

Attention Span

John Kast, June 16, 2014

"I have arrived at a certain place in the world" he thought, "that place where I can afford, without care, almost any material thing I want."

Caressing the polished wood steering wheel in his leather-gloved hands, and feeling perfect feedback from the tires to his fingers and from the exhaust to his ears and gut, he enjoyed his new ride. Not just a Ferrari, not a Ferrari from the showroom or ordered from the factory, but a vintage Ferrari, a red 1963 250 GTO. One of less than forty ever produced. Many people wouldn't understand the attraction. There were faster, better handling, more reliable cars to be had. And almost any car, hell, most any fleet of cars, would have cost less than the thirty million dollars cash that he had laid down at auction for this fifty-year-old ride.

He knew that many people in the world thought it a sacrilege that he should be driving this car, this museum piece. He thought otherwise. Ferrari didn't make these cars to be static artwork. He had bought it exactly so that he could do what he was doing now, driving it, and driving it fast.

He had taken driving courses, so he had some experience at driving modern performance cars fast in controlled situations. He had confidence in his driving ability.

This car was different than modern cars. It was elegant and rough at the same time. There was no power assist for steering or brakes. The clutch was stiff and the shifter throw was long - no paddle shifting in 1963! The engine was highly tuned but devoid of electronics.

Rushing north on California 1 with the sun behind him, blue-green water hundreds of feet below him on his left, and sun-bleached rock of the cliff face a few feet to his right, he thought *"This is a perfect day. The best car, the best road, a challenging drive, all mine."* He pushed his speed to the point at which his tires were squealing in complaint at each corner and he could feel the start of a small, controllable drift. He was on top of the world.

Focused on the car's balance and the sense of the next corner, he was surprised to see a photographer, bending over his tripod, on the outermost scrap of road overlooking the Pacific. The photographer only barely looked up from his camera as the Ferrari screamed past.

"That was close" he thought, and glanced in his rearview mirror but couldn't see anything due to glare from the sun. He returned his attention forward to see that he was going far too fast for the next corner, a sharp left-hander. *"Shit"* he said out loud. His instincts, not honed enough in driver school and with no experience on real roads, locked the brakes.

In two seconds the metal missile slammed into rocks on the right side of the road, spun across the road, and launched over the cliff.

"I am going to die" was all he could think for the three quiet seconds of free-fall. The totality stuck in his brain and expanded infinitely fast, crowding out all other thoughts, not allowing him to review his life, remember loved ones, feel remorse or gratitude, or see the flowers in the green cliffside, the seagulls in the sky, the breakers against the shore rocks, the unfeeling sun over the western ocean.