

1978/1980 FIAT 131 ABARTH SUPERMIRAFIORI GROUP 4 WORKS RALLY CAR

Chassis no. 2045727

Registration no. TO R92450



THE FIAT 131 ABARTH RALLY

The Fiat Abarth 131 Rally was homologated for the 1976 season. There is some conjecture regarding the exact number of cars built, as Graham Robson states 'exactly 400' in his comprehensive book on the model, while other sources states believe that just over 400 cars were built. Regardless, there is general agreement that at least 400 cars were built to satisfy the FIA homologation directives allowing the car to compete in the World Rally Championship.

It is believed that approximately 40-50 of these special 131s were turned into full Group 4 specification rally machines, however the exact number of these full racing cars developed by Abarth is very likely impossible to pinpoint. The cars proved immensely successful, winning with World Rally Championship for manufacturers three times, in 1977, 1978, and 1980. Over a half-dozen years between 1976 and 1981, the 131 Abarth won 20 WRC events and became the final Group 4 car to achieve WRC dominance before the Group B era.

Notable 131 Abarth rally drivers include Walter Rohrl, Markku Alen, Sandro Munari, Timo Salonen, Attilio Bettega, and Michele Mouton.

CHASSIS 2045727

THE EX-MICHELE MOUTON, MARANELLO ROSSO COLLECTION 131

There were at least six 131 Abarths campaigned by the Fiat France team from 1977 to 1980 in the French Rally Championship and in select rounds of the World Rally Championship. These six cars bore the following Italian city of Torino (Italy) registration numbers:

R 92450 TO
P TO 19729
P TO 51474
P TO 51473
P 09981 TO
N 92971 TO

Chassis 2045727 was assigned registration number R 92450 TO, and this car has a history that dates to early 1978. A registration document with the car dated April 5, 1978, Turin, shows the car registered to SpA Fiat SAEASA. Its Torino registration number falls right in the middle of a series of works 131s driven in WRC events by the likes of rally legends Walter Rohrl and Markku Alen, among others. In fact, 92448, 92449, 92450, 92451, 92452 were all Torino registration numbers assigned to works-supported 131 Abarths.

R 92450 TO is a full works-specification gravel/tarmac car that was raced in French Rally Championship and WRC events during the 1978-1980 seasons. It was usually driven by Michele Mouton and occasionally by teammate Jean-Claude Andruet.

Mouton, the fearless female rallyist who would go on to great success in the Audi Sport Quattros, is known to have driven 131 Abarth R 92450 TO in multiple major international World Rally Championship events. Her successes with the car included 7th overall at the 1980 Monte Carlo Rally, where the car was adorned with the distinctive yellow, black and red Calberson livery, and 5th overall on two occasions during the 1979 and 1980 Tour de Corse wearing the red, white and blue of Fiat France. In fact, it can be said that R92450 TO is the car that truly launched Mouton's professional rally career, as after her successes with it during the 1980 season, she signed with Audi for 1981, and of course the rest is history. In all we can document at least six events in which Mouton drove this particular 131 Abarth.

As the 131 proved successful in competition over multiple seasons, and often due to the rigors of competition, some Group 4 cars were modified to look like the revised 1978 "Series 2" production cars, which featured a different rear panel with more prominent, horizontally oriented taillights. This was the case with the subject car, chassis no. 2045727.

During the 1980 Tour de Corse, its last WRC event, R92450 TO sustained cosmetic damage to its original Series 1 rear bodywork panel. This panel was replaced during the rally with the updated Series 2 rear panel, and R92450 TO finished the rally in 5th overall with its new 'facelifted' rear end. Photographic and video evidence of the car's appearance and damage during the rally confirm this.

After its Fiat France works tenure, it appears that R92450 TO was left to sit for 1981, likely gathering dust in Fiat's Torino works facility, until being revived alongside a handful of its ex-Fiat France 131 sister cars for a 1982 campaign in rally events around Italy as a quasi-works Jolly Club racing team entry. We say 'quasi-works' because during the 1982 season, these cars were still owned by the Torino-based Fiat-Abarth factory team. Its major success whilst in its Jolly Club Totip-sponsored livery came at the 1982 Targa Florio Rallye di Sicilia, where it finished

4th overall in the hands of Andrea Zanussi and Arnaldo Bernacchini. Even into the early Group B era, this remarkable 131 Abarth soldiered on with dignity and remained competitive.

Shortly thereafter, at the 1982 Rallye Isola d'Elbe, R92450 TO suffered a serious accident to the left front, causing a DNF and necessitating replacement of the driver's side inner fender. It appears that this accident ultimately ended R92450 TO's works rally career. Evidence of the damage and subsequent left front inner fender replacement (using a Series 2 component) is plainly visible on the car today.

Its works career over, R92450 TO was sold in February 1983 directly from the Fiat Abarth racing team in Torino to Vittorio Carlino of Sassari, Sardegna (Italy), this being confirmed by Italian ownership documentation contained in the history file. Carlino rallied the car with modest success, coming 12th at the Rally Costa Smeralda against heady competition from a strong field of Lancia 037s among many others.

During its lengthy history on the European professional rally circuit, this particular ex-works 131 raced against the rally icons of its era, including the Lancia Stratos, Lancia 037, Audi Sport Quattro, Ferrari 308 Group B, and its fellow Works 131 Abarths, themselves the most formidable contenders of the pre-Group B era – among countless others. R 92450 TO has the distinction of being a genuine ex-works car with all of the special competition features only found on the factory racers, with the added cache of having been the car that launched Michele Mouton's professional rally career to new heights.

After its active competition days were over, the 131 joined the formidable San Marino-based collection of Fabrizio Violati, one of the world's preeminent collectors of Ferrari and Abarth automobiles. In his stable it shared space with some 30+ other Abarth racing cars, and 50-some Ferraris, where it saw little if any use. The highly original, untouched rally car did not change hands until it was sold at the 2014 Bonhams Goodwood Revival auction alongside a selection of Violati's other vehicles. Some of the other cars from Violati's "Maranello Rosso Collection", including his Ferrari 250 GTO, were sold at the 2014 Bonhams Quail Lodge Auction, the GTO achieving a world-record price for a car sold publicly when it achieved \$38+ million.

RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION OF A RALLY ICON

R92450 has since been restored by the specialists at Rallysport Development in Yorkshire, UK. It has been returned to 131 its familiar Fiat France works red/white/blue scheme, exactly as it competed at its final World Rally Championship event, the 1980 Tour de Corse, with Michele Mouton at the wheel.

During restoration, particular evidence was paid to preserving the considerable originality of many of the finishes found throughout this authentic World Rally Championship contender. The body was carefully stripped and placed on a rotisserie to study the underside, which showed considerable use and abuse from its many seasons of competitive rallying. The emphasis was kept on retaining originality of the car's finishes, so repairs were kept to a minimum, but necessary items were attended to as the idea was to make the car operational.

Evidence of all previous liveries was discovered in many places on the car and captured during a photo-documented process of stripping the paint carefully layer by layer down to bare metal. The roof bears the evidence of the car's history most plainly, bearing evidence of the Fiat France colors, Calberson paint scheme, Totip livery, and its final privateer livery, though evidence of Fiat France colors was also plainly evident on the lower rear valence and inside the window frames.

This remarkable period rally car has been carefully revived both cosmetically and mechanically. Its engine, a substantially original works-numbered dry-sump unit retained all factory works competition upgrades. Having sat for years, it had suffered from disuse, and was carefully stripped. The works-numbered engine block was machined for four new liners and line-bored for the crank. New con-rods and pistons were ordered, while the cylinder head was skimmed and a new set of guides and seats installed. The original pistons and rods all retained their factory Abarth works quality control markings and these components have been retained with the car. Fuel injectors were sent away for a check over. The engine bay was sympathetically cleaned but not over-restored with attention paid to preserving original finishes.

The gearbox was rebuilt, while the differential was stripped to ensure

correct operation. The 3-paddle works center clutch disc was found to be the original unit. Brakes and suspension were rebuilt as needed with the Bilstein dampers sent to Germany for refurbishing, while the fuel system was cleaned and new fuel pumps and lines were installed. Other systems were refurbished as needed for correct operation.

The car was then painted in its Fiat France colors as it appeared in 1980 at the Tour de Corse. Chris Jarvis, a specialist in recreating vintage rally car liveries, was retained to reproduce all numbers and sponsorship markings as R92450 TO appeared at this event. Mouton's and Arrii's names are painted on the doors, as we believe they would have been in period, as the facilities for one-off stickers were not yet available at this time. The result of Jarvis' work is a stunning time capsule representation of how this car appeared in its final WRC event.

The car bears its history in so many ways; from the holes where its rally plates were attached on the rear trunk lid, to the telltale signs of hasty repairs on the rear panel and to the left front corner, to the evidence of factory paint still visible in certain crevices. Its largely original interior features its original works roll cage, gauges, and switchgear, and trick modifications such as heavy duty windshield hold downs and works-spec fasteners and brackets throughout let you know that this is not an ordinary *Stradale* variant. The windshield, a period item, retains a factory marking nomenclature 'G39', visible in photos from the '82 Targa Florio and '83 Costa Smeralda.

A painstaking process of photo documentation of the 131 Abarth's competition history was undertaken and the result is a wonderful binder containing dozens of 8x10 photos of the car competing in period at the events noted in the listing below. An accompanying correspondence file includes documentation of the substantial restoration work performed in the UK, as well as correspondence with 131 marque experts, including Vittorio Carlino, the first privateer owner and driver of this very car.

This Fiat 131 Abarth works rally car has been praised as one of the most original WRC cars of its era, and boasts a continuous history from its inception in April 1978 until the present day, an accolade which few other works rally cars can claim.

LIST OF CONFIRMED RACE APPEARANCES

April 5, 1978 – first confirmed existence of R92450 TO per registration document in file

June 3-4, 1978 - Ronde Cévenole (French Rally Championship)

Car # 6

Fiat France entry

Driver: Jean-Claude Andruet

Result: 2nd overall (behind Lancia Stratos of Darniche)

June 16-18, 1978 - Rallye d'Antibes (French Rally Championship)

Car #4

Fiat France entry

Drivers: Michele Mouton/Francoise Conconi

Result: 3rd overall (behind Stratos of Darniche and Stratos of Bettega)

May 5-6, 1979 - Alpine Criterion - Criterium Alpin (French Rally Championship)

Car #??

Fiat France entry

Driver: Jean-Claude Andruet

Result: DNF (broken ball joint)

May 26-27, 1979 - Ronde Cévenole - French Rally Championship

Car #10

Fiat France entry

Driver: Michèle Mouton/Francoise Conconi

Result: 3rd overall

November 2-4, 1979 - Tour de Corse (Corsica) - Round 10 of WRC

Car #3

Fiat France entry

Drivers: Michele Mouton/Françoise Conconi

Result: 5th overall

January 19-25, 1980 - 48th Monte Carlo Rally - WRC

Car #12

Fiat France entry (Calberson livery)

Drivers: Michele Mouton/Annii Arrii

Result: 7th overall

October 23-25, 1980 - Tour de Corse (Corsica) - Rallye de France - 10th Round of the WRC

Car #15

Fiat France entry

Drivers: Michele Mouton/Annii Arrii

Result: 5th overall

**damage sustained to rear and rear panel changed to Series 2 unit*

November 22-23, 1980 - Rally Critérium des Cévennes (French Rally Championship)

Car #4

Fiat France entry

Drivers: Michele Mouton/Annii Arrii

Result: DNF

March 11-13, 1982 - Targa Florio - Rallye di Sicilia

Car #6

Jolly Club/Totip entry

Drivers: Andrea Zanussi/Arnaldo Bernacchini

Result: 4th overall (behind two Jolly Club 308GTB's and Conrero team Opel Ascona 400)

April 22-24, 1982 - Rallye Isola d'Elba

Car #??

Jolly Club/Totip entry

Drivers: Antonella Mandelli/Fiorella Maggi

Result: DNF (accident to left front)

February 25, 1983 - TO R92450 is sold to Vittorio Carlino of Sassari, Sardinia (Italy)

March 23-26, 1983 - Rally Costa Smeralda (European Rally Championship)

Car#42

Gottardi Racing Team

Drivers: Vittorio Carlino/Mario Silvetti

Result: 12th overall (though Carlino recalls he finished 8th)

October 15, 1983 - Trofeo Maremma

Car #20

Gottardi Racing Team

Drivers: Vittorio Carlino/Michele Vanacore

Result: ??

Dates unknown, 1983 - Rally Roccaruja

Car #39

Gottardi Racing Team

Drivers: Vittorio Carlino/Mario Silvetti

Result 1st overall

1984-2015 Maranello Rosso Collection/Fabrizio Violati

**September 2015 Purchased by SF Autocenter at Bonhams
Goodwood Revival Auction**

2014-2015

Restoration by Rallysport Development