

# Scuderia Ferrari still personally yours

*Family man and CEO of Scuderia SouthAfrica, Mervyn Eagles, takes time out for a coffee and a chat with Charter magazine.*

*Words and photographs by Mark Pettipher*

For over 40 years, Viglietti Motors, established in Cape Town in 1972 by seven brothers and lead by Gabriel Viglietti's guiding hand, was known as the home of Ferrari in South Africa and the official dealer of Maranello's finest for sub-Saharan Africa.

Mervyn Eagles, formally a graduate of the University of Cape (UCT) Law faculty, has been the CEO since 2011.

At the launch of their flagship showroom in Bryanston, Johannesburg in March 2015, Mervyn commented in an interview with Business Day Live, "While we are still attached to our history and tradition, we have to embrace the future and that means we need to adopt a new title for the business. We spent a great deal of time contemplating various options and decided to go back to our roots. Our roots, like those of any Ferraristi, run deep, red, and head straight back to a little town in central Italy, not far from the provincial capital of Modena.

"We are of course talking about Maranello, where the world's most recognisable brand is headquartered.

The badge that is chosen by this incredible brand is the 'Scuderia Ferrari' shield. We believe that this association and tie-in to the symbol of Ferrari is the way of the future and something in which we can share a great deal of pride."

And so the name Scuderia South Africa was introduced into South Africa.

47 year old father of four, Mervyn was born in Cape Town' at aged seven Mervyn's parents moved to Namibia in 1976, moving from Claremont - Cape Town to Windhoek, in a period of severe drought; it proved to be a bit of a culture shock, it was a very different experience living in an arid area, but it is with fondness that Mervyn says that he enjoys going back to Windhoek; however Cape Town is where his heart is.

"I've always been interested in Ferraris," says Mervyn. "As a young boy during my high school time, I used to cycle through to the service centre in Woodstock and look through the window of the showroom at the stable of magnificent gleaming metal, dreaming as any young boy would, of maybe one day owning such a prize."



*CEO Mervyn Eagles with the recently launched Spider.*

Mervyn's passion for Ferrari is evident when he talks of a particular event, where he organised a tour and test drive of Ferraris to Namibia. Under the sponsorship of Shell Vivo, they shipped the cars to Windhoek and from there drove to the coast, unlocking various Shell stations and promoting a new brand of fuel along the way. This event was not only great fun he says but was a huge success as well. "There is a very good, but limited market in Namibia," adds Mervyn.

Although Mervyn is the CEO of Ferrari in South Africa he drives, for practical reasons, a white Mercedes GLS. His young family is the main influence for this. "It has seven seats," says Mervyn, "also I can tow my boat with it. I do however alternate between the GLS and a Ferrari FF; we don't own Ferraris yet, maybe once the children have grown up."

However, at age thirty, Mervyn did buy his first Ferrari, a fiberglass 308 in 1997, at that time second hand. It cost him R175,000, a similar one sold just recently for R4.2 million. Which further enhances the notion that you are buying not only a Ferrari as a status vehicle, but one that is an investment as well.

Mervyn pointed out that no one wants to sell their cars and draws attention to the increase in value of the Ferrari; he mentions that a Testarossa was recently offered for sale at R7 million.

"I began talking to the Viglietti's and soon a friendship was struck," Mervyn goes on to say, "Our true friendship came about when, as a student, I 'blew up' the motor of my Fiat 124 Sport, I had no tools, skills or money to repair it and after an abortive attempt at home repairing the Fiat myself, the Viglietti brothers told me to bring the car to the workshop – there I rebuilt the motor with their assistance – all they wanted as payment was a bottle of wine. It was one of those rare and generous moments."



Mervyn studied law at UCT, graduated with a BA LLB, practiced as a Prosecutor in Namibia for just under a year, completed his articles in Cape Town and qualified as an attorney. Thereafter and for just on fifteen years, he served as an Advocate at the Cape Town bar.

Over the years, since returning to Cape Town and qualifying as a lawyer. Mervyn's relationship with the Viglietti's was maintained. Eventually he joined the board and acquired a share holding, grew

to become CEO and seized the opportunity to buy the majority share from the brother's former BEE partners.

Mervyn still has ties with Namibia; he has a brother in Windhoek who is a well-known surgeon, and a younger sister who lives in Swakopmund. "My brother is a highly successful surgeon with two children, and my sister is a stay at home mother with four beautiful children," he says. "I have four children, Marcus three, Aaron one and a half, Joshua nineteen and daughter Jenna seventeen."



When asked which Ferrari he would buy, given the choice: "I enjoy the V12's the F12 scares me though – its a phenomenal car. I prefer the FF and the new GTC4Lusso, that I saw in Milan a few months ago; it definitely has my name on it," he says. "It would have to be white though."

Within reason, Ferrari does produce any colour that you like, explains Mervyn, "The cars do come in a range of standard colours as well as vintage"

"There is an amazing programme; where you can tailor make and spec the car as you wish, you can sit with the Ferrari designated designers and custom make the interior of your car." Mervyn adds, "Ferrari also has a unique programme, the one off programme, here you can design and build your own Ferrari. The Ferrari design team takes an existing base platform, and over a period of 18 month to two years you have your own custom made car."

"If there is any particular aspect of a Ferrari that you like from various previous models you can build that into your own spec."

The recent launch of the Ferrari Spider was hugely successful in both Johannesburg and Cape Town says Mervyn, "The launch was about the Ferrari experience, it's about treating the customers to something that is quite unique."

"In spite of the South African economy the Spider and 488 GTB are sold out for this year's and we are well on the way to selling out next year's as well, which endorses the value of Ferrari as an investment," says Mervyn encouragingly. Commenting on whether or not people can take advantage of the fluctuation in the value of the Rand, he said "All our customers are local; Ferrari are quiet strict about selling their cars, customers must be from our designated territorial allocation."



*When not being the CEO, Mervyn enjoys skiing, boating, model aircraft and long range shooting, but most of his leisure time is now taken up with fun filled activities with his children.*

The Ferrari 488 Spider is essentially an updated version of the 458 Spider. With head-turning style, neck-snapping acceleration, and that indescribable but incredibly potent Ferrari allure, the 488 Spider - and its hardtop sibling, the 488 GTB - are among the most desirable rides on the market.

The 488 Spider trades the 458's naturally-aspirated 4.5-liter V8 engine for a Maserati-derived twin-turbocharged 3.9-liter V8 engine that delivers 661 horsepower at 8,000 rpm and 560 lb-ft. of torque at 3,000 rpm, figures that represent generous increases over the outgoing model. The eight-cylinder is also found under the hood of the California T.

All of that power is sent to the rear wheels through a seven-speed dual-clutch automated-manual gearbox that manages to be both smooth and incredibly quick - shifts are achieved in four-tenths of a second. A built-in torque management function helps get the power to the pavement.

Helping to make the 488 Spider sublime driving dynamics possible is a rigid, lightweight aluminum chassis that features advanced alloys and aerospace industry manufacturing and bonding techniques. The suspension is composed of a twin wishbone/multi-link setup, and an electronic rear differential helps apportion power so as to make the best use of available traction. Standard carbon fiber brakes are extremely fade-resistant and effective at bringing the Spider down from extra-legal speeds.

When asked about why the sales are doing so well Mervyn said, "The brand ascendancy has been built on for many years, the cars have gone from strength to strength – take the mid range engines – the F430 to 458 and now the 488 V8s, Ferrari has taken their cutting edge Formula 1 technology and incorporated it into their road cars; the rest in the model range has also gone from strength to strength."

"That technology not only makes the cars incredibly safe to drive, you can go from 0 – 100 in 3 seconds, but more importantly you can stop equally as quickly," he goes onto say. "The design of the road cars is also greatly influenced by Ferrari's racing car, which makes them pleasing to the eye."

Of course Mervyn follows racing, and in his opinion, Brazilian Formula 1 driver Ayrton Senna was the best driver to have graced the circuits. Sadly Senna was killed in an accident whilst leading the 1994 San Marino Grand Prix.

Today Mervyn follows German Sebastian Vettel, not because he drives for Scuderia Ferrari, but because he enjoys his personality.

Vettel is the four-time Formula 1 World Champion, having won the championship in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 with Red Bull Racing and is reputed to be the most successful F1 driver of all time. He is also only one of four drivers to have won four or more drivers' titles and is now contracted to drive for Scuderia Ferrari until at least 2017.

Bringing the topic back to South African drivers, Mervyn favours Jody Scheckter, who's career debut was at the US Grand Prix in 1972; driving for McLaren, he eventually gave Ferrari the drivers' championship in 1979.

Of the up and coming South African drivers, Mervyn says that 20 year old Raoul Hyman is one to watch; he is making inroads in the Formula 3 European Championship.

Going forward, plans for Scuderia South Africa are well underway, though they have demolished the old Viglietti showroom building to make way for a tower block. Mervyn is not keeping the showroom in Roeland Street in Cape Town, but, staying in trend with corporate identity directives from Italy, Mervyn is looking forward to moving to the new BAT complex at the entrance to the Waterfront.

Previously they had always shunned the idea of the Waterfront, due to access issues during the



*'It's best you sell a customer their first car from the showroom but every other one from the service center'*

peak tourist season. However, the new showroom at the Waterfront entrance will not only afford them greater brand visibility – Scuderia South Africa will be one of the first luxury motor brands that you will see when coming into Cape Town – it will also have easy access.

Keeping continuity within the group is Vito Viglietti, nephew of the older brother; Vito is Cape Town's workshop manager. "He's an absolute genius and an amazing technical wizard; he is well known in these parts, as well as in Italy; if there is a problem we go to him. Furthermore, we have an amazing after sales team, dedicated to excellent service. Highly qualified and skilled technicians, trained locally and abroad, are the backbone of our business. This team is the basis of our success, after all Enzo Ferrari said, 'its best you sell a customer their first car from the showroom, but every other one from the service center.'" concludes Mervyn.



*Mervyn and Liza Eagles. Liza is a former fashion model and an interior designer, she has spent time in New York and worked in exotic locations such as Iceland, India, Spain Malaysia and Bali, as well London. The couple have been together for fifteen years and married for four. Mervyn, as a junior advocate, met his bride to be one evening whilst working with Liza's father on a trial at her family home; it was love at first sight.*