

Mille Miglia x 3

A Privateer Helps Porsche Make History at the Italian Thousand Mile Race

By Loris Gianotti



Kestenholz' Swiss driving license listed his occupation as "meccanico". He also held an Italian competition license.



My passion for the 356 has inevitably driven me to look closer at its history, which in the early 1950s, was strongly related to the races which Porsche took part in to promote the brand. As a Swiss citizen, perhaps the fact of the nearness to Italy made me also appreciate one of the greatest race in the world: the Mille Miglia.

What better combination could I find than my favorite automotive brand and the most successful race in the world? That would be a Porsche at the Mille Miglia with a Swiss-Italian register plate! My dream to take part with my 356 at "The most beautiful race in the world" (which became a reality in 2015) brought me to search for more information on a particular 356 I saw online and also in various books.

The 356 in question took part in the early 1950s at various races, three of which were the Mille Miglias in 1953, 1954 and 1955 with the register plate TI 12103 (TI means Canton Ticino, Switzerland).

The owner of this car was Mr. Giuseppe "Peppino" Kestenholz, a Swiss-Italian automobile importer and vendor. He imported his 1952 1500 Normal directly from Stuttgart. Mr. Kestenholz's mother's language was German but he spoke Italian as well, and his language skills were of course an advantage to promote the brand in the Italian market. That is why Porsche entered directly Peppino's car to the Mille Miglia race.

Mr. Kestenholz's car was also driven and co-driven by friends of his. In the 1953 and 1954 Mille Miglia race, the participating crew was Conconi/Kestenholz while in 1955 it was the team Brochetta/Conconi. Unfortunately, in 1953 and 1955 the teams did not finish the race due to mechanical issues.

In 1954, however, the Conconi/Kestenholz team reached the finish line in Brescia with a time of 15h 32m 5s with a 82nd position overall, and 3rd in the stock category up to 1600 cc. Thanks to this 3rd place, that year Porsche produced a poster with the Italian flag in the background titled "A triple class victory".

Kestenholz had driven a Lancia Aurelia in the 1952 event with Conconi, finishing in 72nd place. In 1953, driving his new 356 Normal, his Mille ended with a DNF after only 7 hours. Porsche KG's best entry that year was Count Einseidel and Prince Metternich driving a 356 1500 Super. Their 30th overall and 11th place in class was unimpressive but reflected the fact they were grouped among Aston Martins, Lancias and Alfas. Recognizing they were outclassed in this and other endurance races, at that time Porsche was well into development of both the new 550 Spyder and a four-cam dedicated racing engine to propel it. For 1954 the factory entered 550-08 with Hans Hermann and Herbert Linge (navigator).



May 2, 1954. At 2:37 a.m. the Kestenholz / Conconi 356 is about to leave the start in Brescia. Huschke von Hanstein motions to the crew, a last communication from the Porsche Racing Director. Support and advice from the Porsche factory allowed the company to claim the private entry as one of their own, and add the car's 82nd-place overall finish (3rd in class) to the famous poster above. In this memorable Mille, Hans Hermann drove his four-cam 550 Spyder under a rail crossing gate just in front of a train, eventually taking 6th overall and a 1st in Sports Under 1.5 Liter class.



Back again to my passion and the will to find out as much information as possible about the car and the people. Some months ago I looked closer at the matriculation office to find out the today's owner of the TI-plate. Fortunately, I found out the register plate has always been kept in the Kestenholz family, so I decided to try to get in touch with a family member.

It was a great pleasure to get acquainted with Francesco Kestenholz, Giuseppe's son. Francesco, with whom I have had the pleasure to get in touch many times, was so kind to share with me these photos, and the memories, the adventures, the feelings and stories about his father, his family and of course about the Porsche 356.

Francesco kept all the documentation and medals from his father and shared with me some unpublished documents and pictures from what is nowadays called a photobook. Thanks to Francesco's permission, I would like to share some of those documents with the Registry's members.

What happened to Peppino's 356, unfortunately, nobody knows. Only one thing is sure: this car and all the people related to this story will remain in my world forever, like my passion for the Porsche and the Mille Miglia.



1954: "Peppino" Kestenholz is at the wheel with navigator Conconi, both dressed in suit and tie, their attire for the entire race. This was probably taken just prior to the start at scrutineering. Smaller displacement cars began the race in the late evening hours on May 1st and the fastest cars left just after 6 a.m. This made for lots of passing and excitement during the race, and kept the road closure time to a minimum.



Above: At the finish in 1954, #237 had covered the distance in 15 hours, 32 minutes (some four hours longer than the winning Lancia and three hours behind Hermann's 550). Of interest, two other 1500 356s and five 1300-engined Porsches finished ahead of Kestenholz. In all, it was a poster-worthy finish for the Porsche factory and its privateer racers.



More Mille Miglia next page.



This MM photo book was made during the 1953 event (photo from that year at right) and given to the drivers on request and previous reservation. It was a custom-made book with all the pictures taken of the same car and only one example was available.





1953

In 1953, Kestenholz ran his 356 without bumpers. In the post-race photo above they have probably been replaced for the trip home. For Peppino and the other Porsche drivers, it was anything but a banner year. #437 Did Not Finish, along with a half dozen other 356s.
 Below: After a successful Mille in 1954, in 1955 Kestenholz gave up driving duty to the team of Brochetta and Conconi. The car was once again a DNF. That was the year in which Stirling Moss and Denis Jenkinson set a new record with an amazing 10 hour, seven-minute run in their Mercedes 300SLR. Peppito gave up racing after 1955; with a growing family he sold the 356.



Below: The Mille Miglia lives on to this day and the author was able to fulfill a dream in 2015 when he entered his 356 in the Italian classic event.



2015

