



By Katy Culbertson

Recently, I got the chance to speak with Lamborghini’s test driver, Valentino Balboni at the Italiafest in Jupiter, Florida. Balboni has been with Lamborghini longer than almost anyone else at the company and, according to many, knows more than perhaps anyone in the industry. Balboni’s friend, Monte Patterson of Lamborghini Orlando, told me, “In the forty years I’ve been in the business, I’ve met all sorts of people, and the one person that stands out is Valentino Balboni. He lives for Lamborghinis....he’s one in a million.”

All day Balboni gave rides to the festival’s attendants. He would drive up, a helmeted person would get out of the car beaming like the Cheshire Cat, and the next person would get in. He would drive a few more laps, return and repeat the process. As the day went on, I noticed one thing never changed—Balboni was still smiling just as much as the people who got to ride with him. Later, during the lunch break when I got the chance to ask him a few questions, he expressed his dismay at the length of the break. “An hour...” he lamented as he looked back towards the track, “I would never stop if I didn’t have to; I love to drive.” So we began to talk about his career at Lamborghini to pass the time. It was evident during the interview that this man didn’t simply drive the cars, he lived for them.

**1. How did your relationship with Lamborghini begin? How has your career evolved since then?**

I began as an apprentice mechanic in 1968; I swept the floors, cleaned engines, and cleaned tools. Then I began working on the cars and finally in '73, on September 5th, I started my training as a test driver.

**2. What is your most memorable drive?**

Everyday I have my most memorable drive. There is no one which is...I mean... I like everything connected to driving, and of course, driving a Lamborghini.

**3. What do you do to prepare for a new vehicle - or rather - what is the most difficult thing about being a test driver?**

You need to be extremely sensible; you need to know the mechanics of how it all works. You need to find your balance with the car...and know what is expected of it.

**4. Do you ever bring music along on the test drives? If so, what?**

No, you need to be able to hear the engine. The noise is the most interesting part. I love music, but the sound of an engine is the best it can get.

**5. If you were to race in the Targa Florio or Mille Miglia road races from days past, what Lamborghini, vintage or con temporary, would you choose to race in?**

I would drive a Miura, a beautiful Miura.

**6. If you could pick anyone from racing history, past to present, who would you choose as your co-driver?**

Good question, Ayrton Senna.

**7. And finally, if you can tell us, where you see yourself and Lamborghini in the next five years?**

Lamborghini now... we keep up with new products. We develop everyday; we have lots of things coming out in the future.

The history and life of the company is changing because since Audi bought the company – Audi's a huge concern in Europe and everywhere in the world – they have invested and helped a lot. I think Lamborghini is really going up with their new product. Today you can't keep on so long with exotics, so every 4 or 5 years we will have a new one. There will always be something to look forward to...

It makes life very, very exciting.

I would love everybody to know and feel what a Lamborghini is. It is such a nice feeling and sensation.

Lamborghini Miura



Directly after the interview, Balboni gave me that chance. We took off in a black Gallardo 520 hp all-wheel drive Lamborghini, helmets on, windows open. Moments later, after having my retinas reattached, I realized I had just taken the ride of my life. I was able to ride in a Lamborghini with the man that speaks their language. As opposed to hearing an engine, he hears music, and he knows every note. Earlier that day I witnessed the legend crawl partway under the rear left tire after it had been on the track - ignoring others' warnings about the possibility of being burned - because he said he felt a vibration there. The culprit? Less than a handful of dirt that was stuck in the wheel.

He took me around the Moroso track three times, but it wasn't enough. I will never forget how, for about 7 miles around 30 turns, I was encompassed by (or ensconced in) raw power and sitting next to the man who harnesses it better than any other. Balboni was right—feeling what a Lamborghini is made of definitely makes the difference, and my smile still hasn't faded...•••

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