

RIVALS...

By Doug Stokes. April 17th, 2019

Over more than a century of competition, there have been many legendary rivalries in motor racing ... but none quite so intense, quite so pitched, quite so personal as the battle between two cars known almost universally by their numeric designations: the D50 and the W196.

Built and originally campaigned by the Lancia factory, the D50 was a visually startling machine ... a long, thin, body as sleek as a loaf of Italian bread with an opening for a single driver and straddled on both sides by long outrigger sponsons that rode between the wheels and were secured to the car with a network of trusses.

No other race car Italian, or otherwise, ever looked, or stood on a racetrack, like the D50.

And the rival ... the gleaming, sleek silver arrow W196 from Mercedes ... German, not a line or a bolt or a rivet out of place, no frills ... but no expenses spared either. The cars that bore the three-pointed star were wide, low, menacing, each the perfectly bred and built car for a specific job, and as cold-hearted as the Lancia's were emotional.

In 1955, following the death of its top driver, the great Alberto Ascari, Lancia considered abandoning motor racing competition altogether. In what might be called "an arranged marriage" Ferrari stepped in and bought the race team assets lock, stock, and barrel and the cars became first "Lancia-Ferrari D50's" and finally simply Ferrari D50s.

The record shows that only one man ever drove for both of these teams in competition ... the legendary five-time world champion Juan Manuel Fangio of Argentina.

It's unknown as to which Fangio preferred: the verve and bravado of the Lancia-Ferrari or the sang-froid, no-prisoners style of the Mercedes-Benz. He seemed equally at home in either car, and won many races for both marques.

Today we have a small bit of the intense D50 versus W196 rivalry preserved in a whimsical, but nonetheless respectful fashion, with these two young person's, Gonzalo Silveire and Juan Mercado Virasoro, fun machines from Locomoviles LLC.

Designed and manufactured in Argentina, these two half-scale machine are wonderfully-styled tributes, reminders, of those days when two great automobile manufacturers met on the field of battle on the great Formula One race tracks across the world.

A memory, a tribute, and a lot of fun ... the Rivals.