

1967 Fitch Phoenix and 1966 Griffith Series 600

There's something about sports cars clothed in svelte Italian-built bodies—and powered with American brawn. I can't quite put my finger on the allure, but so many of these hybrids fill my dream garage.

John Fitch and Andrew "Jack" Griffith are just two of the many automotive entrepreneurs who showed great ingenuity, took risks and expended great effort to marry American muscle with Italian sex appeal. The 1967 Fitch Phoenix and the 1966 Griffith Series 600—two very different sports cars—both had their bodies constructed in Frank Reisner's Carrozzeria Intermeccanica in Turin, Italy.

Unfortunately, only eleven Griffith 600s were produced. And just one Fitch Phoenix—the prototype, which John still owns and drives—was built.

Automodello strikes again. This model company is fast becoming known as one of the finer mid-volume producers of 1:43 scale model cars. The company often chooses to replicate interesting and forgotten cars that other model makers ignore. Both of these releases are the only models ever produced of the respective cars, and each is an excellent representation. Overall fit and finish receive very high marks, and side by side, they make for a great display. Each is supplied mounted in a display case with a plaque.

The Phoenix is the third release, and the Series 600 is the fourth from Automodello, who worked closely with John Fitch and Jack Griffith to bring these to fruition. As part of Automodello's "Founders Edition" series, both of these gems are numbered editions limited to 192 of each model. Each comes with an information card about the car, which has been personally autographed by John Fitch for the Phoenix, and Jack Griffith for Series 600.

Body castings are crisp and coated with high-gloss paint finish and wonderful chrome bits. All of the many photo-etched parts—used for window trim, windshield wipers, steering wheels, and numerous other details—are superbly made and carefully installed.

The Phoenix has been modeled in its most pure form to represent the way it was when first shown, with the exception of no whitewall tires and prior to the added rear luggage rack railing. Automodello has done a very fine job matching the custom mix gray/brown color of the real car. The detail on the wheels and tires is great, as is the comprehensively detailed interior—even down to the little brass plaque mounted on the dash in front of the passenger.

The Griffith 600 is stunning. The color combination is that of the New York show car, and it is set off so well with those chrome and black mag wheels shod with Redline tires. Both door windows are fully lowered, which helps show off the all-black interior. With the right lighting, you can see that it's all there, with correct door panels that even have separate silver trim strips.

My single gripe for both models is the license plates don't match any real plates. This isn't bad, but it's not ideal. I guess it comes down to personal preference, and I'd prefer clean-looking blank license plates, or none at all. That said, these are great models and very highly recommended. Priced at \$195 each.

Model Details

Production Date: The Fitch Phoenix was made in 2010, and the Griffith Series 600 was released in 2011

Quantity: 192

SCM Five-Star Rating:

Overall Quality: ★★★★★

Authenticity: ★★★★★

Overall Value: ★★★★★

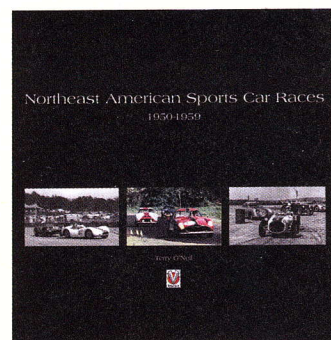
Email: www.automodello.com



Northeast American Sports Car Races: 1950-1959

By Terry O'Neil, Veloce, 432 pages, \$146.00, Amazon

Soldiers came home from Europe after World War II with a new appreciation for goodies from across the pond—from Leica cameras to BMW cars—and as factories turned from war materials to consumer goods, a wide range of European automobiles came back into production. With all those options, it was almost inevitable that sports car racing would take off in the United States.



Those early days, researched thoroughly by Terry O'Neil, were the beginnings of some of the most important venues we have, and they set the stage for the explosive growth of racing throughout the country. Focusing on racing in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, O'Neil has chronicled those early days, with race-by-race accounts from a small part of the country that had a big impact on racing in America.

O'Neil has pieced together grids, race reports and photographs of a decade when car racing transformed from self-described gentlemen amateurs who drove their cars to the races to a more professional atmosphere that set the stage for the incredible 1960s.

The decade started with street races, and Watkins Glen and Bridgehampton became the leaders in creating huge civic events that drew tens of thousands of spectators, overwhelmed little towns and often claimed the lives of drivers at every event. The fallout from those events forced the sport to airport circuits, and then to the creation of the first special-built road courses. Many of these tracks became national treasures that survive today.

O'Neil also chronicles the political infighting between the Sports Car Club of America, the Automobile Association of America, and the United States Auto Club. He also describes the often-naked class warfare during racing's transition from a clubby, exclusive playground for rich amateurs to a more blue-collar battlefield, with the SCCA trying to keep the sport patrician and "pure" by simply not processing applications from drivers who failed to meet unspoken means or religious tests. But, as always in racing, the best figure out a way to win—on and off the track. It was, after all, why they fought the war.

Provenance: ★★★★★

O'Neil has pored through countless archives, periodicals and racing organization source material to create race-by-race reports for each year, complete with grids with as much detail as he could muster. O'Neil often adds to the skimpy written record through detective work using photographs from the time. It's a dazzling work and makes the book a great resource.

Fit and finish: ★★★★★

More textbook than coffee table darling, the book supports and nurtures the content—and is not worried about flash. The many images are nicely reproduced, and the text is clean and readable.

Drivability: ★★★

When an author is faced with mountains of data, trying to put together the definitive reference book on a subject, the facts become king. And the insurmountable challenge of describing an entire race meeting from 60 years ago in 1,000 words, as O'Neil is forced to do, race by race, year by year, inevitably forces a choice between the facts and flowing narrative. Leave that to the next author, perhaps a journalist who happens on O'Neil's necessarily abbreviated recap of the handful of races that made up the first Watkins Glen weekend and turns it into the next *Seabiscuit*. But rest assured that author will be standing on O'Neil's accomplishment before the first word is written. ♦