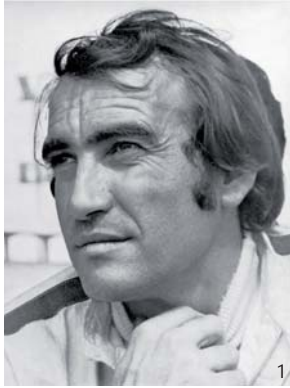


Clay Regazzoni: a life in the fast lane

by Adriano Cimarosti



1. Gianclaudio (Clay) Regazzoni was a works driver from 1969 to 1972 and again from 1974 to 1976.

2. Thruxton F2 GP, 7 April 1969. Regazzoni (race number 15) gets off to a flying start from the third row in his Dino 166 F2 chassis number 0012.

3. Italian GP, 6 September 1970. Regazzoni takes the chequered flag to win Ferrari's home race in the 312 B (chassis no. 004).

4. 1000Kms of Brands Hatch, 4 April 1971. Despite losing his helmet visor a few miles from the end of the race, Regazzoni took the 312 P to second place with co-driver Ickx.

The Ferrari Owners' Site wanted to mark the passing of a great champion, Clay Regazzoni, who died shortly before Christmas, so we asked renowned Swiss historian and journalist Adriano Cimarosti, also a long-time friend of Clay's, to take us through his fascinating life and career.

Clay Regazzoni led an intense existence, through a series of highs and lows. But he was a true motor-sports hero, rather like a character out of a novel. Until that is December 15th 2006, when his car ran into a truck on the motorway near Parma in Italy, killing him instantly.

I have known Clay Regazzoni since the far-off days of 1963. The first time I saw him was at a Swiss Auto Racing Club (SAR) rally in Bienne in Switzerland. He had come there with his great friend and hero Silvio Moser who had already made a name for himself as a racing driver. Clay himself had driven in a few Swiss races too at the wheel of an Austin Sprite. In March 1965, I bumped into him again, quite by chance, at Lignières in the Canton of Neuchâtel. At the time, the small circuit there was the only place in Switzerland one could test racing cars. Regazzoni was trying out a Formula 3 De Tomaso-Ford he'd just bought from Mario Casoni. Emblazoned on the side of his truck was the logo of "Martinelli & Sonvico, Lugano", the name of the well-known Alfa Romeo dealer which later set up a team for which both Silvio Moser and Clay raced Formula 3 Brabhams.

Just two years later, Regazzoni would become the lead driver for the Tecno works team, going on to drive their



Formula 2 cars in 1968. In 1970 he was crowned European F2 Champion but he also made his Formula 1 debut that same year at the Dutch Grand Prix in a works Ferrari 312 B. In only his fourth race ever in a Formula 1 car, Clay Regazzoni won the Italian Grand Prix at Monza on September 6th 1970, a good 5.08 seconds ahead of Jackie Stewart. It felt like the stands at the Brianza track would explode with joy when the Ticino-born driver took his first



major victory at the wheel of a Ferrari despite the fact that the motor racing world was in mourning that weekend as Jochen Rindt had been killed in practice at the Parabolica the day before.

Charming but moody

Enzo Ferrari believed in Clay Regazzoni even though at the time he hadn't too many wins under his belt. However, Ferrari still realised that he was dealing with a major talent and a real first class fighter. A win at Monza - and behind the wheel of a Ferrari to boot - was then and remains to this day, the greatest achievement any driver can offer the Italian public. From that moment onwards, in fact, Italian and Swiss fans began following Clay's career in earnest.

The Ticino driver was a man who lived and enjoyed life to the full, but he also suffered. He was always ready to fight to the last, a real full-on attacker who, although he could be very courteous and charming, could also be moody. Now and then he would have attacks of rage when things weren't going the way he wanted. He even drove like he was fighting for every centimetre. Sometimes, particularly in the early days, he could get rough and aggressive. Enzo Ferrari once remarked: "Clay is a playboy who does a bit of racing in his spare time." However, he soon proved himself



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5. Monte Carlo GP, 14 May 1972. Rain started just before the start of this race where Clay was third on the grid behind Fittipaldi (Lotus) and teammate Ickx. He retired on lap 52 whilst lying third when his 312 B2 (chassis no. 005) slid on oil from another car into the guard rail at the entrance to the Gazomètre curve, damaging the front left of the car.

6. An F1 test session at Monza, 11 July 1974. He is pictured with (left to right) Niki Lauda and Mauro Forghieri.

7. Another victory for Clay, this time at the German GP at the Nürburgring, 4 August 1974. His 312 B3-74 is pictured at the Karussell.

8. Regazzoni (race no. 11, chassis no. 024) and Lauda (race no. 12, chassis no. 023) in their 312 Ts shoot to the lead at the start of the Italian GP, Monza, 7 September 1975. Clay would go on to win, with Lauda third.

to be a tireless test driver, brilliantly talented at giving the technicians the exact information they needed. Ing. Mauro Forghieri, the former technical director of Ferrari's Racing Division, describes him thus: "Clay brought a lot of good humour to the team and when everything was running perfectly, he was unbeatable." Clay raced for Ferrari from 1970 until 1972 when he moved over to BRM. He then returned to Ferrari in 1974, driving the Prancing Horse flat-12s until the end of 1976.



"World Champion for just 500 metres!"

1974 was Clay's greatest year. By the time the last race of the World Championship came around at Watkins Glen, he was on equal points at the top of the World Championship rankings with Emerson Fittipaldi of Brazil. Unfortunately, in that last race, his Ferrari wasn't in top form at all. He started from the fifth row on the grid with Fittipaldi just in front on the fourth. "Fitti", however, finished fourth in the race while Regazzoni crossed the line 11th. Many years later I talked about that day with Mauro Forghieri because I wanted to know why Clay's Ferrari wasn't running as smoothly as it usually did. "Clay's car was just back in action after being involved in an accident in practice a few weeks previously. I wasn't around when it was being repaired because I was working on another project. I also had only arrived in Watkins' Glen on the Saturday evening of the Grand Prix weekend, so I wasn't even there for qualifying. I was late because I realised that my passport had run out just before I was due to fly out from Milan Airport. That cost me two days. But Clay's car definitely wasn't in perfect shape at Watkins' Glen."

This meant that Regazzoni finished the season three points behind Fittipaldi, making him runner-up. He later commented with more than a touch of irony: "I was World Champion for 500 metres. In fact, my Ferrari stayed ahead of Fittipaldi's McLaren for half a kilometre after the start. However, Ferrari didn't lose out on that world title because of Watkins' Glen

alone. At the start of the season, the Ferrari team had focused on Niki Lauda and when I got to the top of the rankings, they still didn't want to put all their energies behind me and me alone. There were other mistakes as well, such as a disastrous wheel change at Zeltweg"

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Seven Formula 1 wins, five of them valid for the F1 World Championship

Clay won the 1970 Italian Grand Prix at Monza, the 1974 German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring and then the 1975 Italian Grand Prix, once again at Monza, for Ferrari. The day of the 1975 win at Monza it felt like the whole stadium was going to explode with joy as Niki Lauda finished third



© Ercole Colombo



9. Given that all racing had been banned in Switzerland, the non-Championship Swiss Grand Prix in 1975 was actually staged at Dijon in France. Regazzoni on the winner's podium is flanked by Depailler (right) and Jochen Mass (3rd).
 10. Lauda and Regazzoni alongside a fibre-glass bodied 308 GTB at the Fiorano track early in 1976.
 11. Clay's last victory at the wheel of a Ferrari F1 (312 T, chassis no. 024) at the USA West GP held at Long Beach, 28 March 1976.

thereby giving him the World Championship title on points. In 1976, Clay won the United States Grand Prix West at Long Beach, starting from pole and staying in front for the entire race. He also won a further two non-World Championship F1 races, the Race of Champions at Brands Hatch in 1972 and the Swiss AC Grand Prix at Dijon in 1975.



However, he didn't always confine his speeding to the race track and his performances on the Italian motorways could be adventurous to say the least. In 1976 Clay drove Ferrari's then Team Manager Luca Cordero di Montezemolo to an urgent meeting in Rome with Minister Andreotti. He used all his skills as driver behind the wheel of his Ferrari Daytona en route. Montezemolo later declared: "I never want to go through that experience on the motorway again." Mauro Forghieri too was driven from Monte Carlo back to Maranello by Clay and summed up the trip with a succinct: "Never again!" The Italian police always turned a blind eye to Clay's antics, however. Once during a dinner in Modena, a senior policeman who was sitting beside the driver, told him: "If you ever find yourself in any trouble, I'll put things right for you."



Another time Clay was stopped on the motorway by the police but once they realised who he was, they just told him to be careful because there were plenty of bad drivers on the roads.

His days with Ensign, Shadow and Williams

In 1977 Ferrari replaced Clay with the Argentinean Carlos Alberto Reutemann and the Ticino driver moved over to Ensign, a smaller team. The following year he was taken on



by Shadow but that season too proved disappointing on several fronts. In 1979, Clay raced for Williams which was doing very well indeed that year thanks to an injection of several million dollars from its Arab sponsors and the technical talents of chief designer Patrick Head. Clay won his fifth and final World Championship race at the British Grand Prix in Silverstone. 1980 saw him back racing for Ensign once again. But then on March 30th he was involved in a tragic accident at the Long Beach circuit: when Clay tried to brake at the end of a straight, the brake pedal snapped and his Ensign smashed into one of the massive cement blocks marking out the track. He spent many months convalescing from that accident and underwent several operations in various specialist hospitals but he never regained the use of his legs and was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. However, Clay never became despondent and within a few years had a new career doing rally raids across various continents.

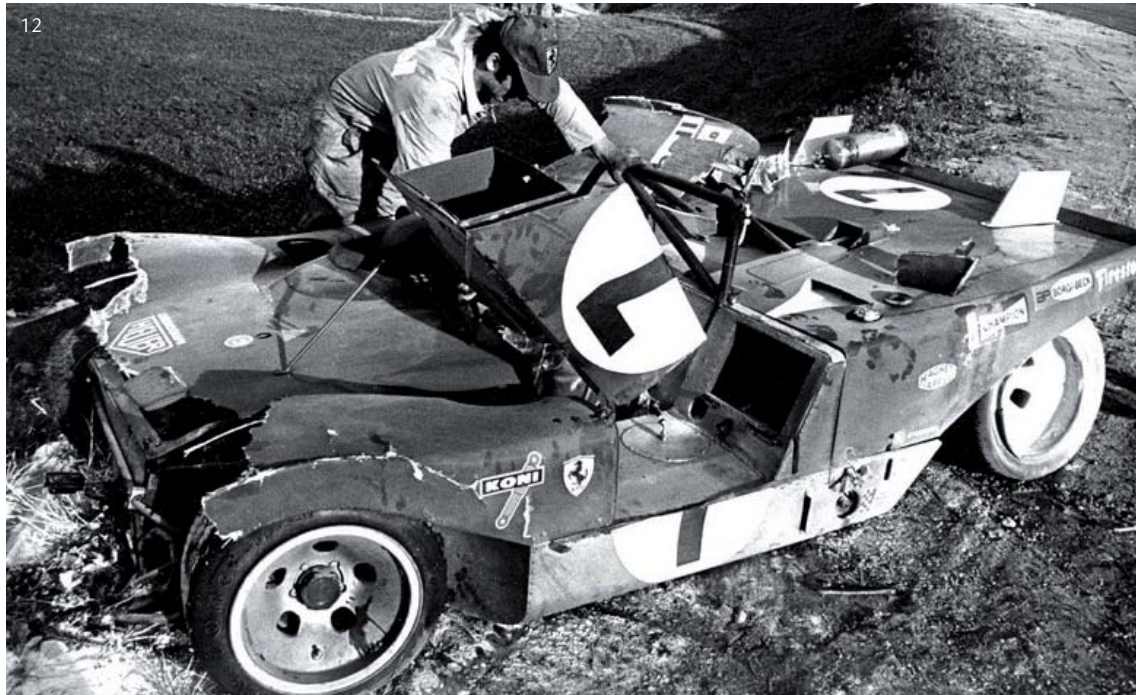
His accidents

Regazzoni had several brushes with disaster. When he was still very young, for example, he raced in the Formula 3 Grand Prix at Monaco. His Tecno hit the guardrail at the chicane and the front half of the car disappeared under the rail itself. Only Clay's lightning fast reflexes saved him from decapitation that time. He was involved in another serious accident at the South African Grand Prix too.



12. 1000Kms of Zeltweg, 27 June 1971. Author of a number of spectacular crashes in his career, Regazzoni spun into the guard rail on lap 148 at Zeltweg when the front right suspension broke of the 312 P (chassis no. 0878) he was sharing with Ickx. He had a 98-second lead over the Rodriguez-Attwood John Wyer-Gulf Porsche 917 that would go on to win.

13. One of the last meetings between Clay and Mr Ferrari in occasion of the company's 40th anniversary celebrations.



This time he was trapped in his BRM which burst into flames after going off the track. Luckily for Clay, English driver Mike Hailwood, who was also involved in the crash, ran to his aid and pulled him out of the blazing car. In another spectacular accident at the 1977 Indy 500, Clay lost control of the Theodore Team McLaren-Offenhauser he was driving on the 31st lap. It hit the outer wall, bounced back onto the infield, then somersaulted several times before coming to a halt, but Clay emerged unscathed. And then, of course, there was the terrible accident on March 30th 1980 at Long Beach.

His family

Clay began life as an apprentice coachworker in his father's workshop at a very young age. He met his wife, Maria Pia, who was also from Lugano, at the Monaco Grand Prix.

They married in 1966 and had two children, Alessia and Gian-Maria. They separated after a few years but Clay really adored his children. After his marriage split up, Clay moved to Menton but he also kept an apartment in Monte Carlo which he shared with his partner Maddalena who has always kept well out of the spotlight. Just a few months ago, Clay told me he was getting a bit tired of the Côte d'Azur and said he'd like to move back to his native Ticino region where he had lots of friends, just as he had in Italy, a country of which he was very fond.

He once also confided that one thing really hurt him: "In the good times, when I was winning all those grands prix, not once did any politician, mayor or any other official representative of our canton or any town in Ticino ever pick up the phone to say: "Well done, Clay. We're proud of you."

