

1967 Iso Grifo GL 300

Light weight and Chevy power gave Grifos the ability to run with anything from Maranello and live to tell about it

by Colin Comer



Jason Doad ©2013, courtesy of RM Auctions

Chassis number: GL660107

The 1967 Iso Grifo GL offered features Chevrolet's famed 327-ci V8, which puts out 300 horsepower. The car's silver finish accentuates its distinctive Bertone lines, and the black leather interior presents nicely, showing wear commensurate with the car's age. The elegant wood-trimmed instrument panel remains in good condition, as does the sporty three-spoke, wood-rimmed steering wheel. This example comes to the sale from a sizable collection of collector cars, where it was kept in good company.

The Iso Grifo is a car that combines some of the automotive world's best engineering ingenuity with beautiful lines that are distinctive to their Italian creators — and horsepower and torque that only the United States could deliver. With only 471 built within an 11-year production run, they are indeed few and far between. Any chance to purchase an Iso Grifo is truly a rare occasion.

SCM Analysis This car, Lot 233, sold for \$244,269, including buyer's premium, at RM's London auction on September 9, 2013.

Hybrids. How did a genre formerly comprising of some of the best performance cars ever conceived become, a mere 40 years later, a genre of cars for people who hate cars and merely view them as basic transportation between protests and organic food stores?

Perhaps Publisher Martin's next title, *Hyper Mile Market*, will explore that. So what are some of the hybrids we actually care about? Shelby Cobras, Sunbeam Tigers, Griffiths, DeTomaso Mangustas, Panteras, and Longchamps. Intermeccanica Italias. Facel Vegas. And, of course, Iso Rivoltas, Grifos, and their sibling Bizzarrini Stradas. We should not see any of these cars at Whole Foods anytime soon.

From appliances to sports cars

Since this is an Iso Grifo profile, I would be doing a disservice by not offering a bit of the fascinating backstory of Renzo Rivolta and Giotto Bizzarrini, the men behind the Iso Grifo. "Iso" comes from Rivolta's very successful Isothermos refrigeration unit company, which he founded in 1939.

After World War II ended, one can only guess Mr. Rivolta no longer found building appliances "cool" and completely re-invented his company. He began building famously robust, high-quality scooters and motorbikes, such as the Isomoto and Isosport. Perhaps his most famous product was the Isetta microcar, which Rivolta later licensed to manufacturers worldwide — the most famous of which is obviously BMW.

This success allowed Rivolta to follow his dream of building a powerful GT car. To accomplish this, Rivolta hired Giotto Bizzarrini. Bizzarrini's résumé was certainly impressive, as he was a former Alfa Romeo engineer and held chief engineer and test-driver titles at Ferrari. His projects at Ferrari included the 250 TR, 250 SWB, and 250 GTO. Rivolta hired Bizzarrini in large part to develop his new GT car's unified-pressed-steel chassis and body structure.

Add Rivolta's choice of designer — Giorgetto Giugiaro with coachbuilder Bertone — and you get a pretty good cast of players.

Italian design, American power

Throw in the decision to use Chevrolet's famed 327-ci small block fitted with a Borg-Warner T-10 4 speed, De Dion rear suspension — with the Salisbury/Dana 44 differential (also used in Cobras, E-types, and Jeeps, among others) — and four-wheel disc brakes from Girling.

Details

Years produced: 1965–74 (all types)
 Number produced: 413
 Original price: \$14,000
 Current SCM Valuation: \$210,000–\$300,000
 Tune-up cost: \$250
 Chassis #: Metal plate on top of right front shock tower
 Engine #: Top left flange at rear of block
 Club: Iso & Bizzarrini Owner's Club
 More: www.isobizclub.com
 Alternatives: 1965–69 Bizzarrini 5300 Strada, 1966–68 Ferrari 330 GTC, 1968–73 Ferrari 365 GTB/4 Daytona
 SCM Investment Grade: B

Comps



1969 Iso Grifo
 Lot 18, s/n 920242
 Condition 2-
 Sold at \$352,000
 Gooding & Co., Scottsdale, AZ, 1/20/12
 SCM# 191582



1967 Iso Grifo GL
 Lot 14, s/n GL65007B
 Condition 3+
 Sold at \$137,500
 Gooding & Co., Pebble Beach, CA, 8/14/10
 SCM# 165656



1969 Iso Grifo GL
 Lot 157, s/n GL920245
 Condition 2
 Sold at \$308,000
 RM Auctions, Phoenix, AZ, 1/18/08
 SCM# 48682



It was an international tour de force of brain power and car components, the result of which was the modestly named Iso Rivolta GT, which debuted in 1962.

To follow the GT, Rivolta took its chassis and created the Grifo. A muscular two-seat supercar, the Grifo offered visual excitement more befitting of the stout chassis and powertrain that was hidden under the reserved 2+2 GT. As with all of Giugiaro's designs, it was the complete package, and every detail was thought out — and worked.

Not satisfied with merely plugging in the engines sourced from Chevrolet, Iso Rivolta was reported to have balanced, blueprinted and tested each unit before installing them in Grifos.

Most were dressed with beautiful cast-aluminum oil pans and other trimmings that made the install look like it belonged nestled in that sleek Italian body — instead of looking like an American tourist wondering how to order a cappuccino.

This Iso Rivolta-tuned Corvette power, along with the available 3.07 final drive, tall 205-15 tires and light 3,200-pound curb weight gave Grifos enough high-speed ability to run with anything from Maranello. Of course, much as with other supercars of the day, such as Ferrari 275 GTBs, the Grifo's power Girling brakes were good for one or two high-speed stops — but not a day at the track.

And the Rivolta/Bizzarrini pairing? The two decided to part ways shortly after the Grifo was a reality. Rivolta always wanted to build grand touring cars of the highest order, while Bizzarrini was clearly deeply rooted in competition and wanted to build all-out GT racing cars.

The result was Rivolta continued to build touring cars and Bizzarrini formed his own company (Bizzarrini SpA), which took the Grifo chassis and clothed it in sensational bodywork to create the car that became the Bizzarrini 5300 Strada, with various road and racing incarnations.

The Grifo's styling has held up remarkably well, and obviously the drivetrains are simple to keep running.

Hidden rust a possible gremlin

All this said, Grifos are not without caveats today. The pressed-steel unibody, while revolutionary at the time, is quite prone to rusting —

because of a complete lack of any rust-proofing during manufacture. Much like a Pantera, a Grifo can look exceptionally clean from the outside, but a little poking around can often find serious structural issues.

Not helping this was the standard Italian practice of slathering the entire chassis with an asphalt-based undercoating over bare metal. This undercoat will dry out and crack, allowing moisture to work its way in between bare steel. The comfy layer of undercoating allows that hidden water to convert steel into rust for years.

Also, while most mechanical bits were used in many other cars and are easy to source, trying to source the Grifo-specific bits today — if missing — can produce massive brain damage.

While I did not personally inspect our subject Grifo, upon reviewing the photos, it does appear to be a nice original example — although it does appear slightly unloved.

It is missing its trunk script and hood badge, and the grille badge is mounted on the hood. Some underhood components are missing or not original, most noticeable are the incorrect radiator and missing fan shroud. The interior appears very clean and original, including the original shifter (a plus for originality but a hindrance for speed shifting), minus the horrid 1970s cassette stereo.

Bargain style and grunt

The RM catalog does not mention if the engine and transmission are original (Iso Rivolta did stamp engine numbers, and even numbered air cleaners), any restoration history, or report of this car's current structural or physical fitness.

The last sale I was able to find of this particular car was Coy's London auction in 1997 for about \$43,400, and it has been reported to have been on display at a museum in the Cayman Islands since.

However, if the car retains its original drivetrain, has a solid chassis and body, and runs and drives reasonably well, I would call it well bought. Why? With classic Italian supercar styling and American grunt under the hood, a good Grifo offers exclusivity and performance for what amounts to modern-day buyer's premium of most comparable Italian cars of the day. ♦ (Introductory description courtesy of RM Auctions.)

