radical "picket fence" seats. Those seats consisted of a sheetmetal frame, fitted with yellow foam blocks. Visually striking, but judged by Ford as being too weird for the marketplace, they never went into production. As De Tomaso had already produced many of these frames, they simply upholstered them with light padding and turned them into race car seats.)

Heavily padded bolsters, as used in the Group 4 cars, were sometimes fitted to the door panels on one or both sides.

On some cars, the ignition switch was later relocated from under the dashboard to the middle of the center console, behind the ashtray, and within easy reach of the driver while he was belted in. A fire extinguisher was bolted to the floor in front of the passenger seat.

The USA-model steering wheel was standard equipment, but buyers had the option of fitting the three-spoke Euro GTS Momo Prototipo wheel or the smaller Group 4 Momo Prototipo wheel instead. Interestingly, the Gr3 Panteras were sold with full heating and air conditioning, electric windows, a radio aerial bolted to the roof, and a pair of speakers installed in the center



The interior is original except for the LeCarra steering wheel and Sparco racing seats. Note the padded knee bolsters on each door. The roll cage padding completely blocks access to the windshield wiper switches!



The removable fiberglass center section hangs on a sheetmetal lip and is held in place by rubber fasteners (both broken, unfortunately.) Apparently there was a removable sheetmetal firewall underneath, but this has gone missing, so the cabin gets hot and loud in a hurry!

kick panels (one in front of the gas pedal, and the other pointing into the passenger footwell), but no radio was included. Air horns were also optional.

The plexiglass rear window and six-point roll cage of the Group 4 Pantera were standard issue in the Gr3 cars as well. Furthermore, the front engine cover was modified to allow easy access to the front of the engine without requiring the removal of the entire back panel (which would have required removal of the roll cage!)

Cosmetically, the Gr3 Panteras slowly changed as the production Panteras changed. Early Gr3 cars carried



The shift gate has a hinged reverse lockout. The chrome shift lever has been shortened. The ignition switch was positioned in the cigarette lighter hole originally, and was apparently moved closer to the driver before finally being moved to its current location



The bolt-in roll cage passes through the plexiglass rear window

standard two-piece front and rear bumperettes. After the introduction of the L-model Pantera, some Gr3 cars were equipped with early-style front bumperettes incorporating the front turn signals, while others had European L-model bumperettes with the turn signals residing in the standard L-model pods on the underside of the front fenders. Turn signal lenses were either clear with a colored bulb, or bi-color with an amber and a clear section.

Some cars retained two-piece rear bumperettes while others received the European L-model one-piece rear bumper (which was the same as the USA L-model bumper, except that instead of being mounted on hydraulic rams, it was mounted on solid brackets, considerably closer to the car's body.) Both front and rear bumpers on Gr3 cars were normally chrome.

There were various driving and fog light packages issued; some cars received Carello fog lights, while others received massive lighting arrays for nighttime rally racing. For the first few years, a simple flat blade front spoiler with cooling ducts for the front brakes was installed while later cars got a miniature air dam (also a common option on the post-1976 European GTS) and small, riveted-on GTS flares.

Apparently few of the Gr3 cars received the Euro GTS paint scheme, with a blacked-out front hood and rear decklid and blacked-out rocker panels. The Gr3 Pantera shown in the factory brochure and postcards is solid yellow. In most cases, the European GTS rocker panel decal (which said "De Tomaso" in large letters, then had the words "Pantera" in smaller script, above the word "GTS") was used, but modified to delete the mention of "GTS."

As with the Group 4 cars, rubber



Rubber hold-downs supplant the stock hood and decklid latches. The original right-side battery shut-off switch is missing, and a replacement has been crudely bolted to the underside of the left fender

tie-downs were used to secure the front hood and rear decklid, although unlike the Group 4, the sheetmetal was standard steel instead of aluminum. An external battery cut-off switch without a removable key was fitted to the right front fender; the same switch was mounted on the the Group 4 cars.

The documentation on racing Panteras is sketchy at best; it's difficult to say exactly how many were built. At

least one owner claims that his Gr3 is one of only 10 cars produced by the factory, but the De Tomaso Registry now lists at least 13 claimed Gr3 cars (although it's possible that some of those were converted from regular production Panteras.)

Nevertheless, the number is undeniably small, so Dale had his work cut out for him, and it took several years of searching before he unveiled a Gr3 car in the USA, and one that was for sale, no less!

THPNMS04803 was built in December 1972 and sold by De Tomaso to a Mr. Parpinelli. In 1973 and 1974 it contested the Italian Group 3 Championship, campaigned by the Soc. Veneta Sport-Car of Padova. It saw action on all the famous Italian road courses including Monza, Imola, Mizano, Maggione, and Vallelunga. It is believed to have met with some success, although it has proven difficult to



The original straight exhaust pipes had crude home-made silencers added



A third radiator fan was added, switched by a stock relay. The radiator is a standard, original unit

Getting Our Kicks On Route 66

Story and Photo by Dale Eriksen

The owner of the Gr3 Pantera had entrusted it to Ed and Gail Abrams to handle the sale. We spent a lovely time visiting with them, and after leaving their hospitality, the first stop on the 3400 mile drive home was north to the New Hope car show. When a big rain-storm arrived, the Panteras, Qvale Mangusta and several other exotics crossed the Delaware River into New Jersey to Joe Moore's farm. Joe had an enormous tent and tables set up, and the food just kept coming. The rain continued to fall but everyone seemed to have a great time.

The next morning we were loaned a care package by Glen and Diane Pascal consisting of a distributor, fuel pump, and coil. Luckily none of these items were needed.

Heading west, we cruised at legal speeds mindful of the long trip ahead, not wanting to risk tickets and trying to conserve the car, not to mention the price of gasoline (we paid a high of \$2.09 in Illinois.) Pennsylvania rolled by into Ohio and we noticed the rear Pirelli P-7's were getting thin. What was tread six hundred miles before was now turning into white cord.

In Cleveland the tires were so thin we got on the phone in a desperate search for big, wide, 15-inch tires. We found a set 70 miles away and drove at a very reduced pace on side roads so as not to suffer a disastrous blowout on the expressway. After a near three-hour trip and a patch of white cord three inches wide by seven inches long on one rear tire, we got our new tires.

Nearing Chicago the temperature climbed to 95° outside, while inside it was much hotter. With no air conditioning and less insulation than a regular Pantera, the heat was incredible at times, 120°+ being no exaggeration. Battery-powered spray bottles helped somewhat, the water vapor being blown about by the wind blowing in the window. The

exhaust and open window noise made conversation difficult. Though as loud as many other Panteras, after 3000 miles the constant deep roar became quite annoying.

Staying in Chicago with friends, #4803 got to rest for a couple of days. Leaving downtown where old Route 66 begins, we headed south, stuck in big traffic caused by lots of road construction. Using our Route 66 guidebooks we drove as much as possible on old 66; sometimes it was difficult to follow but in the end it was worth it. We drove through Illinois, and Missouri with a stop at the Arch, then through a corner of Kansas and into Oklahoma where the Mitchells—Ted, Gail, Rick and Joy, provided us respite from the 100° heat.

Ted served POCA for many years as the Master Mechanic. Ted and Rick were excited about having a running Pantera in Eastern Oklahoma and quickly had it up on the rack in their enormous air-conditioned garage, changing out some hoses, checking wheel bearings and working on stubborn headlight limit switches. Monique spent the day with the ladies, enjoying their two lakefront houses and cooling down with a spin on their jet-ski.

Reluctantly leaving this paradise, we headed west through Oklahoma, the Texas panhandle and into New Mexico,

still on as much of old 66 as we could. We stopped at the Cadillac Ranch and of course the Wig Wam Motel.

Our last night was spent in Williams, with the California desert our last obstacle. Rain greeted us as we neared Needles, next came Essex and Amboy. In Barstow we were grateful we had only two hours left of driving, because entering the Interstate there we had the water pump hose blow. Our makeshift repairs to the access panel failed as steam and hot water shot through the firewall; we quickly bailed out without injury. This tough-to-get-to hose (we should have replaced it in Oklahoma!) required a long delay before we were able to make it back home.

Summing up our trip, we drove through 12 States, drove 3400 miles, received no tickets, had one hose blow, replaced two tires, reattached one mirror, had a shopping cart slam into the driver's door in Oklahoma, suffered some carburetor float level problems, had headlight bucket motor trouble, and had no close calls while driving.

A big thank you goes to the Pantera people who helped make this trip so enjoyable, the Abrams, Moores, Pascals and Mitchells, who together proved once again the friendliness and camaraderie of the members of the Pantera Owners Club of America.



substantiate.

In October 1974, the car competed in the Giro D'Italia (apparently a multi-day event similar to the Tour De France, incorporating both racing on closed circuits and open-road stages.) At that time, it was sponsored by Bata, a century-old Czechoslovakian shoe company, and a large tennis shoe graced the front hood. "Scuderia Palavium" was written in script across the nose of the car. The driver and co-driver/navigator remain unknown.

The history of the car then becomes murky until 1983 when it was registered by Vittorio Raineri of Milano. An American named Meade took the car to the docks at Genoa where it languished in the wake of first a dock worker's strike, then a trucker's strike, and finally a customs official's strike (!) before being loaded onto the ship "Genova." It arrived in Baltimore, OH on 29 November 1984, and was shipped to new owner Davis Walsh of Charles City, Iowa.

It traded hands again and was owned by Robert Ash of Georgia, and was then purchased by John Granauro of Philadelphia in 1990. Under John's tenure, the car was seldom used, but was driven for several years at the Pocono event. Several Eastern Pantera Association members were granted the opportunity to drive the car, and all reported that the driveability, handling and brakes were superb, but the power was lacking due to the near-stock engine. In spring of 2000, John put the car up for sale. Dale learned about it, and in August he and Monique flew to Philadelphia and bought it, then drove it back to California (see sidebar.)

I was afforded the opportunity to spend a day driving the Pantera in and around Los Angeles,

including a few miles of spirited back-road driving. Despite the fact that the car has obviously led a fairly hard life, it was surprisingly tight and composed, absolutely free of the types of rattles, squeaks and clunks that one might expect from an old race car. The brakes are absolutely excellent, with a very solid pedal feel, lacking the "mush" sometimes found in stock Pantera brakes.

The steering was tight with no dead spots or unwanted kickback, and despite the lack of caster, self-centering action was excellent. The suspension was firmer than a stock Pantera, yet still compliant. The non-original seats were reasonably comfortable (considering their full-race specifications), but the lack of functional air conditioning coupled with an extremely leaky front engine cover conspired to turn the cabin into a sauna unless the windows were lowered.

The engine was decent but far from impressive, and the pinging under acceleration coupled with the minor smoking from the exhaust leads to speculation that it has lived most of its useful life. That, coupled with a slight crunch when shifting into second gear, means the engine and gearbox will have to be attended to before the car can be

actively raced again.

When the engine and gearbox come out, Dale intends to prepare the car for vintage racing. He will go through the car carefully, making necessary safety modifications (on-board fire system, fuel cell, braided steel brake lines, etc.) while keeping the chassis, suspension, brakes, and all-steel bodywork completely original. He is currently researching the original color scheme and hopes to re-trim the car with its original sponsorship logos, greatly enhancing its eligibility for the most prestigious vintage racing events.

Besides the short sprint races at the major spectator events such as Monterey and Sears Point, the car will also see action in vintage endurance races, with long-time POCA member and VARA driver Kurt Bernatzke sharing the driving duties.

Although the Eriksens still have some work ahead of them, they are well on their way to having their historically significant Pantera race-ready. Then it's simply a matter of convincing Steve Earle that it's worthy of the honor (not a simple task!), and hopefully theirs will be the first Gr3 Pantera ever to compete at the Monterey Historic Races.

In the meantime, they're planning on just having fun with it!



Dale and Monique Eriksen are proud of their Ford-powered exotics.