

Book Reviews

Joseph Figoni: Le Grand Couturier de la Carrosserie Française—Volume One: Alfa-Romeo

by Peter Larsen and Ben Erickson

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moteurs.dk/figoni-alfa

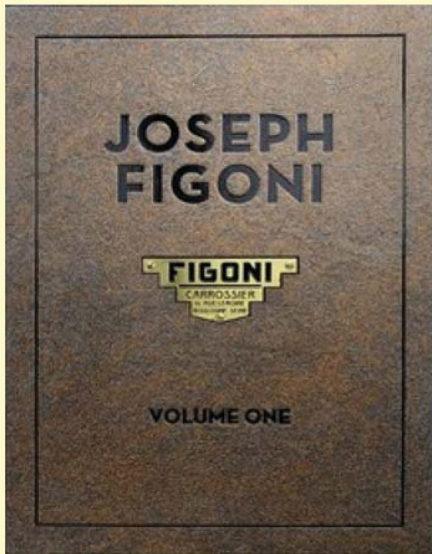
(Pre-orders available;

books ship mid-August)

436 pages, 8.6" x 12" hardcover, slipcased
220 b/w and 80 color images, and 180 ads,
documents, drawings, illustrations and tables

Limited edition of 600 signed and numbered
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Published books on carrossières (coachbuilders) are in the minority compared to marque-dedicated books, so the body of knowledge hungers for new quality entries to the mix. The authors of this new book are getting deep into this genre following their previous multivolume titles: *The Kellner Affair* and *J. Saoutchik Carrossier*. This Figoni project actually gave birth, while it was underway, to their Kellner book, which accumulated enough material to justify a separate work that created a detour for some time until it was published; now the

Figoni project is back on track. As the title states, this new book is “Volume One”—so unlike their previous books, this project will evolve with future volumes starting with this one dedicated to Alfa-Romeo, the next covering Bugatti bodied Figoni cars, then Delage, Delahaye, Talbot-Lago, an “A-Z” volume catching the various other marques and ending with a biographical volume.



The book is divided into three parts. The first part deals with Joseph Figoni and Alfa-Romeo in France, and other relationships and events, all in three chapters: “Alfa-Romeo in France,” “Joseph Figoni, Alfa-Romeo, Luigi Chinetti and Raymond Sommer,” and “Joseph Figoni and the Alfa-Romeo Le Mans and Road Cars.” (There’s a splendid “book report” summary of these chapters on the publisher’s site noted above.) Part two’s three chapters deal with bodies made for the 6C 1750, the 6C 2300 and the 8C 2300 by chassis number. Part three are the appendices (seven in all) dealing with aspects of total production, including tables of the cars listed by chassis number.

The arc and particulars of the book are covered in the Foreword and Acknowledgements section in helpful detail to align the reader (so don’t just skip these parts when you get the book). Here’s an example: it’s here that we learn (happily for this arguably pedantic reader) of why and when “Alfa-Romeo” would appear in the book with a hyphen: “French Alfa-Romeo advertising in the 1920s and the Alfa-Romeo radiator badge that French-assembled chassis were given used a hyphen between the Alfa and the Romeo of Alfa-Romeo. Since this book deals with the establishment of the Alfa-Romeo subsidiary in France and the Figoni-bodied Alfa-Romeo chassis, most of which were assembled in the Alfa-Romeo facility in Levallois-Perret, the hyphen has been retained whenever Alfa-Romeo is mentioned

in this book. There are a few exceptions e.g. when the title of a book is referenced where ‘Alfa Romeo’ is part of the title and the author did not hyphenate.” This reminded me of other occasions where the hyphen was used, e.g., the English ads on p. 5 of *SAHJ* #273; and as noted by *Michael Sedgwick* (UK) in *SAHJ* #57 p. 3: “Alfa Romeo lost its hyphen without anyone’s noticing, and neither Armstrong Siddeley nor Isotta Fraschini ever officially had ‘em.” The French hyphen treatment was a fun new item to learn. (Small pedantic note: Appendix 6 on the contents page differs from the appendix page in its missing hyphen.)

The point of the excursion into the pedantic above is to underscore a sense of the authors’ aim towards getting to a satisfying depth with the subject and the material. It is likely true that the reason marque books outnumber coachbuilder books has to do with the relatively scant and scarce material that survives for any given firm. Though the industry came to all but a complete end after WWII, it was on steady decline. Firms like Brewster, Fleetwood, Fisher, LeBaron were acquired by marque companies to secure their supply of designs and bodies. As noted in the Acknowledgements, a boost for this project came from Benoît Bocquet who “spent years amassing an archive of Figoni material”—and the Figoni family—and more, happily.

The scope of the Figoni enterprise was much smaller than other well known firms (“approximately 800 bodies from 1923 to 1954”), and the material used in the book (drawings, documents) rather reflect this. The tables covering production are well detailed (with only three chassis numbers listed as unknown).

The attention to detail is only rivaled by the number of period pictures and modern photos, often including detailed shots of the chassis plates and engine numbers. Each chapter ends with its reference notes, the bibliography is split between book and periodical sections, and the index is split between four categories (chassis, periodicals-organizations-places-events, people, and marques-models-carrossiers).

Perhaps it would be most appropriate to review the entire work when all the volumes are complete and published, but this first volume clearly leaves this reader with the hope that all the other volumes will come to be published.

—R. Verdés