



The gorgeous De Tomaso Mangusta was first shown in 1966 at the Turin Auto Show on a Sport 5000 chassis and went into series production in 1967. In 40+ years of popularity amongst aficionados of the Marke, you would think that we enthusiasts would have found out all its secrets.

Well, it just goes to show what we know - a chance remark by Mrs DeTomaso at a family gathering recently to her nephew, William Ellis mentioned that when the upcoming De Tomaso and Ford business arrangement was beginning the largest series production of sports cars the company had ever experienced (the Pantera) in early 1971, Mangusta production was winding down and actually getting in the way of the upcoming Pantera assembly line.

So, Mr De Tomaso contacted a German, Armin Fischer of Stuttgart, who ran a business called Ital Import and who had spoken to Mr De Tomaso several times about being the official concessionaire for Germany. According to an interview some time ago with Herr Fischer, De Tomaso took him into a warehouse area in Modena and showed him 55 Mangustas in various stages of assembly.

Mr. De Tomaso reportedly said "The day you have sold all 55 cars, you will get a one year exclusive concession for Germany.

So, returning to Stuttgart, and with the financial help of friends at a local bank, Fischer bought all the cars in lots of 8-10, and had them brought to another friend's workshop in Landau, run by Gustav Hoecker.

As mentioned, the Mangustas were mostly assembled but needed detailing. For instance Fischer remembers that all 55 were missing hand-brake handles, a Ford part, but no parts were available from De Tomaso. So, he and Hoecker substituted a similar hand-brake handle from a Mercedes 230SL.

Humourously, after they had bought 20 handles from Mercedes, the Mercedes parts manager noticed the huge increase in sales of the item, thinking there was a quality control problem in their own production. When Fischer told them there was no problem, they were simply using the Mercedes part on a De Tomaso sports car, the next phone call that day was from Mercedes lawyers telling them to stop using German parts on 'those' cars and threatening to sue!

The remaining 230SL handles were subsequently sourced from various clandestine sources, out of the back-door, so to speak.

So, all the German-completed Mangustas, roughly serial numbers 8MA 1192 through to 1300 have a unique e-brake handle sourced from Mercedes, and can be differentiated by that fact.

The total includes all six of the known Mangustas built for the English market, and may also include the second known prototype 8MA 1196 which for unknown reasons has a one-off soft urethane nose in place of the usual bumperless steel front end.

*UK editors note:* It is generally accepted that 10 right hand drive Mangustas were completed by the factory, but not all made it to the UK. It is now thought that at least 6 reside in Australia.

Armin Fischer completed and sold all 55 Mangustas within a 3 month period, and received his sought after exclusive rights to Germany for all De Tomaso products. Besides the sale of 200 Mangustas to Kjell Qvale in San Francisco, this was the second largest group of De Tomaso cars ever shipped from Modena, and really helped start the tiny factory on its way to the "big time".

Of course, the Pantera was already in 'prototype production' at Maggiora, with 'pushbutton' bodies being hammered out by hand while Ford was completing the automated

stamping plant at Vignale. A considerable amount of early Pantera content, or at least design similarities of parts came from their Mangusta experience and sources. Hood latches, door latches, trunk lid release mechanisms, the design of the windscreen chrome surrounds and some e-brake parts.

Due to Armin Fischer's sales prowess and his long-term friendship with Gustav Hoeckler, who in turn became Fischer's favourite De Tomaso dealer in Germany, Fischer was referred to by De Tomaso in a 1990 conversation with Roland Jaeckel as, "My best salesman. Armin could sell refrigerators to Eskimos!".

Roland's first De Tomaso was one of Fischers and Hoecklers Mangustas.

Hoeckler also became locally well known for being able to do high quality repairs and tune-ups on exotic-in-Europe Ford V8's, and making a considerable amount of money in the process. And, being a racer at heart, Hoeckler partially sponsored an as yet unknown local boy in Kart racing, and when that was successful, then in Formula Koenig - the German equivalent of Formula Ford.

This is the lowest level of open-wheel racing where many racers started their careers, including the former world champions Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost.

The 'local boy' who made good? Young Michael Schumacher. So, that being the very beginning of Schumacher's pro-racing career, one could say with some truth that he owes De Tomaso and Ford for at least a part of the start of an illustrious racing career, and also has in some respect, the German Mangustas to thank.

Gustav Hoeckler passed away in 1999, but Armin Fischer is still alive and active, although now retired. Roland bought all his De Tomaso spares in 1996, along with many of those sold off from the factory assembly plant in Modena. Roland reports that Schumacher's original Koenig racer was still in Fischer's warehouse at that time, lending credence to Fischer's claim.

(Note: Armin Fischer's 'Italia Import' operation changed names several times. An advert from a 1971 German car magazine is under the name 'Sport Auto', but it is still the same Fischer run operation.)

Thanks to Jack DeRyke who compiled this and the Pantera Owners Club Of America, for allowing us to use this article.

*Article credits go to; William Ellis, Roland Jaeckel, Armin Fischer and Mrs De Tomaso.*