

# CLASSIC & SPORTS CAR

JUNE 2002

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## Alfa's dazzling GTs

Milan's sexiest bargains: Sprint, Veloce and GTA

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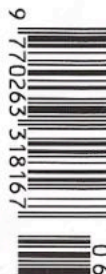


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# THE HOLY TRINITY

Richard Heseltine falls for the charms of Giugiaro's sublime Alfa Romeo coupés, from Giulia Sprint GT to 2000GTV, with a bit of GTA on the side









The key to immortality is to leave something behind that will be remembered. John Logie Baird brought us television, Alexander Fleming penicillin, and Thomas Crapper the flushing toilet. But etiquette usually dictates that immortality be recognised when you're in no position to enjoy it. Only if you're really blessed is your brilliance acknowledged during your lifetime. One such fortunate is Giorgetto Giugiaro. Responsible for some of the most hallowed classics of the past 40 years, his stock shows little sign of fading. Yet even if his only offering had been the series of Alfa Romeo Giulia GTs, he could lay down his magic markers safe in the knowledge that his eminence is assured.

Whereas many designs don't transfer intact from rendering to finished product, this one thankfully did. Presented to the world at the 1963 Frankfurt Motor Show, the Giulia Sprint GT represented a modernist take on the alchemist's dream of turning base metal into gold. Except that there was a better starting point. The Tipo 105 Giulia saloon had been introduced a year earlier with an all-alloy twin-cam 'four' and five speed 'box. A little fairy dust was sprinkled over the important bits and the result was a winner.

Even now, you'd be hard pressed to find a more beautiful representative of kinetic sculpture: this virgin white '64 example is exquisite. Styled by Giugiaro while still a Bertone employee, it is, in effect, a distillation of his earlier efforts. All of the maestro's trademark styling traits are present and fully formed, in particular the roofline aping the Gordon GT, and the aggressive crease that runs from front to back along the flanks. Inside, it's equally high on the style quotient and more practical than the much-loved Giulietta Sprint it replaced, offering a useful plus-two rear seat – not just for the *bambini* but for the *giovannotti* too.

The GT's most striking interior feature is its instrument panel, fronted by a gorgeous Bakelite-rimmed wheel. Through its alloy spokes, the driver sees the speedo and rev counter, flanked to the right by a combined instrument for (wildly fluctuating) petrol level and oil pressure. To the left is another dual-function gauge for water and oil temperature. The panel is finished in crackle-effect paint with padded rolls on the upper and lower edges: nothing ostentatious, just ergonomic elegance. That said, the driving position is dictated a little by the size of the wheel which prompts a splayed-knees position but this is offset by the supportive seats.

But the real beauty is the car's engine. Few fours sound as constantly alive as this 1570cc twin-cam. Even when dawdling through the mean streets of Wandsworth, the rorty back-beat transports you to more romantic climes. Rather than negotiating the gyratory, you're tackling the Futa pass as the deep induction throb is overlaid with the faint whirring of the chain drive for the twin camshafts. With nearly 70bhp per litre, power delivery is smooth with no noticeable steps in the torque curve, but the engine needs to be kept in the upper reaches of the rev range for fast motoring.

This is where the transmission makes all the difference. When easing past slow-moving traffic or simply enjoying rare stretches of deserted tarmac, there's always a gear to suit the conditions. The gate has stiff spring loading

TONY BAKER



The 1750 was so named in homage to Alfa's pre-war great, despite its 1779cc capacity. It's the best tourer of them all

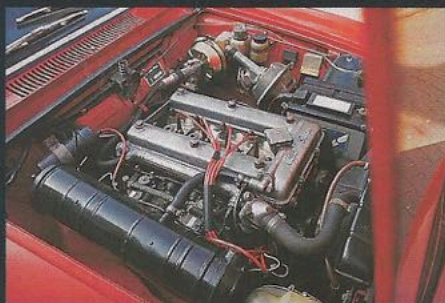


Delightful '64 Sprint (the year that the model was first sold in GB) is the purest of them all with minimal embellishment



2000GTV the most powerful of Giulia coupés. It's identifiable by larger tail lights and slightly raised rear arches



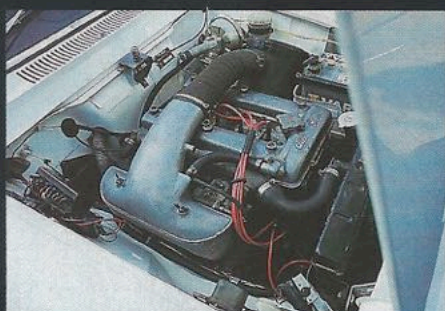


#### FACTFILE

##### ALFA ROMEO

##### 1750GTV 1968-'71

**Engine** all-alloy dohc 1779cc 'four' **Max power** 122bhp @ 5500rpm **Max torque** 137.4lb ft @ 2900rpm **Transmission** five-speed manual **Steering** recirculating ball or worm and roller **Chassis/body** steel monocoque **Suspension: front** double wishbones, coils, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, coils, anti-roll bar **Brakes** ATE discs all round, with servo **Length** 161in **Width** 62in **Height** 51.7in **Weight** 2292lb **Top speed** 116mph **0-60mph** 9.2 secs



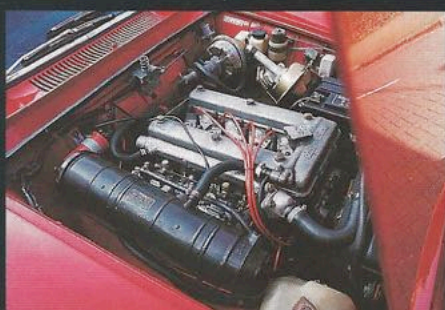
#### FACTFILE

##### ALFA ROMEO

##### GIULIA SPRINT GT

1963-'68

**Engine** all-alloy dohc 1570cc 'four' **Max power** 106bhp @ 6000rpm **Max torque** 97.5lb ft @ 3850rpm **Transmission** ZF five-speed manual **Steering** worm and roller **Chassis/body** monocoque, all steel **Suspension: front** double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, coils, anti-roll bar **Brakes** Dunlop discs all round, with servo **Length** 161in **Width** 62in **Height** 52in **Weight** 2350lb **Top speed** 115mph **0-60mph** 11.2 secs



#### FACTFILE

##### ALFA ROMEO

##### 2000GTV 1971-'77

**Engine** all-alloy dohc 1962cc 'four' **Max power** 132bhp @ 5500rpm **Max torque** 152.6lb @ 3000rpm **Transmission** five-speed manual **Steering** recirculating ball or worm and roller **Chassis/body** all-steel monocoque **Suspension: front** double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle with LSD, coils, radius arms, T-bracket, anti-roll bar **Brakes** discs all round, with two servos **Length** 161.1in **Width** 62in **Height** 51.8in **Weight** 2292lb **Top speed** 120mph **0-60mph** 8.9 secs





towards the middle plane, where third is up and fourth is down. Moving the lever into second from first involves a conscious effort against the spring-loading – and the same again from fourth to fifth – but you're never left in any doubt about which gear you're in.

It feels much like a '50s Giulietta, with the same cable clutch and slightly dead brake pedal and, through the bends, the handling has the same sweet poise. There's a reassuring sense of security about the light, high-g geared steering which is never anything other than communicative. On exiting a corner, the tail begins to drift but does so gently and you're safe in the knowledge that it can be snapped straight again without any difficulty. On skinny rubber, a Sprint will struggle to match the tautness of later variations on the theme, but rewards driver involvement. It's a balancing act between handling and roadholding that's challenging and, more important, huge fun.

Driving a Sprint serves as a reminder of a time before Alfa forgot how to make good cars, or rather how to develop them. During the '60s, it was almost as if the engineers at Arese knew instinctively how to eke more out of a design without watering down the entertainment value, the 1750GT Veloce being a case in point. Introduced at the 1968 Brussels Motor Show, it's the variant at the top of most *Alfista's* wish-lists and perhaps the most easily identifiable of the Bertone family. Whereas previously the leading edge of the bonnet overlapped the top front panel, here it's flush-fitting, the single headlamp frontal treatment replaced with a quad arrangement within a tasteful black grille.

Inside, changes are even more obvious. The large speedo and rev counter are shrouded in separate binnacles with secondary instruments repositioned on a centre console, the wood grain inserts seemingly stolen off a radiogram. The revised seats, with their slightly corrugated appearance, are a touch uncompromising too.

Bigger developments occurred beneath the skin. Alfa's boffins increased capacity to 1779cc by taking the liners out to a maximum 80mm bore and fitting an 88.5mm stroke crankshaft. The first thing that strikes you when driving a 1750 is the added edge of refinement over the earlier car. Higher gearing means that acceleration doesn't feel much faster than the GT, but there is a massive improvement in torque so there's less need to swap cogs to make effective progress. It's a lot less strained. The engine pulls smoothly from as low down as 1500rpm – right up to the 6k redline – but there's little point in taking it past five grand unless you want to solicit the wrath of the Noise Abatement Society. Such is the torque spread (137lb ft appears at 2900rpm), it's hardly necessary to drop below fourth most of the time. It's a happier motorway cruiser, too, 80mph corresponding to around 3800rpm.

You never take the car's performance for granted, however, as quality time at the wheel means total involvement. Acceleration isn't sensational (0-60mph in 9.2 secs on to 118mph overall) but there's something special about feeding in the power from mid-range as you gun past slower traffic or sweep through a sequence of bends. The messages are there through all the contact points: your hands, your feet and your backside. You can really feel the car working. If anything, the 1750

## GIULIA COUPE HISTORY

There are so many different variants of 105-series coupés that it's easy to get bogged down understanding which is which. The first, the Giulia Sprint GT, arrived in September '63 and was in the UK the following year. It was joined by the GTC (convertible) at the '65 Geneva Salon. This elegant machine was built by Touring just as it was staring death in the face. No surprise then that only 990 or so (99 rhd) were made in two years.

The Sprint GT made way for the Sprint GTV in early '66, effectively an improved GT with three more horsepower thanks to reworked porting. Later that year, it was joined by the Giulia GT

Junior, with lower trim levels and 89bhp 1.3-litre engine to get around Italy's crippling tax rates based on engine capacity.

January '68 saw the arrival of the 1750GT Veloce in place of the Sprint GTV with a 1779cc engine, hydraulic clutch and styling

revisions to the nose and dash.

The range was augmented further from early '71 with a revamped Junior coupé having 1750-style lowered bonnet smoothed into the front panel and twin-pod dashboard. It also saw the reintroduction of the 1570cc 'four'. The 1750 made way for the 2000GTV in June '71 (UK, October), the Junior adopting its body style from '74.



## OWNERS' VIEWS

**David Diaferia** is a devout *Alfista*. He didn't have much choice: "Various members of my family had these cars so I suppose it was inevitable that I'd get one." Having owned numerous performance cars, why the 1750? "I love the whole package. The styling is fantastic and so is the engine. Being of Italian extraction probably had something to do with buying it. The car had been restored by *Alfaholics'* Richard Norris and is among the best 1750 GTVs in the country."



**Ian Fishlock** converted to Alfas after years driving Caterhams. "My last was a Superlight R," says the affable sound engineer. "I drove it in all weathers for two years: then I grew up. I decided that I wanted a roof over my head and bought a 1750GTV for relatively little. I went through all the mechanical stuff but, when it came to getting the bodywork done, I decided that I'd be better off selling it and getting one that was sorted. I haven't had this car long [four weeks prior to the photo shoot] but I love it. The Sprint is much more of a sports car than the 1750 – much more chuckable."



## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

You're hooked by the beguiling Bertone looks and that twin-cam throb, so what are the pitfalls? According to Mike Spenceley of MGS Coachworks (020 8645 0555) who has restored several, it's simple: "Rust is a problem, but no worse than many other classics – the front valance, anti-roll bar mountings, jacking points, inner and outer sills and spare wheel recess can go. But if you decide to opt for the restoration route it would make better financial sense to buy a cheap car and go through it in its entirety rather than opt for a superficially good looking car for say £3-4000 that will need its sills doing: that's where the money goes." Richard Norris of *Alfaholics* (01398 351360) adds: "Virtually all replacement panels are available now and people are beginning to spend proper money on these cars which is a

good sign. There are a lot of bad ones out there that look the part but which are little more than cosmetic rebuilds."



**Hal Haines**, a Radio 4 producer, may be relatively new to the joys of Bertone Alfas, having owned the car since last year, but he's been a fan of Italian motors for some time. "I had an *Alfasud* which was wonderful and a Lancia Flavia convertible before this. Unfortunately, that relationship didn't end terribly well. I bought the GTV after it had won the 2001 Spring Alfa Day concours. At the moment, I think it's sitting a bit too high on its GTA-style wheels so I'm thinking of fitting a handling kit to firm things up a bit and lower it slightly. Otherwise, I really like the car."





## ALFA GIULIA SPRINT GTA

The uncivil cacophony ebbs in and out of focus: parp, bark, blare, parp, stall. A quick circuitous glance and the audience is expressing its glee with non-verbal gestures. A few more revs – about 2000 – dump the clutch and the twin 45s gurgle, spit and cough before reluctantly leaving the line. Exit the roundabout, plant the throttle and the tail squirms a touch before gluing itself to the asphalt. Through the underpass, the auricle-assaulting clamour bounces off the walls: it's loud. Head up the dual carriageway, past the hard-trying A4 quattro as the needle heads into the ruder numbers, and then more traffic. Bugger.

Alfa's Giulia Sprint GTA isn't happy dawdling. Few cars are more entertaining than this, the ultimate incarnation of the classic Bertone series. But not in London congestion. Your joy swiftly dissipates as frustration sets in.

So what makes the GTA so special? It was built to allow Alfa's competition arm, Autodelta, to compete in the European Touring Car Championship. During the early to mid-'60s, the firm's Giulia Ti Super had played the plucky underdog to Ford's Lotus Cortina, winning occasionally but not consistently. The GTA made its debut in 1965 and would dominate into the following decade thanks to the likes of de Adamich, Vaccarella, Hezemans and Rindt.

The 'A' stands for *alleggerita*, or lightened. By 603lb no less, largely by replacing the outer steel skin – aside from the sills and filler cap – with aluminium, the panels being stamped out of the original dies. The side glazing made way for Plexiglass, and the cabin lost all superfluous addenda including sound deadening: the cam covers, bellhousing and sump were magnesium.

Mechanically, the 1570cc 'four' gained a twin-plug head, with bigger valves. It made a relatively tame 115bhp on a higher 9.7:1 compression, although 170bhp was apparently possible. A smaller radiator made room for an oil cooler; the five-speed 'box gaining lighter, drilled cogs and closer ratios – first going to 42mph, second to 63mph, third to 85mph, fourth to 100mph and fifth to 125mph.

Production figures are typically vague. Most history books quote 493 of the 1600 version and a further 494 1300s but marque expert Richard Banks, who restored this fabulous example, has seen chassis numbers as high as 900 for the bigger-engined car (he's owned a dozen or so as well as 240 other 105 coupés). Whatever the truth, it's still ultra-rare.

Menacing too. Up close, the svelte outline is familiar but infused with attitude, dropped low over the 14in Campagnolo magnesium rims, an inch smaller than the regular cars to further lower the centre of gravity. The mesh grille and bent tube doorhandles scream intent. Inside, the cloying embrace of the figure-hugging bucket seat is instantly racer like, your legs akimbo to work the floor-hinged pedals. The slender wood-rim wheel fronts a minimalist dash, the mushroom-top lever sprouting out of the bulkhead.

Free of hectoring commuters and random brakkers, the GTA astounds. And it's the manner in which this race-bred Alfa deploys its power that makes it unique. Throttle response is instant once past 3k. It will pull all the way to 6000rpm – not that high for a real screamer – with no faltering or flatspots, just an unbridled release of energy.

All the controls are beautifully weighted. The steering is wonderfully light, tightening the moment the suspension's loaded, balancing the car perfectly as it dallies with slower traffic – before destroying them. A few suspension tweaks on this example have banished virtually all traces of understeer, with body roll barely perceptible.

This is a car canonised by Alfa types. Born for the race track it doubles up as a handy road car, albeit not one for city dwellers. Just bring your ear plugs.



### FACTFILE ALFA ROMEO GIULIA SPRINT- GTA (1600)

1965-'67

**Engine** all-alloy dohc 1570cc 'four' with twin plugs per cylinder **Max power** 115bhp @ 6000rpm **Max torque** 116lb ft @ 3000rpm

**Transmission** five-speed manual **Steering** worm and roller

**Chassis/body** steel monocoque, ally skin

**Suspension: front** wishbones, coils, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, coils, radius arms, T-bracket, anti-roll bar **Length** 161in **Width** 62in **Height** 52in **Weight** 1750lb **Top speed** 125mph **0-60mph** 8 secs



Richard Banks' GTA spent much of its early life in Spain. A resto project when he bought the car, it's now near perfect



feels more closely clamped to the road than its predecessor thanks to the wider boots, but with a mild understeer bias. There's an anti-roll bar at the back, relocated dampers and a revised transverse link in the rear suspension, these developments instigated for ease of construction. Delicacy and vigour are still key to the 1750's appeal.

And then there's the 2000GTV, often viewed as the poor relation, due in part to the less lovely detailing. Its glitzy multi-slatted chrome grille, with the embossed outline of the traditional Alfa triangle, lacks the earlier purity. The larger rear lamp clusters (incorporating reversing lights) also divide opinion. Inside, the restyled instrument cluster has fuel level and coolant temperature gauges mounted in their own pods between the speedo and rev counter rather than on the centre console, although the vicious-looking protruding binnacles don't prevent the instruments from being clearly visible. The tombstone seats, lined in tacky plastic (some in cloth), do nothing to lighten the atmosphere, while the atypical splayed legs position is further exaggerated by the clutch and brake pedal that sprout out of the floor (left-hand drive cars featured the more comfortable pendant types).

Cabin décor becomes of secondary importance the moment you find a stretch of deserted tarmac. Instead of simply feeling like a bigger version of the 1750, the 2000 makes its extra 183cc – from an extra 4mm bore, achieved by moving the bore centres – apparent with near-instantaneous engine response. Where its predecessor feels like it was engineered with the emphasis on a wide torque band, here it's on Alfa's more traditional preoccupation with immediacy. There's far more acceleration in the lower reaches: third takes you easily past 70mph and, while purists rail that there's less smoothness, you'd be hard pressed to notice. Producing 132bhp at 5500rpm (up 10 over the 1750), it's bound to be faster, yet it's the low-speed flexibility that impresses most.

The five-speeder remains the same, as do the gear ratios, but the 2000 also features a limited slip differential. Whereas earlier cars sometimes spin their inside rear wheels exiting corners due to the front weight bias, here the tendency's curbed. Otherwise, it's much the same as before. The big brother remains agile, maintaining its line through corners unless you provoke oversteer – slow bend, stamp on the accelerator – but always with about half an hour's warning of direction changes. And, should you overdo it, the bite of the four-wheel discs, despite the apparent overkill of twin servos, offer fabulous stopping power. The 2000 feels so natural on B-roads, so at ease as its stubby tail squats down under the twin-cam's torque and hurls the screaming coupé out of corners, that it's hard to imagine anything as usable and practical as this Milanese masterpiece that could possibly be more entertaining.

Since their inception, hacks have struggled to find suitable superlatives to describe Alfa's super coupés, no prose being too purple, no plaudit too inappropriate. These cars elevate the spirit and, according to those in the know, their popularity is at an all time high. Aren't we lucky to be living through a renaissance? ♦

Thanks to Richard Banks for sourcing the cars and historical information (01398 351360)

