

Chapter Eight





MOTOR VALLEY

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SUPERCAR-
MAKERS,
MUSEUMS,
RACETRACKS,
AND
EXPERIENTIAL
ACCESS
LURE CAR
CONNOISSEURS.

OPPOSITE: THE MAIN ASSEMBLY LINE AT THE FERRARI FACTORY IN MARANELLO, ITALY.
CHAPTER IMAGE: A LAMBORGHINI GT3, ON DISPLAY AT THE FERRuccio LAMBORGHINI
MUSEUM, WITH OIL MARKS STILL VISIBLE FROM ITS LAST RACE.

“The students from the local technical school would wait outside of the Maserati workshop, not because there was unemployment, but because they knew they would really learn.”

In northern Italy, spread out across the Po River plain between Piacenza and Rimini, lies an unrivaled trove for automotive aficionados. Here in Emilia-Romagna—amidst lambrusco vineyards, olive groves, and boutique producers of Parmigiano Reggiano and Aceto Balsamico—the country’s famed sports car heritage was formed.

Clustered around Bologna is a coterie of exotic vehicle manufacturers whose monikers are synonymous with the supercar. “If you name Ferrari, Lamborghini, and Maserati, worldwide, everyone knows what you are talking about,” says Roberta Frisoni, the region’s minister for tourism, trade, and sport. “This is why they now call us The Motor Valley.”

Oddly enough, the area traces its vehicular dominance to its rural history. Italian industry, in the early 20th century, was clustered in the northwest, around Milan, Genoa, and Turin. But the farms of the Po Valley had their own manufacturing needs.

“Emilia-Romagna has a deeply rooted mechanical culture that dates back to the early 1900s when it was still a predominantly agricultural region,” says Stephan Winkelmann, CEO of Lamborghini. “The initial interest came from the need to improve and simplify agricultural work through machinery.”

A series of vocational schools was created by regional authorities to train local students in the emerging mechanical arts, so this talent could be applied to farming solutions. But some expertise trickled out, and was applied to the newfangled automobile, as it materialized. “The people here have a deep passion for speed, engines, and competition,” Winkelmann says.

At the same time, the region’s soil contributed to the development of the valley’s increasingly lithe and nimble cars. “Italy has no raw materials,” says Alessandro Silva, a noted historian and author, and president of the Italian Association of Automotive History. Metal had to be imported from Poland and Czechoslovakia,

so it was used sparingly, contributing to a focus on lightweight applications. (Less mass travels faster, more easily.) Stretching these limited resources contributed to early experiments in aerodynamics, bringing about the taut sensuality of Italian cars. “This was the flair of the Italians for design,” Silva says; making more from less.

Because many of that generation’s talented engineers and designers were home grown, they also took the country’s geography into account. And this, once again, contributed to peak performance.

“To go from one sea to the other, to go anywhere, you have to cross mountains,” Silva explains. “So you needed a lively engine, and a good gearbox, that could get you up and over.” Contrast this with the high-speed cruising engendered by Germany’s autobahns, or the compliant suspensions endemic to French cars, which often performed agricultural duties.

The Italian proclivity for performance vehicles had socio-cultural origins as well. “In those early days, Italy was a very poor country,” Silva says. “So the car market was very small, essentially an elite market for the wealthy. And they wanted good, high-performance cars. So, to market them, they had to have some characteristics that made them similar to racing cars.”

The Maserati brothers, Alfieri, Ettore, and Ernesto, were the earliest of the cohort to capitalize on this. They founded a speed shop in Bologna in 1914 to upgrade racecars, before releasing their first name-branded vehicle in 1926. Intriguingly, for a company based in a competitive sport, instead of focusing solely on winning, they concentrated on engineering advancements and creating a collegial atmosphere.

“The students from the local technical school would wait outside of the Maserati workshop, not because there was unemployment, but because they knew they would really learn,” says Silva. “The Maserati brothers were modest. They liked what they were doing. Every single driver who drove for them, even when they were the worst team, said that they were the best years of their profession.”

Similarly, Enzo Ferrari launched his racing team, Scuderia Ferrari, in 1929, modifying racecars for Alfa Romeo. Hotheaded, but successful, Enzo had endless conflicts with the Alfa brass, and left in 1939 to form his own car company. His first eponymous road car wasn’t released until after WWII, in 1947. It featured a potent V12 engine, which became, and remains, a Ferrari staple. Enzo sold road cars mainly to fund his

addiction to winning on the track. “Racing,” he famously said, “is a great mania to which one must sacrifice everything, without reticence, without hesitation.” Officious and arrogant, he prospered, but not without alienating people.

One of them was successful local tractor-builder and industrialist Ferruccio Lamborghini. Based on his success and passion for cars, Lamborghini purchased a Ferrari 250 GT in 1958. But he had consistent mechanical trouble with the car. Given his engineering and manufacturing expertise, he offered suggestions for improvements to Enzo. After being personally rebuffed by Ferrari, in 1963 he created a rival namesake company to battle Ferrari directly.

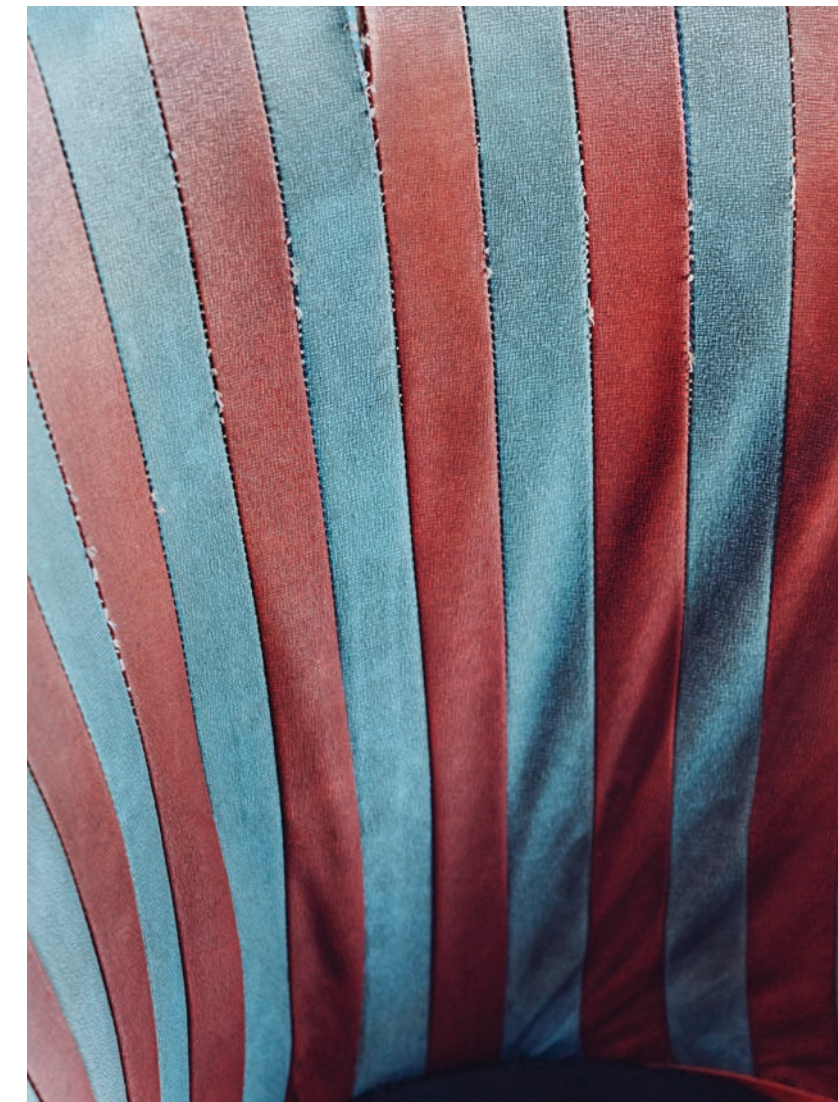
Continuing this chain, car-obsessed Argentinian Horacio Pagani dreamed from a young age of emigrating to the Motor Valley. “He said, ‘Why so much passion in such a small place? This is where I want to go,’” says his son Christopher, marketing chief of his father’s namesake supercar manufacturer. At 28, Pagani moved to Italy and was hired to work in Lamborghini’s experimental body shop, advancing eventually to head engineer. He had long felt the future of supercar design was in carbon fiber—a material far lighter, stronger, and stiffer than metal—and Lamborghini leadership refused to back his mission. So after eight years, he left and founded his own boutique, carbon fiber-intensive, namesake automaker in 1992, revealing his first car in 1999.

The region has since grown to include not just these flagship brands, but thousands of smaller companies that provide components, consulting, and testing. To provide highly trained workers for these labor-intensive industries, the automakers found, fund, and provide curriculum for the local vocational school, the Motor Valley University of Emilia-Romagna.

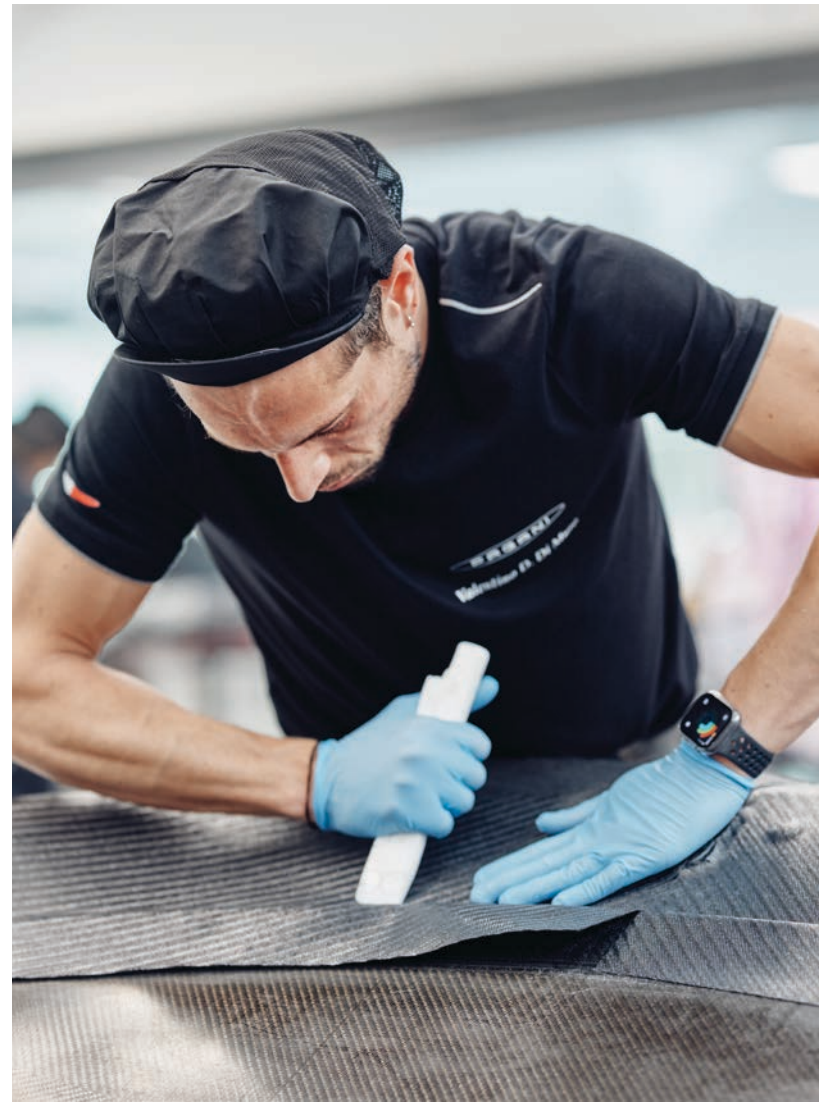
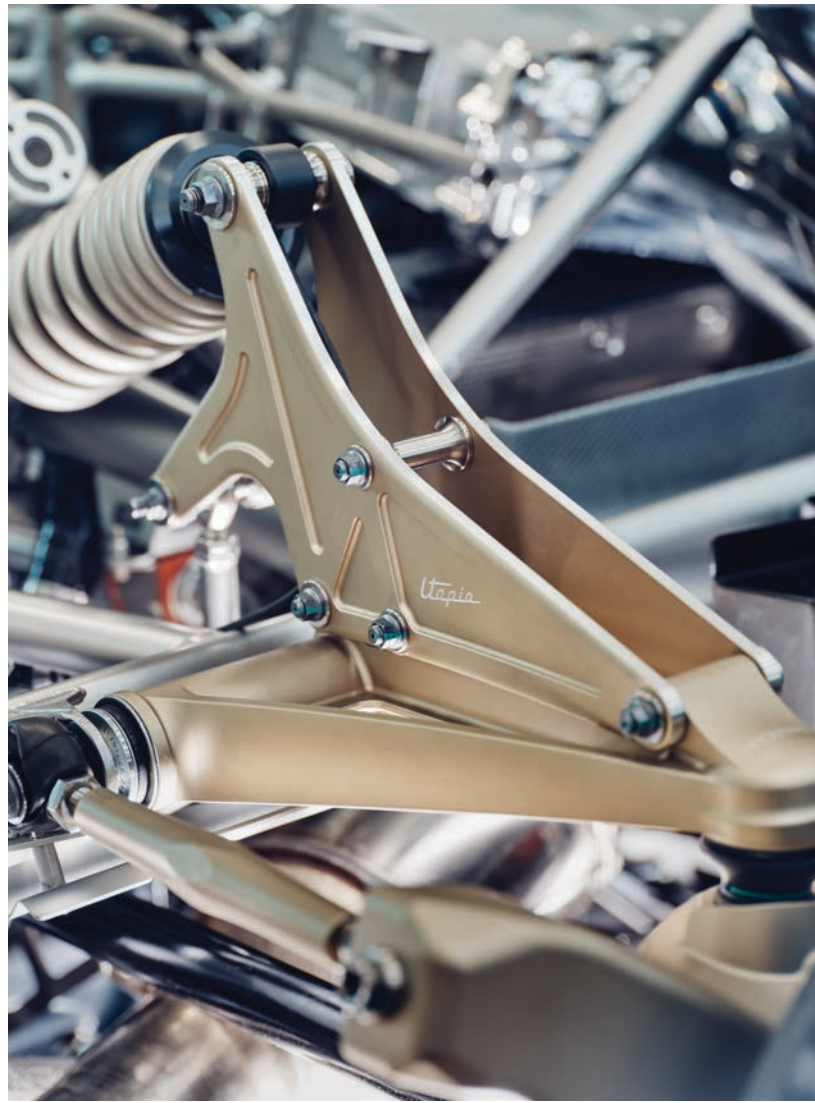
Brands like Ferrari and Lamborghini collectively produce around 25,000 cars per year, while Pagani makes anywhere from a dozen to a few units. But as pinnacle, aspirational *objets*, they have a mystique that belies their numbers, helping to brand their homeland in the minds of car fanatics worldwide. “For Lamborghini, the ‘Made In Italy’ identity adds immense value on the international stage,” says Winkelmann. “And being located in the Motor Valley reinforces that identity.”

To enunciate that heritage, each brand hosts a museum near its headquarters—Maserati in Modena, Ferrari in Maranello, Lamborghini in Sant’Agata Bolognese, and Pagani in San Cesario sul Panaro. Each showcases the maker’s history, displaying exhibitions on winning racecars, recent collectibles, or limited edition models.

Dozens of public and private transportation museums also dot the region. These include sites dedicated to brand founders, like Enzo Ferrari and Ferruccio Lamborghini Museums, which tell the life story of these visionaries through their vehicles and ephemera. The Panini Collection hosts the world’s largest private Maserati horde,

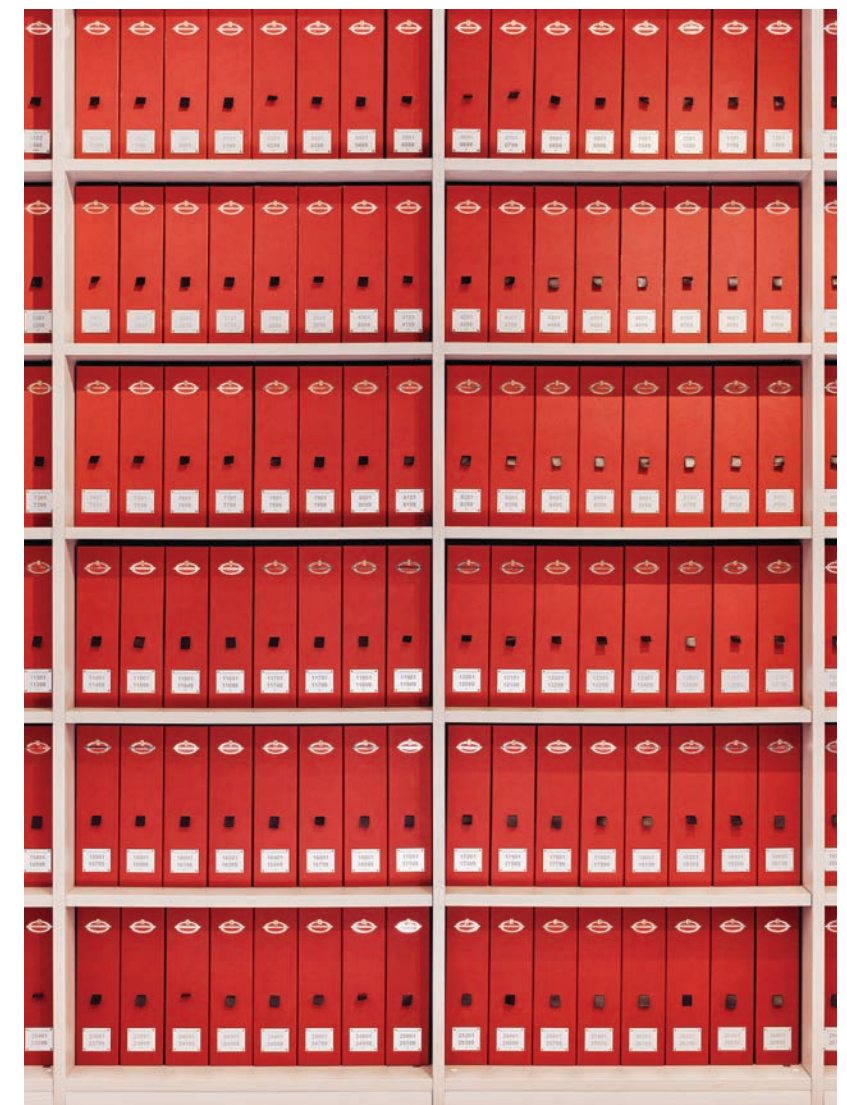
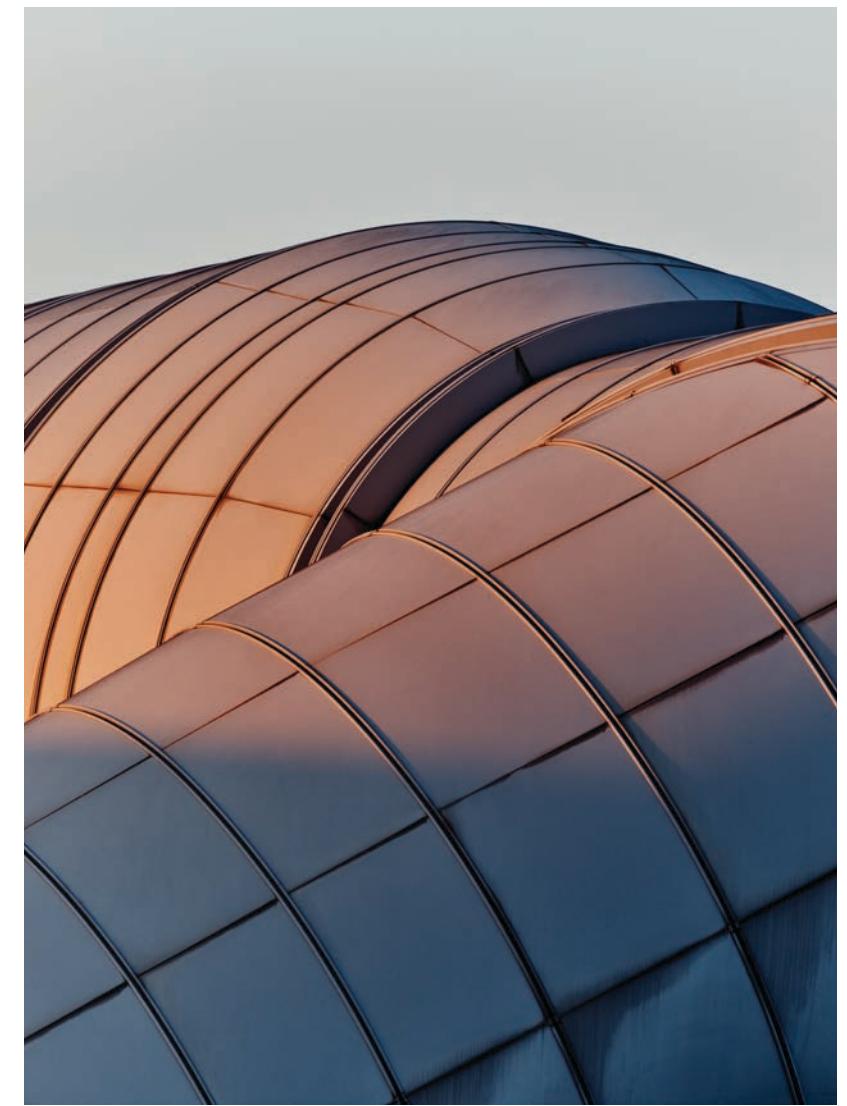


OPPOSITE: CARS ON DISPLAY AT THE MASERATI UMBERTO PANINI COLLECTION. AN EARLY MASERATI HAS A STRIPED INTERIOR CUSHION.





AN INSPECTOR AT THE FERRARI FACTORY CHECKS THE V8 AND V12 ENGINES.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: AN INTAKE FROM A 1960s FERRARI; FERRARI'S WIND TUNNEL IN MARANELLO, DESIGNED BY RENZO PIANO; FERRARI'S ARCHIVE ROOM, WHICH HOUSES ORIGINAL PLANS FOR EACH CAR BUILT; A MACHINE STITCHES THE AUTOMAKER'S PRANCING HORSE LOGO.



“Maranello is a bit like the Vatican. People from all over the world who love Ferrari have the possibility to visit and deepen that connection.”

including more than 20 stunning vintage cars purchased from the brand’s corporate heritage collection during one of its financial crises.

Maserati, Pagani, and Lamborghini also offer public factory tours, by appointment. The Ferrari factory is only accessible to clients and VIPs, but a visit is a near-requisite pilgrimage. “Maranello is a bit like the Vatican. People from all over the world who love the brand have the possibility to visit and deepen that connection,” says Enrico Galliera, Ferrari’s chief marketing and commercial officer.

The complex’s core artery is named for the founder, Via Enzo Ferrari. Side roads are named for championship-winning Ferrari Formula 1 drivers like Kimi Räikkönen. Road testing of every customer car, as well as that of forthcoming models, takes place along these streets, offering gawking access. Visitors pass buildings dedicated to design, engineering, technology, and the famed Ferrari Formula 1 racing team—the winningest in F1 history. A short bus ride to the brand’s private onsite racetrack, Fiorano, may yield glimpses of camouflaged prototypes, roaring through the twisties.

Ferrari’s assembly hall was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Jean Nouvel. Like his reverential museum commissions, the factory is a temple to its subject. Giant images of famed Ferrari cars, engines, and drivers are exhibited on the walls. (They double as sound-absorbing panels to minimize interior noise.) Cars travel from station to station like rolling sculpture, as hundreds of workers hand-attach components; just two of the scores of assembly stations are manned by robots. The latest screamingly potent V12 engines are hand-built by a single master mechanic over four days.

As a testament to the marque’s venerated status, nearly everything in the complex is emblazoned with Ferrari’s icon, the Cavallino Rampante: a black-on-yellow silhouette of a prancing stallion, its front hooves raised as it

rears back. This includes signs, coveralls, safety equipment, vending machines, transport vehicles, and even trash cans.

This horse also lends its name to the onsite Michelin-starred restaurant. Here, acclaimed chef Massimo Bottura provides regional tasting menus, with available wine pairings. And for those who wish to purchase a memento, multiple boutiques peddle Cavallino-embellished items, from two-figure hats, three-figure sweaters, and four-figure loafers to five-figure F1 souvenirs and six-figure drivable electric cars.

Additional, exclusive sites are accessible only to top-tier clients. Ferrari’s Classiche workshop performs restorations of vintage, F1, Special Series, and limited-edition models, often utilizing the cars’ original blueprints, which are preserved in its extensive archives. “We are probably the only automotive company in the world which still has the original drawing done by our engineers of every single car that left the company,” says Galliera. “This gives us the possibility, if the client wants to bring the car back in the original condition, to restore it exactly as it left the factory.” The waitlist for a restoration is years long.

Its Tailor Made atelier offers select buyers opportunities to personalize every aspect of their vehicle, from unique interior materials and trim pieces—like woven Japanese indigo denim, or hammered copper—to paint colors developed, named, and used solely by them. For its most faithful clients, the Special Projects office will even create a seven- or eight-figure one-off, custom-bodied car, a singular model all but guaranteed to appreciate significantly the moment it is completed. These makers carefully track the secondary market, punishing those who flip their cars for quick profits by banning them from accessing allotments for future models and special editions.

Profits on such projects can reach 80 percent, so all of these brands endeavor to expand their take rate with their top customers, while maintaining exclusivity. Lamborghini thus offers similar individuation opportunities in Sant’Agata through its on-site Polo Storico classic car reconditioning shop, and its Ad Personam and One-Off bespoke programs. Likewise, in Modena, Maserati has its own Classiche workshop and Officine Fuoriserie customization site. And while every Pagani is a seven-figure custom creation, myriad individualization opportunities exist at the workshop, so each car is truly one-of-one.

For Ferrari owners who want to enhance their driving skills while on site, the brand’s Corso Pilota program provides immersive experiences on its private Fiorano track, instructing clients in how to unlock their car’s abilities. The brand will even sell top clients track-only vehicles, up to and including decommissioned Formula 1 cars. It will then—for a price—train them on the vehicle, as well as store, maintain, and fly it around the world for them to compete with other clients. Lamborghini, Maserati, and Pagani all offer similar on-track and racing programs.

Brand-agnostic driving opportunities also abound at the region’s four racetracks: Varano in Parma, Misano in Rimini, Imola in Bologna, and Autodromo di Modena in Modena. At the latter, driving a Ferrari or Lamborghini is as easy as donning a helmet and buckling in. A pro driver in the passenger seat provides precise instructions on when to accelerate, brake, and turn via an integrated headset radio.

The program is open to anyone with a valid driver’s license. “We once had an American woman, 94 years old, who came here with her daughter,” says Federica Borghi, the site’s marketing director. “And we have many who have just turned 16.” The instruction is expert, and the experience is exhilarating. Just remember to pay attention and follow directions. “People don’t have trouble turning,” Borghi says, smirking. “But they sometimes forget to brake.”

Longer term rentals of exotic cars—classics or modern—are available to tour the expansive region, for time periods literally ranging from minutes to weeks. No need to be nervous; Italian hospitality reigns, and support is provided. You can request an assistant at your side to give you instructions and directions, someone to follow you in case of breakdowns, or even a chauffeur to drive for you, says Francesca Soffici, a local tour operator.

Driving a supercar through the homeland of Enzo and Ferruccio may bestow a thrilling sense of invincibility. But when you’re behind the wheel, even in the Motor Valley, there are rules and repercussions. “So even if you have a Ferrari,” Soffici says, “you still have to follow the speed limit.”

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A V12 ENGINE ON A HOIST IN THE ASSEMBLY LINE AT THE LAMBORGHINI HEADQUARTERS IN SANT’AGATA; THREADS ON A STITCHING MACHINE; A 1989 LAMBORGHINI LM002; A SELECTION OF LEATHERS IN THE AD PERSONAM AREA, WHERE CLIENTS CAN CUSTOMIZE FINISHES FOR THEIR LAMBORGHINI.

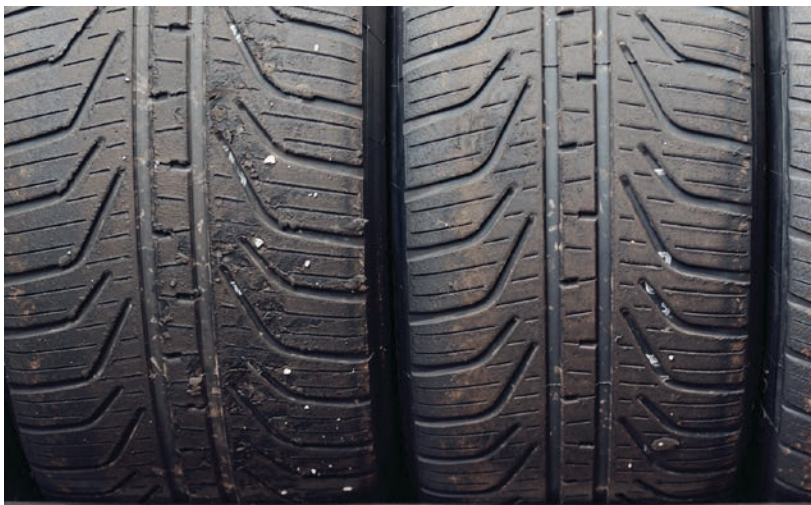


PHOTO ASSISTANTE: LUCA PEREIRA-FREARS

