



LONG TERM ASSESSMENT

JUST WILLUM

10,000 miles in an Alfa Romeo GT 1300

By Geoffrey Howard and Michael Scarlett

SOMEHOW the mixed feelings of sadness and nostalgia battled incompatibly with excitement as I trickled up the Edgware Road towards Alfa's new London centre. I was parting with our long-term Giulia 1600 Super and collecting a new 1300 GT Junior. The Super had been a delightful car which had taken me safely and reliably through several months and over 12,000 miles. The Junior was to be a 1969 model (with all the latest improvements) in yellow ochre. As soon as I saw the WLM 39G registration, this Alfa became "Willum".

Immediately I drove it I noticed lots of differences compared with the Super. It was a much tauter car with a firm, jiggly ride and near-neutral instead of understeering characteristics. But I fitted it better than the Super and I liked its many differences.

Willum was barely 200 miles old when an odd thing happened at the back end. I reversed out of my garage one cold dark morning and set off through the London suburbs. I was surprised when the wheels spun briefly on the loose gravel of the drive and I was alarmed to hear a deep rumble from the rear axle on the overrun. Somehow I thought the differential was breaking up, so I parked near the station and prepared to catch a train. Then I saw that one rear tyre was flat and kicked myself for being so stupid. In defense I should perhaps add that the Alfa was singularly unaffected by this disturbance. At least it served as a good demonstration of the excellent jacking system. Fortunately I remembered from the Super that the left-hand wheels on Alfas have left-handed threads for some inexplicable reason.

These early days in Willum's life seemed fated and before even the first service, at 350 miles, the windscreen shattered on the way to

Rob Walker's Corsley Garage in Wiltshire. Prior to this there had been ominous creaks from the scuttle, so it looked like a stress failure. Anyway, the easiest thing was to continue without a screen, raincoat buttoned to the neck and eyes screwed tight to keep out the flying mud and glass splinters emerging from the cracks and crannies. Being official Alfa distributors, Rob Walker's people made light work of fitting a GTV screen (laminated!) at my request and performing the first service.

When I returned to collect it a few days later, I can pay the Alfa no greater compliment than to say it was no disappointment after the Ferrari 365 GTC I had been driving in the meantime. Some say the Ferrari is just like a big Alfa; I prefer to think of the Alfa as a mini-Ferrari.

From then on we built up miles without incident, and our little twin-cam ran like a train getting freer and faster with every yard which passed under its wheels. Obviously with only 1,290 c.c. the performance could never be startling, but with five gears and a fairly wide rev range it was always easy to keep the engine singing sweetly and with such delightfully balanced handling journey times were always brisk.

Partly because of the "with it" colour, partly because of the chic shape, and partly because Willum was the kind of car which deserved affection, I always liked to drive it clean. The colour lightened several shades between dirty and clean, and the paint always shone without the aid of a polish. Even dirty, Willum still looked smart.

Such had been the excellence of Rob Walker's service (no-one had ever set up twin Webbers to idle so smoothly as the mechanics

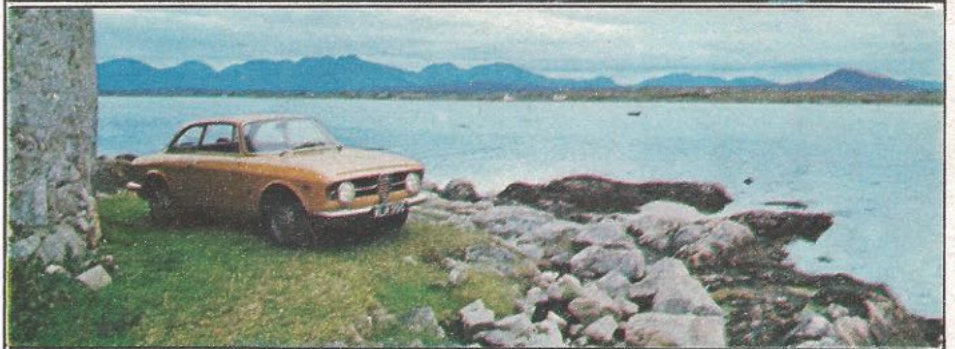
at Corsley), that we sent the car back for its second service. With so many of the staff so keen to get behind the wheel, the mileometer clicked happily up to 3,500-odd miles in no time at all, or so it seemed. To stop myself getting too conditioned, I then passed Willum over to Michael Scarlett, as compensation for suffering 10,000 in his Honda N.600. **GPH**

BEING like *Iolanthe's* Lord Chancellor, highly susceptible to attractive things, I had hardly looked at the car for fear of becoming too envious; it was a delightful surprise to be given charge of it at 3,480 miles. Without knowing that the Technical Editor had permitted himself a little untechnical wallow in anthropomorphism, I saw WLM 39G and straightway called him William. About 5,000 miles later Geoff and I discovered each other's guilty secret—test drivers, like that peer, should not grow fond of their wards—and in mutual embarrassment agreed to stop confusing the animal; we settled on Willum. Which just goes to show what sentimental fools these journalist mortals be.

First impressions were a strong mixture of immediate likes and dislikes. Dealing with bad points first, Willum certainly did not fit the 6ft of me. He had been made for a particularly deformed specimen of the Darwinian ape who is Italian Standard Man for most Latin car interior designers; thanks to Lancia, Fiat and Alfa, one has grown familiar with, if not friendly towards, this unfortunate chap, who normally has very short legs, a stocky trunk, and long arms. He is at least symmetrical. The GT1300 Junior one is not so lucky, having his right leg considerably shorter than his left; the accelerator pedal is therefore some way back from the brake and clutch. He is a strong enough fellow however, happily applying nearly 50lb of pedal effort over 6in. every time he de-clutches. Not being as healthy, I found this tiring in traffic. Not being the same shape, my right leg had to remain partly unsupported and there wasn't enough rearward seat movement by about 2in. My head brushed the roof. If I reclined the seat enough to clear, then I could hardly reach the wheel or gearlever. (It was a great relief to find that by about 5,000 miles, the seat had settled just enough to cure this.) The ride seemed rather jerky, there was quite loud bump-thump, you had to keep the revs up to get any performance—which made it fussy—the flat interior mirror wasted the car's excellent rear view and I was glad that I hadn't as part of the long-term test been made to lay out such a lot of money for a 1.3-litre car.

On the other hand, every important control moved with superb smoothness and precision; this is common to all Alfas—nothing felt even slightly rough or grating as on so many other cars—there were no sharp-edged nuts under gear-knobs, no sticky-fingered handles, no gooey-rimmed steering wheel. The steering and handling were much better than before, the servo-assisted brakes worked beautifully, the seat held me well round corners, it made a lovely subdued hum as you revved it—overlaid, as the revs rose, with a fascinating quiet crackle like a chuckle to itself in its throat—it went quite fast, incredibly so remembering its 19.9cwt kerb weight, and it looked absolutely perfect in my opinion. The shape was of course familiar before I met Willum, and until the sad day when I watched him being driven away was an almost daily sight (assuming I'd selfishly managed to keep him to myself, always a running fight). Yet every time I set eyes on it and no matter from what angle, it always looked "right"—exactly right. Bertone has made many wonderful shapes, but I think that the Giulia Sprint GT

continued



Alfa in various settings. Opposite, close-up in Richmond Park; above from top, in Connemara, County Galway, watching the evening tide rise near Cloonisle, at Roundstone with the Twelve Pins behind, overlooking Bertraghboy Bay from Bunnahown, and under Derryclare and Bencorr. Modom (the Peugeot) is included because, though Willum's senior, she rides Irish roads more comfortably, like most other French cars

JUST WILLUM . . .

body is one of his masterpieces. Perhaps he thinks so too, if that pardonable swagger of a motif "disegno di Bertone" is anything to go by.

The colour certainly made it stand out. It was the source of several picturesque comments. I was asked on one occasion if I'd come "in that vulgar yellow car again". Many people thought it "soopah". Others suggested it was derived from canine sources. Another person said she thought it was "a very nice little car but I'm not sure about the paint". One man was reminded of his godson's nappies, and one other of stale mustard. Fiat, whose "Positano yellow" is very close to the Alfa shade, were wrongly credited by many with starting to make the colour popular—Porsche actually are the culprits with their "Bahama yellow". Whether it was the colour I'm not sure, but I was rarely balked on motorways—slower cars in the fast lane nearly always seemed to see Willum coming well in advance. I loved it unashamedly; it is particular-

ly fascinating in the late afternoon, richening and darkening in sympathy with the reddening sun.

Two tests (the *Autotest* in our 10 April issue and the double test with the Lancia Fulvia Coupe Rallye 1.3S in *Autocar* of 7 August) and the accompanying performance figures tell most of the story about the car's performance. Contrary to appearances, Willum is not the original *Autotest* car, but was used only for the photos. At 6,000 miles and in rather better weather than the Road Test car enjoyed, he proved to be a little faster in acceleration but had approximately the same MIRA banking mean maximum speed, 101 mph. Given his head on another occasion for long enough over a straight course, Willum did 105 mph mean, with a best speed one way of 106 mph. The last check we made, at 10,000 miles, gave identical figures. The engine has always stayed crisp-sounding and eager throughout, never seeming to deteriorate, and perpetually very smooth indeed.

He will cruise at up to 90 mph, with only the wind noise really indicating how fast you are going; the engine isn't quiet, but neither does it sound hard-worked until right up at its top end. He is at his best—a very good best—over

country roads, provided that you don't drop below about 3,000 rpm. If you do, you must wait, or change down. Thanks to the very pleasing gear-change, that is no chore, but a delight. Towards the end of the test, there was a slight suspicion of stickiness going into 5th, but it was not serious.

Willum is not a little car, he weighs the same as some 2-litre GTs and tries to perform nearly as well. The result is a similar thirst, if driven to his maximum—down to around 23.7 mpg. On a gentler drive in company with a well-driven and respectable elderly lady Peugeot across from the West of Ireland to Dublin, he managed 28.8 mpg. The overall figure of 24.4 is identical to that of the Road Test car and reflects a regretted amount of town driving, though not as much as it might have been, since whenever possible, Willum travelled.

He went to Russelsheim, lingering amidst German General Motors like a sophisticated Italian gigolo amongst a party of American matrons on tour, whilst Stuart Bladon and I ran off with a Road Test Opel GT, then he romped back a little breathlessly with the very first right-hand-drive BMW 2800, thankful that 2800s don't have to be run-in at more than 100 mph. He went to Wales several times and loved it. Welsh roads are Alfa roads. Willum's nearly-neutral handling, his quick steering, excellently even gear ratios and light, powerful and superbly balanced brakes made joyous work of every open bend. I know few other cars with such safe braking; one could get away with an astonishing amount of retardation during a fast corner without either end breaking away. "Sure-footed" is I think, no. 493 in the road-testers Book of Well-Worn Clichés, but it is assuredly *votre mot juste actuelle* here. Though he seemed to dare you to try harder he never frightened you. A lot of the credit must go to the fat 165-14 in. Pirelli Cinturatos which I kept inflated at 27F/30R (motorway pressures) stuck just as well as when at normal pressures and ceased to squeal.

Part of this is also due to the steering. I stick to my belief that where cornering is concerned "feel" is as much in the senses of balance in one's head as in one's hands, and that live steering is not essential. But I do agree that it is very much better and much more pleasant to have good "feel" if possible, and it is in this respect that the Alfa is almost unapproached. Though it needs average effort to work—and rather more than average for parking—there is very little friction in the Alfa's re-circulating ball (or worm and roller) steering; certainly much less than in most rack and pinion systems. The lack of much friction and therefore damping *pro rata* is combined with just-enough castor and not too much off-set. The result is that that delightfully made two-spoke steering wheel tells you exactly how much grip there is immediately without any irritating fight over bumps (as on earlier models); it spins back through your hands as you wish when self-centering no matter how gently you're turning. Anyone sensitive reacts to this perfect behaviour and tends to find himself steering with the finger tips rather than the hands. Running straight on a motorway—the Alfa does that very well too, even in a side-wind—there is nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ in. of slop at the wheel-rim, but as it is progressive you don't notice it at all.

Ride has always been a little "nobbly", but not too firm, and well-damped. We all agree that it seemed to improve slightly latterly. Willum went west, almost as far west as he could go, to the beautiful wilds of Connemara, in County Galway, and there he met the road that is full of surprises, the Irish bog road. Such roads cannot help being most wonderfully bumpy, as they are not too well-founded. The result is a *chaussée* which is more *tourmentée* than *deformée*; the most flexible French cars are the only ones that seem anywhere near at home on this. In spite of some remarkable ups and downs, Willum managed quite well, moving a lot but bottoming only occasionally and then surprisingly gracefully. He appears to have unusually good bump



Above: Willum sliding wide at MIRA, one front wheel nearly off the track. Cornered hard, the Alfa understeers progressively but not too much with power on, let its tail out on lift-off (as here) and doesn't roll inordinately. Left: The highly presentable engine room. Accessibility is much better than it looks here. Forward-mounted battery never seems to need topping-up. Below: A neat interior. The water and fuel gauges look tidy, angled towards the driver from under the heater, but are blocked by the gearlever when in top



rubbers and also well-made rattle-free body-work; there were no nasty bangs.

Where fittings and comfort are concerned the small Alfa is on the whole well-appointed. Everyone who has made a long journey in the car has commented on how comfortable the passenger seat is. The "sofa-type" rear seat (as the handbook calls it) is habitable by one adult if one in front adjusts his seat forward appreciably. Regarding space, the boot with its very neat little door-jamb remote lock on the nearside is remarkably roomy, easily big enough for two people's holiday luggage. I badly missed anywhere to put small things in front where they wouldn't get lost. There is the small locker on the left but it is too remote for casual use by the driver. A central open tray as on BMWs would be a great boon. The locker also suffers from a release you have to push as you pull it open, not a clever idea.

Being one of the first rhd '69 models, Willum came with rubber mats, which I like, especially when they bear big Alfa Romeo insignias; cars for the British market normally have carpets like the GTV. The mat on the nearside tended to come loose at the top. They are definitely practical. The door releases outside are unnatural in action; you post your fingers

in a letter-box-like slot and must then push the tongue upwards, instead of pulling it out which is what everyone tries to do at first. Window winders are unusually light and easy to turn, which is nice to find nowadays; like other Italian cars they are of opposite sense to what is usual elsewhere. Seats slide easily; the eight-position eccentric-adjustment for rake of the seat back is not ideal, as all weight must be moved off it, not just a little. That lovely plain steering wheel has easily found horn keys, like the black notes of a piano, in each spoke. I would like the boss to work the horn as well, since I still clout that first in an emergency. It would also be easier when you suddenly have occasion to beep in the middle of twirling the wheel. The horn itself has a very fine note in keeping with the car's character, though perhaps not quite as Continental as some expect.

The instruments are straightforward and neat, which also describes the pleasing interior styling. The trip mileometer has a delightfully positive and easily worked re-set. The same does not go for the excellently comprehensive fuse box, very awkward indeed to deal with if a fuse goes because of its difficult mounting. One other really maddening item is the absence

of any provision for holding the doors open. Having to hold a door open with your boot, which marks the trim, on a car of this price is very irritating. The bonnet stay is not self-setting, and is too easily released by wind. Ventilation we have criticised before; it is not up to current British standards. The wind-screen wiper linkage tends to creak, especially on a drying screen. The handbrake is exceptionally good and easy to use.

Starting never presented any problems once one had remembered that a hot Alfa engine needs quite a few turns before it will "catch". Maintenance is not too difficult, thanks to a fairly informative handbook. I had no trouble changing the oil filter element or in getting at other routine items for servicing.

There are always things to quibble about on any car. In spite of them, Willum was a wholly delightful companion over every mile. His very great qualities bring out the best in any driver, since you feel you owe the best to this superb machine. He gave all of us who were lucky enough to drive him great satisfaction and very great fun. I admit to growing fond of most cars I've had to drive for any long-ish time; saying goodbye to this one was very sad indeed. **MS**



Willum in company. Above: After the Seaman Trophy at Oulton Park (Kenneth Neve's 1914 TT Humber and Rolls-Royce tractor behind)



Above: Willum, Modom and canistered waters of the Liffey outside a famous watering place, Nee's Bar, near Ballynahinch, Connemara

Below: In the emptying car park after the August Shelsley Walsh meeting



PERFORMANCE CHECK

Maximum speeds

Gear	mph		kph		rpm	
	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff
Top (mean)	102	105	164	169	5,600	5,750
(best)	104	106	168	171	5,700	5,800
4th		97		156		6,200
3rd		71		114		6,200
2nd		49		79		6,200
1st		29		47		6,200

Standing 1/4-mile, R/T: 19.1 sec 72 mph
Staff: 19.2 sec 73 mph

Standing kilometre, R/T: 35.7 sec 90 mph
Staff: 35.6 sec 90 mph

Acceleration, R/T:	4.3	6.6	9.3	13.2	18.8	25.3	36.3	—
Staff:	3.9	6.2	8.9	13.1	17.7	24.7	35.8	—

Time in seconds 0

True speed mph 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Indicated speed MPH, R/T: 31 42 53 63 74 85 95 106

Indicated speed MPH, Staff: 32 42 52 62 75 86 98 109

Speed range, Gear Ratios and Time in Seconds

Mph	Top		4th		3rd		2nd		1st	
	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff
10-30	—	—	—	—	—	9.0	5.3	5.3	—	—
20-40	15.6	15.0	11.9	11.3	6.9	7.4	4.4	5.0	—	—
30-50	14.4	14.3	10.7	10.7	7.4	7.5	—	—	—	—
40-60	15.1	13.4	12.2	10.8	8.0	8.0	—	—	—	—
50-70	18.1	17.0	14.8	12.5	9.5	9.1	—	—	—	—
60-80	25.6	22.8	16.9	14.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
70-90	—	29.0	20.7	19.0	—	—	—	—	—	—

Fuel Consumption

Overall mpg, R/T: 24.4 mpg (11.6 litres/100km)

Staff: 24.4 mpg (11.6 litres/100km)

NOTE: "R/T" denotes performance figures for similar model tested in AUTOCAR of 10 April 1969

COST AND LIFE OF EXPENDABLE ITEMS

Item	Life in Miles	
	Life in Miles	Cost per 10,000 Miles
One gallon of 4-star fuel, average cost today 6s 4d	24.4	£ 129 10 0
One pint of top-up oil, average cost today 3s 6d	2,000	17 6
Front disc brake pads (set of 4)	18,000	2 12 0
Rear disc brake pads (set of 4)	15,000	3 3 0
Tyres (front pair)	23,000	7 10 0
Tyres (rear pair)	20,000	8 15 0
Service (main interval and actual costs incurred)	3,750	22 12 0
Total		174 19 6
<i>Approx. standing charges per year</i>		
Depreciation		500 0 0
* Insurance		35 9 0
Tax		25 0 0
Total		735 8 6

Approx. cost per mile=1s 5½d

Insurance is a Cornhill quotation based on business and private use, 65 per cent n.c.b., residence in "Metropolitan Surrey" and a £25 excess.