

Alfacionada

The Journal of the Alfa Romeo Owners of Southern California

November/December, 1993



Coming up:

Time Trial and race: December 4, 5

Holiday Party: December 11

Drivers School: January 15, 16

Annual Meeting: January 28

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Randall Híga

TIME TRIAL AND RACE, WILLOW SPRINGS RACEWAY, DECEMBER 4 & 5

Don't miss the last Time Trial and Race event for 1993 at Willow Springs Raceway. Although the deadline for the entries was November 22, you can still come and root for your favorite Alfa.

HOLIDAY PARTY, DECEMBER 11, 7:30 PM

4 It's time to again celebrate the AROSC traditional holiday party at the home of Charlie Thieriot. Come see what Charlie has done to his back yard and witness one of the best views of Los Angeles. For only \$10 per person or \$15 a couple, you can enjoy terrific food and party with your fellow Alfisti. While the food will be plentiful, it is BYOB. As we did last year, we will have a gift exchange, so bring a gift (don't spend over \$5) to put under the tree. Charlie's house is at 2500 Roscomere Road in Bel Air, just off the 405 Freeway at Mulholland Drive. Also remember to bring canned food for distribution to the homeless. RSVP to Charlie Thieriot at (310) 476-8812 ASAP.

ANNUAL MEETING, JANUARY 28, 1994

Stay tuned to your Alfacionada for the keynote speaker and the location of our fabulous Annual Meeting. I will personally guarantee that you will receive the announcement in time. Please note that the next issue Alfacionada will not be a full-blown newsletter, so be on the look out for an abbreviated version of your (sometimes) trusty newsletter.

DRIVING SCHOOL, JANUARY 15 AND 16

The first of two Drivers Schools is scheduled for January 16 and 17 at the Streets of Willow Springs. This is an excellent opportunity to improve your car control and driving skills, whether it be for everyday commuting or wheel-to-wheel racing. The AROSC is very proud to have a real crackerjack team of instructors that will allow you to drive your own car (even if it is not an Alfa Romeo) with a minimal amount of safety equipment. Even though you will learn a tremendous amount about driving (it may even save your life), the school will be more fun than you have ever had on four wheels. So, if you are interested in learning how to better negotiate that tricky freeway on-ramp or if you want to learn how to late-brake and pass the pesky Porsche in the next vintage race, plan on attending this outstanding school. For more information, contact John Green at (818) 994-2318.

TIME TRIALS AND RACES FOR 1994

Charlie Thieriot has gotten the dates for almost all of the events for 1994. Refer to the Calendar for the dates of the confirmed events. At the time of this writing, we are still not sure if we will be able to get Laguna Seca for May. If we don't, we will be back at Las Vegas. Keep an eye on your Alfacionada for the schedule of other upcoming events!



Chiasso!

Text and photos by

Randall Híga

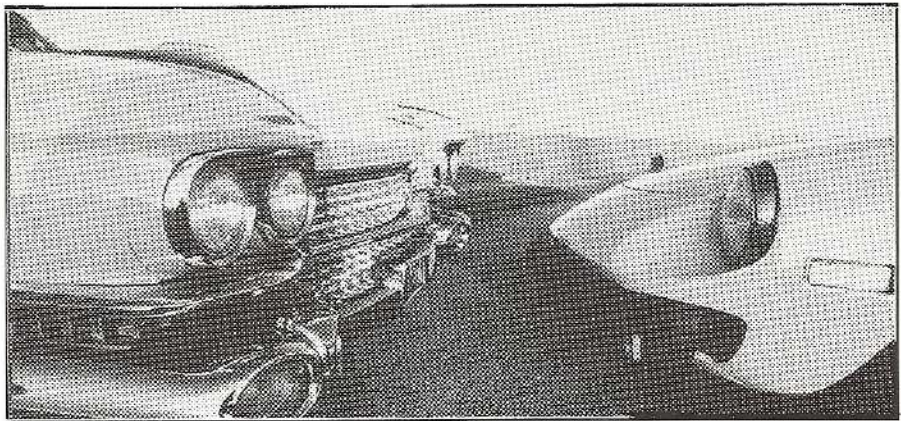
Monterey Peninsula, CA.

The 1993 year brought another glorious weekend of automobiles with the triathlon weekend of the Concorso Italiana, the Monterey Historic Races and the Pebble Beach Concours.

This year, I had the need to haul my wife Janice, her aunt Miyako, and myself to Monterey. With only a GTV and a Spider in our stable, I tried to get a 164 press car for the big weekend. I figured that being the editor of one of the bigger Alfa Romeo club chapter newsletters and being an up-and-coming automotive journalist, it shouldn't be a problem. Sure enough, one month before the Weekend, I was told that I could have one, if one were available. Yippee! Just think, tooling into the Alfa Romeo Corral at Laguna Seca with a new 164! Hey, if I were really lucky, it might even be a Quadrifoglio.

Unfortunately, it was not meant to be, as the big-time magazines grabbed all of the available 164s in the press fleet. However, as a consolation, I did have the use of a Lexus GS300. A very nice consolation indeed! It hauled the three of us in blissful luxury for the entire weekend and generally spoiled us rotten.

The Lexus GS300 was developed as a placeholder to fill in the model line void between the Lexus LS400 and the ES300 since the LS400 pricing went further upscale. With the somewhat



modified six cylinder engine from the Supra, the GS300 provides a healthy 220 horsepower to the rear wheels. While the torque isn't as dazzling as it could be, the engine loves to rev and is smooth all the way to its 6,000 plus RPM redline. The automatic transmission appropriately takes advantage of the horsepower/torque curves and does let the engine rev without any need for gorilla strength force on the throttle pedal. With a light but decisive nudge on the loud pedal, the GS300 will cleanly downshift one, two or three gears and scurry on down the road.

The styling of the GS300 departs from the corporate conservatism of Lexus/Toyota and offers a, uh, contemporary Giorgio Giugiaro styling. From the front and directly from the side, the GS300 has a clean, sleek, though somewhat puffy aero look. From the rear, the height of the trunk looks more pronounced. This seems to be a new styling trend as other cars (such as the Jetta, Saab 9000 and new 900) have the same large derriere. Did the Milano, brunt of many "fat butt" jokes, start a styling a trend? Surprisingly, like the Milano, the trunk is small for a medium-size four-door luxury sedan. Worse yet, the visibility out the rear of the car is truly wanting. As many of us know, the price of Italian design can be somewhat inconvenient and unconventional.

Although Lexus has tried to position the car in the luxury sports sedan segment, it is more at home on the open road than on the canyon twisties. The Lexus is by no means floaty or mushy and has been equipped with relatively wide, grippy 60 series tires and a moderately taut suspension. While the GS300 can corner at very respectable (and illegal) speeds (on the hilly twisties between Laguna Seca and Carmel Valley), it was clearly not happy doing so. While the GS300 felt relatively confident being thrown into blind downhill corners, my passengers were begging me to slow down. It was like watching Ballet de Trockaderos; the all male ballet dance troupe who are technically skilled (they do get on their points) but do not evoke images of swans and flying angels.

While the GS300 is an extremely competent car, and has a wonderful CD player, it is still not an Alfa Romeo. For most, this is very good thing. However, for those afflicted with the Alfa Romeo Disease that need a four door people hauler, it is probably best to stick with a 164, a Milano or even a slightly grungy Alfetta Sport Sedan; at least you'd look more respectable tooling into the Alfa Romeo Corral at Laguna Seca...

V-6 Timing Belt Tensioners

Edward Ng

Recently, I had the good luck to spot a good deal on a GTV-6. Except for the seats and the infamous timing belt tensioner oil leak, the car was in pretty good shape. The tensioner represented the most interesting of the problems. I had repaired the tensioner on our Milano about two years ago using the original Alfa repair kit and, not too surprising, our driveway is starting to get spotted with little oil drips again. I decided to look for some other repair solution that was less likely to fail in such a short time.

The tensioner (see fig. A) is a clever little device which is intended to adjust the tension on the timing belt for various engine speeds and temperatures. The tension is adjusted by an eccentrically mounted roller which is acted on by the tensioner shaft. The piston and shaft in the tensioner are actuated by oil pressure fed through a hollow mounting stud. When the engine is at rest, the belt tension is at the maximum tension due to the spring pressure on the piston. When the engine is running, the oil pressure pushes up on the piston and counteracts some of the spring pressure. In theory, at low engine speeds, the oil pressure is relatively low and the belt tension is not significantly reduced. At low engine speeds, the crankshaft rotation is not constant due to minute little hesitations and lurches. To assure that the belt doesn't skip any cogs, the belt tension is kept high at low engine speeds. However, as the RPM's build up, the engine speed is much more consistent and the belt tension can be lightened up as the oil pressure builds up to further counteract the spring pressure in the tensioner.

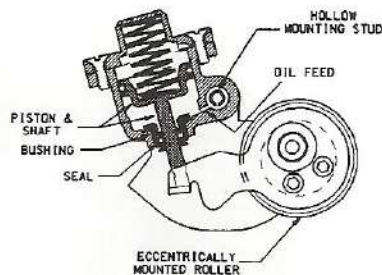


FIG. A - ALFA BELT TENSIONER

I'm sure that the belt tensioner looked like a good idea on the drawing board. However, in the real world, the tensioner has proved to be less than perfect. The most obvious failing is the oil leaking problem. The primary point of oil leakage is the rubber seal around the piston shaft as the seal loses its tightness with age or gets worn down with the constant movement of the plunger shaft. Another major failing in the tensioner is that the eccentrically mounted roller may stick and not pivot freely due to rust or gum build-up on the mounting shaft. In addition, in extreme cold conditions, the cold viscous oil creates very high oil pressures. This pressure causes the tensioner to relieve tension on the belt, even at idle. If the initial belt tension is not set correctly, this could result in inadequate tension on the timing belt and the belt skipping some cogs and possibly bending the valves.

The V-6 tensioner has been around since the 1981 model year and it has been one of the more frequently mentioned problem areas. Only in the last few years has anyone developed alternative solutions to the leakage problem. The latest entry is none other than Alfa Romeo itself. The alternative fixes I found include 1) the original Alfa repair kit, 2) a reworked belt tensioner by Sperry Valve Works, 3) the "Staybelt" manual tensioner from Alfa Heaven, and 4) Alfa Romeo's new replacement non-oil fed tensioner.

The Alfa repair kit consists of replacement rubber seals and gaskets. Done right, it basically restores the tensioner to original condition. Until recently, this was the only repair solution for a leaking tensioner. Given the short life of the repair and the availability of alternatives, it is the least desirable solution.

Mike Sperry of Sperry Valve Works feels that the concept of the original tensioner is basically sound -

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that the large V-6 aluminum block and long timing belt requires an adjustable tensioner to accommodate the expansion of the engine as it warms up to operating temperature, particularly under conditions where the temperature range is extreme. The weak point of the original Alfa tensioner is the leaking seal. Sperry's solution is to modify the tensioner by replacing the existing bushing and seal with a larger silicon aluminum bronze bushing and a viton double lip seal (see fig B). To further improve the seal, a spring collar compresses the seal around the plunger shaft. The plunger shaft is further stabilized by the addition of a second bushing to provide a second point of support on the plunger shaft. The Sperry tensioner is a complete replacement unit and is sold on an exchange basis. The Sperry unit has been on the market for about three years now and the customer feedback appears to be positive.

The Staybelt unit by Alfa Heaven takes a different direction. The Staybelt unit does not make use of oil pressure to adjust the belt tension. The belt tension is set manually and fixed with an adjustment bolt. Installation of the Staybelt unit requires removal of the hollow mounting stud and blocking the oil passageways. The Staybelt unit is basically a piece of mounting hardware on which the existing roller is mounted and converted into a fixed idler wheel. This is the same principle used on many of today's engines using timing belts. Tom Zat of Alfa Heaven has found that the engine dimensional changes are very small and the tension difference in the belt between full cold and full hot is about 2 to 3 lbs. The key is to not overtighten the belt so that the belt has some initial slack. The Staybelt concept was developed in 1983 by Tom for his race car applications after he found that the belts were skipping the cogs due to the inability of the tensioner to maintain proper tension, particularly at the lower engine speeds. Tom reports that because the Staybelt does not depend on oil

pressure, it is not prone to loss of belt tension due to excess oil pressure caused by high oil viscosity during cold midwest winters. The Staybelt unit has been available on the general market for about three years and the customer feedback appears to be positive.

In August 1993, Alfa Romeo announced a replacement tensioner which does not use oil pressure for adjusting the belt tension. Instead of oil pressure, Alfa's non-oil fed tensioner uses a temperature sensitive clutching device to adjust the belt tension. The new style

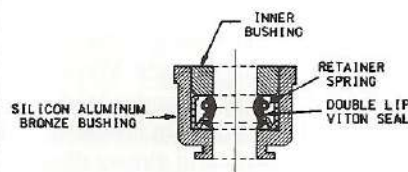


FIG. B - SPERRY'S MODIFIED BUSHING

tensioner totally replaces the existing tensioner. The installation procedure requires that the hollow mounting stud be removed and the oil feed and oil return holes be drilled, tapped, and plugged. On the GTV-6 and Milano, removal of the radiator is required to make room for the drilling and tapping equipment, in addition to the other items usually removed when rebuilding the tensioner. On the 164, access for the tensioner replacement requires removal of the wheels, struts, and the inner wheel well. Because the tensioner clutch is temperature sensitive, installation of the unit requires that the engine be cold with an ambient temperature between 59_ and 96_ F. in order to establish the proper initial belt tension.

The new style tensioner replaces all tensioners from the 1981 to 1993 model years. The presumption is that the 1994 and future model years will be fitted with the new style tensioner. The cost of the

Alfa non-oil fed tensioner is remarkably reasonable at about \$80. The installation labor will, however, be somewhat higher due to the complexity of installing the unit according to factory instructions. Alfa should be shipping these units by the time this article is printed. For the sake of all V-6 owners with oil stained driveways, I truly hope that this unit is a success.

There are some cautionary notes to be adhered to. First, if you don't know where the timing marks are on the camshafts, distributor and crankshaft and where they need to be during installation of the belt, do not attempt to rebuild or replace the tensioner yourself. Let your favorite Alfa mechanic do the work. Failure to heed this warning will result in an engine that will not run or will bend the heck out of your valves and possibly damage the head beyond repair. Second, the fiberglass reinforced rubber belt should be replaced every 30,000 miles, particularly if you drive your Alfa enthusiastically and if it is susceptible to oil drips. Third, used belts should not be reinstalled. A belt is considered "used" if it has been in use for more than 30 days. This is cheap insurance as a belt only costs a little more than \$20. Finally, the belts are rather delicate and can be damaged by rough handling. Do not twist the belt or bend the belt sharply.

I have tried to briefly describe some of the alternatives available to "permanently" solve the leaking tensioner problem. If you are in need of a fix for your tensioner, consider the information in this article as a starting point only. You should make your own inquiries with your favorite Alfa dealer, mechanic, or parts dealer and get full details on the above. Good luck and go get your last can of driveway cleaner!

Thanks to Mike Sperry of Sperry Valve Works, Tom Zat of Alfa Heaven, and Bill Werner of Alfa Only for their insights and information for this article.

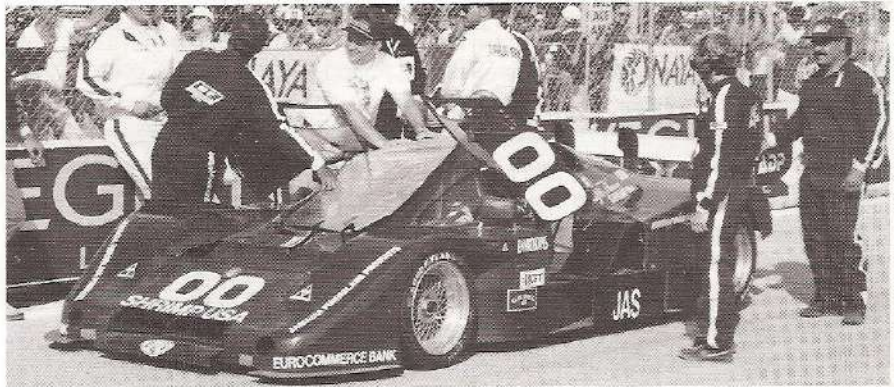
Good News, Bad News and Just News

Stu Schaller

8 Why do things seem to happen with Alfas that don't seem to happen with other cars? I recently had a problem with my car that baffled me and a few others for a matter of days. My car would start and idle fine, but after a few miles, there would be a severe loss of power. The car made noises like it was starving for gas, and then almost die. I limped the car home at 5 miles per hour, using 1st and 2nd gear. If I tried to use a higher gear, the car would die. Remove the fuel filters and check for dirt seemed the most logical thing to do. No dirt. O.K., check out the electrical systems. Everything checks out fine. Fire up the car and it starts immediately. Drive about 2 miles, and the same thing happens all over again. Limp the car home one more time. What in the world is going on?

Maybe there is some dirt in the carb jets. Remove the float covers. A little dirt, but nowhere enough that there should be a problem. Call Tom Zat, the 2000/2600 guru. Tom thinks the problem might be dirt in the fuel regulator, which, on older Alfas is what the glass fuel filter bowl is attached to. Remove the regulator unit. It never has been opened up in 30 years; the seal is still intact! Clean out the unit and bolt everything back together.

The car starts immediately, and idles fine. I let it sit and idle for a while. Drive the car. Two miles away, the same thing happens yet again. Now what? Drive the car over to



Santos, whose shop is, fortunately, only a mile from my house. Everything checks out fine. Does he think I'm nuts? I tell him to drive the car. The same thing happens again!

Lets rig a fuel pressure gauge into the fuel line, to see if the fuel pump is putting out enough pressure. Fine, a steady 4 plus pounds. Maybe the pump is packing up under load. Drive off with the guage in line, and the car looses power and almost dies, but there is no drop in fuel pressure. Now Santos and I, along with all the people in the shop are stumped. Call Charlie Theriot. He verifies we have done everything, and can't come up with any other ideas. Try Zat again. He has no ideas either.

After trying a number of things over the next week, we finally decide to see if there is a fuel blockage between the tank and the fuel pump. Yes! Lets open the tap on the tank and drain it too. More goop comes out. Do I really want to drop the tank? Let's try removing the fuel gauge sending unit from the top of the tank, and flush the gas through the tank and out the tap. More glop. One more time. Still more glop. Maybe I really should drop the tank. No, let's try pouring gas through again. Gas is now much less dirty. Maybe a few more times. Finally after about 100 gallons (the same 5 gallons, filtered thru coffee filters in a funnel, 20 times) the gas is clear. Button everything back up, and start the car. Everything is perfect at idle. Drive the car. Two miles and no problems. I don't want to get too far from my home or Santos' shop, so turn around. Two or three more miles. Still fine. Park and turn off the car. It restarts fine. Drive another 5 miles around the neighborhood. No more problems. YEA!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Autovolant GTP Light Alfa Romeo

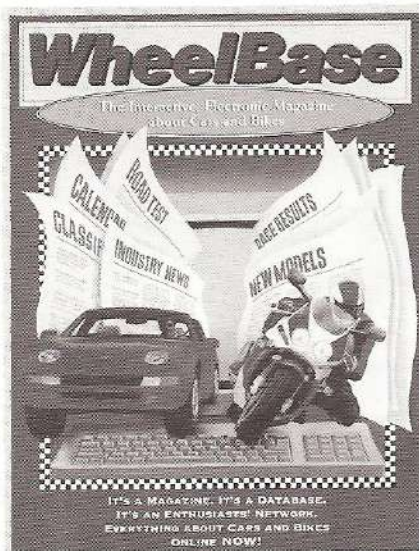
Of course, this story is meant to have a point; if you have not cleaned out the gas tank in you car in the last few years, DO IT NOW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

On other Alfa matters, the 155GTA's won the German Touring Car Championship, with 14 wins, over Mercedes. As of this date, the Italian and French series are not over. Alfa does not compete as a factory in the English championship. In formula 3, regardless of the country, Alfa had very few wins this year. Fiat, the parent company to Alfa, has decided to use the new 2 liter Fiat motor instead of building a new Alfa unit.

The new 4-cam 164 Quadrifoglios are finally out, but only 30-50 cars will be available before 1994. It is a wonderful car, but I don't know how many Alfa can sell at the \$43,000 "out the door" price asked, when you can buy a very nice, low mileage, 2-cam 164 for around \$15,000. No information on the new spyder as yet, except for the fact that it will be built.

Richard Sirgany of Autovolante in Miami is fielding a GTP Light Alfa Romeo which they produced. This is a 2.8 litre V6 made from a 2.5 litre. The bore is 94mm and the stroke is 68.5mm. It has 12:1 compression pistons, titanium intake and exhaust valves and keepers, and no distributor. Fuel injection is controlled through a pair of GM throttle bodies. They're also planning a 3 litre with 93x72 bore and stroke and 14:1 compression for which they predict 400 HP.

I hope all of you have a great holiday season.



Randall Higa

There are those who take great pleasure pursuing the on-line world Prodigy, CompuServe, and the various electronic bulletin boards. Others would rather read Road and Track, attend a concours, or twiddle with a pair of Webers.

WheelBase is for ALL OF THE ABOVE. WheelBase is not about using computers but rather about cars and motorcycles. Two of the founders of WheelBase, Gordon Jennings and Steve Anderson, have been in the motorzine business for years and, though they won't admit in public, are closet Alfa Romeo enthusiasts. In fact, Gordon has been having an ongoing "online dialogue" under the title, "Alfas Remembered." Not only is it a terrific series of Alfa Romeo memories to read, it is a dialogue that you can join!

If you missed our June General Meeting, Frank DeGiorgio of WheelBase gave a live demonstration of the program. He brought a laptop computer with built-in modem, plugged it into an available phone outlet and dialed up the WheelBase computer through a local CompuServe phone number. (For you techies, WheelBase operates in a Windows environment and can be accessed via 300 to 9,600 baud modems.) Frank walked us through several of the features of WheelBase that included a calendar of events, classified ads, road tests, various bulletin boards, places (car museums, hotels, restaurants, etc.) electronic mail, vendor directories, registry (many Alfas listed) library of automotive and motorcycle information, news, club directories and... well, you get the idea.

WheelBase is a participatory medium. Unlike traditional print media, you can immediately comment on anything that you find, whether it's a news article, an ad or a road test. Your comments, and others including the authors', can be attached to the specific article or ad. Anyone who is willing can write articles, submit classified ads, start bulletin boards and more.

And there is virtually no limit on space. In print media (such as this newsletter), there are limits to the amount of material that can be packed into an issue. Many things get edited to fit a certain format and not all of the news gets reported. In WheelBase, information storage and retrieval is not a problem so reports can appear in their full length. Manufacturers will be able to put in their entire press kits, vendors can list their entire inventory and price lists (can you imagine Alfa Ricambi's full inventory at your fingertips! You would even be able to place an order by sending them an order form using the electronic mail!), and journalists wouldn't have to condense their stories! Our Club could publish a listing of technical articles and books in the club library. Of course, one would have to be a member to actually obtain the material.

WheelBase is up-to-date and immediate. Racing news is generally entered immediately as it occurs. In some cases, road tests are even entered in WheelBase in phases as the road test progresses. For clubs, the dates of events could be announced as soon as they are planned. No more will the general meeting topic be announced in the newsletter that comes days before the meeting.

Accessing WheelBase is extremely simple. All of the computer operations were designed for those who are only slightly computer literate. Frank DeGiorgio was always available by phone to assist me with any problems or questions that I've had. It is the best supported software that I've used to date.

The WheelBase system requires an IBM 386 compatible computer (a Macintosh version is scheduled for introduction by the end of 1993) with two megabytes of RAM, Microsoft Windows, version 3.0 or higher, a mouse and modem. The program is in color with some dazzling graphics so a VGA or super VGA monitor should also be a part of the package. All support is on-line and available with the push of a key.

WheelBase is currently marketed to car enthusiasts. There are about 1500 users now, including some Alfa Club members like Pat Braden. The Alfa Club member price for WheelBase is \$39.95 (a \$10 discount) including two free hours of on-line time. Connect rates are \$12 per hour; blocks of 10 hours are \$9.00 per hour. The Alfa Club is negotiating a lower block rate. With enough members on-line, it may be ideal way for the club to improve communications among members. Stay tuned to the Alfacionada for more updates on a Alfa Club WheelBase opportunities.

For more information, about WheelBase, please call Frank DeGiorgio at (714) 363-1856.

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HUNTINGTON LIBRARY CONCOURS

Randall Higa

Located in picturesque San Marino, the Huntington Library was a wonderful venue for a concours. I was even able to coerce my wife Janice to attend by telling her about the Craftsman style furniture displays in one of the the Library's buildings. Unfortunately, most of you did not receive the newsletter in time to know of the event. However, there was a good turnout nonetheless.

Many thanks to our two wonderful judges Craig Turner and AROSC member Tim Walker. Their enthusiasm and keen eyes for details were greatly appreciated.

10

CONCOURS RESULTS

SPRINTS

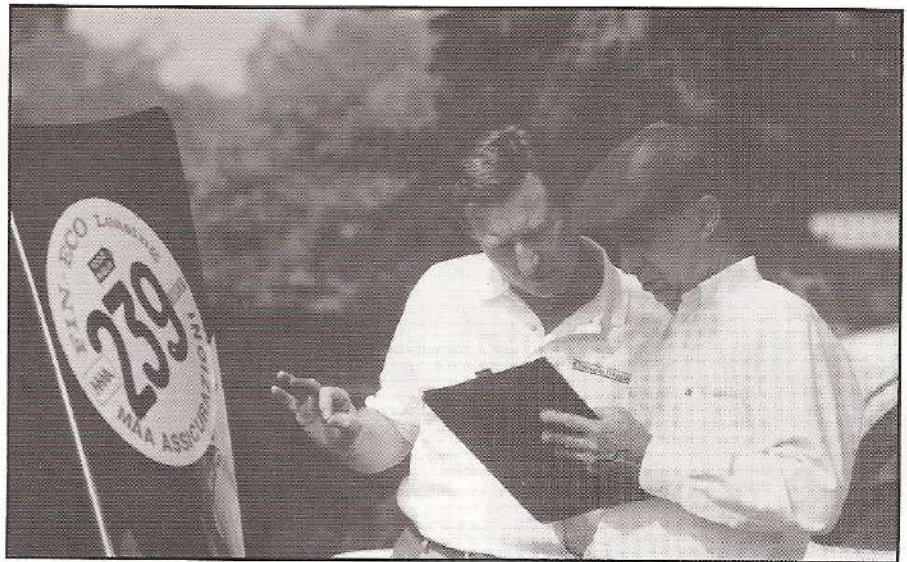
Name	Model	Points
Doug Brown	Sprint	192
Dave Gooley	Sprint	171
Herb Wysard	Sprint	168

SEDANS

Warren Braverman	1963 2600	206
Larry Grossman	1974 GTV	185
Dan Ritter	750 Giulietta	175

SPIDERS

Randall Harris	1963 Spider	196
Philip Guiral	1967 Duetto	196
Warren Braverman	1967 Duetto	177
Dirk Stoehr	1981 Spider	175



ADVENTURES ON THE RIM

Part 2

Text by *Randall Higa*

Photography by *Jay Negrin*

In Part 1, I recounted the first day's adventure of navigating (or sometimes referred to as "co-driving" even though no time is spent actually driving) with pilot/driver Gary English in his Alfa Romeo. We had done good; finishing a very respectable 8th in the Two-Wheel Drive Open Class and 11th overall in the Divisional Class at the end of Saturday night. This represented our progress for only the first third of the Rim of the World Pro Rally.

Sunday morning came much too early, even though I woke much later than Gary. By the time I had my essential three cups of morning coffee, Gary was scurrying around the car checking for any lost, broken or loose parts on the Alfa. Part of the morning's preparation included washing the car. I wondered, why wash a dirty race car when it's only one-third through an event?

As it turns out, I soon discovered that all of the rally cars are put on display, ("Parc Expose") in the Antelope Valley Mall parking lot before the first car is sent out at 1:00 PM. So, after the Alfa was mechanically up to snuff, we gave it a quick bath behind the Ramada Inn dumpster and put the car up for public viewing at the Mall. I'm sure that many people, unaware of the Alfa's extensive

European rally experience, looked at the Alfa and wondered how such a car (especially in such stock condition) could be suitable for such an event. I must admit that there were some intimidating and awfully trick machinery also on display. There were a couple of cars that were flown from Japan just for this event; one of which was a tiny Nissan March 4-wheel drive Open Class car. Other trick cars included the Audi Quattro of Paul Choiniere/Jeff Becker, the Subaru Legacy of Chad DiMarco/Erick Hauge and the Porsche Carrera 4 of Jeff Zwart/Tony Sircombe. The field also included some less extraordinary cars (but some still very impressive) including Datsun 510s, Volvo



142s, Toyota Corollas (including a FX-bodied device with 4-wheel drive!), Saab 99s, Mazda 323 GTXs and Mitsubishi Eclipses. Although we were not directly racing all of these cars, we certainly had our work cut out for us.

With a flag wave by Miss Budweiser and a uninspiring hand-wave by a miserable looking Miss Palmdale, we were off at 2:20 PM towards the Angeles National Forest. The next four stages were run in the daylight and, most importantly, the heat. Although not nearly as hot as the previous day, the temperatures were warm enough to cause the needle of the water temperature gauge to tap against the right edge of the dial during the

second stage. Gary had earlier told me that his Alfa was notorious for overheating and had been appropriately dubbed, "Chernobel."

I yelled to Gary that the water temperature was getting really hot. Gary shot a glance to the gauge and yelled back that the he's seen it there before. OK, I thought...He didn't slow down.

After the stage, we met up with our support crew, Stuart, Angela and Brian and proceeded to check the engine. Gary shut the Alfa down but left the electric radiator fan running. Chernobel appeared to nearly have a full core meltdown. It had gotten so hot under the hood that the plastic coolant overflow bottle, brake fluid bottle, clutch fluid bottle and windshield wiper fluid bottle had melted and were doing Salvador Dali painting imitations. No substantial amount of fluids appeared to have leaked, but the caps of the bottles looked like plastic potato chips. Aircraft ties and tin foil were deftly crafted into makeshift caps. The highly-skilled mechanic who performed this remedy asked to remain anonymous for fear of tarnishing his reputation.

I stood by the engine compartment and stared with amazement at the engine and wondered how it continued to buzz at redline (and then some) while nearly suffering a full seizure. While still in a daze, for some unknown reason, I reached down and touched a bulbous wrapping of electrical tape at a junction of wires. The radiator fan stopped! I touched the wires again and the fan stuttered and came on again. While I stood in mild horror, Gary unwrapped the tape and found that there was a cruddy connection that appeared to have been temporarily made and later forgotten. Maybe I found the cause of the overheating!

Continued next page

11

**"A car has no business
being so desirable..."***

Alfa Romeo Owners of Southern California Membership Application

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*Road and Track on Alfa Romeo, March 1958

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Then again, maybe not. Gary decided not to take chances and removed the hood for better heat dissipation. We also added an alarming amount of oil and brake fluid and continued to the next stage.

The course continued to be rough and we saw more casualties along the way. Although hoodless, Gary and the Alfetta never missed a beat and we continued to pass other cars that had either gone off the road, had mechanical problems, or both. I never got used to the sound of rocks pounding against the floorpan and winced every time a flurry of rocks splattered against the underside of the car. Nor did I get used to the sound of the transmission as Gary slammed the gearbox from second to first in the middle of a turn; just in time to catch the rear end of the car as it slid towards the edge of the road. Gary does observe that, after destroying two previous transmissions, the slam-bam shifting does prolong the life of the tranny when compared to gently and slowly shifting.

During the stage just before the dinner and service break, the Alfetta started getting noisier. I had to yell directions to Gary even louder to overcome the incredible din blasting from the hoodless engine compartment. When we pulled into the Lake Hughes Community Club parking lot for the dinner break, Stuart informed us of the problem. The number 2 and 3 exhaust manifold had removed itself from the head and was lying against the fender! One of the ears on one of the flanges had cracked and the studs had pulled out of the head. This appeared to be the end of the event for the Alfetta. With one-third of the Rally left, it seemed quite improbable for any repairs to be made.

Gary was not ready to concede. "What can we do?" he asked Stuart. All Stuart could do was shrug. I went to the Community Club building and got dinner wondering if the event was over. Some part of me felt relieved with the thought of going back to hotel and going to sleep, while another part of me felt deeply disappointed with our bad luck. However, I never took my eyes off my watch for more than two minutes since we had to be at the next control point in exactly one hour and 42 minutes.

When I got back with my dinner, Stuart was already at work with the exhaust manifold. Gary clearly did not want to quit and decided to try re-installing the headers by forcing coarse-threaded bolts into the head where the studs had pulled out. I winced as I heard the clicking of the ratchet slowly turning new threads into the aluminum head. The

crew next to us helped us by making a little bracket to hold the header where the flange had broken. Since we didn't have spare exhaust gaskets, there was still a gap between the headers and the head.

Therefore, to keep the exhaust gases from blasting the already-melted fluid bottles in the engine compartment, Stuart found a piece of sheet aluminum (a baking pan or cookie sheet) and fashioned a neat heat shield. We also noticed several cracks in the body in the engine compartment. Gary assured Stuart and I that it was non-structural and really won't cause a problem...Oh, yeah?

With little time left to spare and darkness nearing, Gary fired-up the Alfetta and we rejoined the other competitors for the remaining four stages of the Rally. What I didn't know was that the worst was yet to come.

You must forgive me because my memories of the remaining parts of the Rally are a little hazy; and yes, there was a reason for this. During the first stage after the dinner break, the exhaust header again pulled itself from the engine. I also began to lose my voice because of the yelling to overcome the unmuffled number two and three cylinders. Good thing Stuart made the heat shield; I had a hard time imagining hot exhaust gases blown directly from the head's exhaust port against the brake fluid reservoir and the coolant bottle. For some reason, the water temperature and the oil pressure appeared to stay within normal tolerances. Apparently, the coolness of the evening helped "contain" Chernobal.

Soon after my throat began to ache from the yelling, I noticed that my lungs began to hurt as though I had just bicycled 80 miles during a stage two smog alert. I also began to feel a bit groggy. It slowly became obvious that the engine exhaust was coming into the cab of the car so I opened the window to let in, supposedly, clean outside air. I began to wonder how Gary was holding up if he were also breathing the same air?

Amazingly, the Alfetta continued to run. The amount of oil consumption was obscene; after one particular stage, four quarts of oil had to be added! Remember that the longest stage is under 15 miles! After another stage, one of the other drivers came up to us and asked if we lost an exhaust system as he saw one lying across the road. Gary and I shrugged and got on our hands and knees to find that not only did we lose the exhaust system from the headers rearward, but the skid plate that was under the sump was also gone. Oh, well, less weight to burden us!

Gary also found that the brakes were fading and that there was a leak in the brake line to the rear wheels. It was not particularly comforting to realize that we did not have rear brakes and that we lost almost all of the brake fluid in the reservoir after each stage. During one particular stage, I yelled to Gary that we were approaching a triple caution water bar; this meant that if we did not slow down, we would have damage caused to both car and passengers. Although it was dark, Gary must have seen the waterbar and decided to barely slow the car. The Alfetta bottomed with a vengeance as the underbelly (sans skidplate), pounded against the loose rocks. I fully expected my helmet to hit the roof as I hunched over and gritted my teeth. Amazingly again, the Alfetta soldiered onward with no apparent damage (still had oil pressure!). I later asked Gary how he was able to precisely gauge the actual severity of the waterbar and blast through it at the highest possible speed. He then informed me that he had no choice since, by that time, the brakes had completely faded!

With only a few stages to go, my voice was nearly gone and I had a very difficult time breathing. I limited my directions to only the most critical and used hand signals as appropriate. I also felt like an 80 year old chain smoker nearing the top of Mount Everest. For some reason, Gary seemed unaffected by the exhaust. I had a very difficult time concentrating as my head hurt and I could barely keep myself from going unconscious. It became more difficult to climb back into the car to begin each stage. With only two more stages to go, this event ceased being a Rally and became a MISSION. It took my full concentration and effort to stay awake, keep time between the stages, and to read and hoarsely shout the instructions to Gary. After the second-to-the-last stage, I became overcome with nausea and threw up by the side of the road. By this time, I was ready to call an ambulance figuring that I had destroyed all but a dozen brain cells.

Much to my surprise, we made it. Nearly 12 hours after we left the Antelope Valley Mall, we completed the Rally. The Alfetta never skipped a beat despite its ragged condition and I managed to keep from blacking out. Gary was exhausted but was in fine shape. We later surmised that since he kept his window closed, he did not get exposed to nearly as much carbon monoxide as I did.

Despite our problems on the second day, we still managed to finish 7th in our class and 12th overall in the Divisional Class. We left many higher-

Continued on Page 14

Classified

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Continued from Page 14

dollar machines behind us. While they only awarded trophies up to 6th place, we still felt rewarded for our efforts in being able to complete the Rally. It was, after all, more of a contest with the elements and ourselves than with the other contenders.

Now you may ask, would I do this again? Would I risk my life and my sanity by navigating for another Rally? ARE YOU KIDDING?

When I close my eyes, I can still hear the Alfetta singing as 6,500 RPM, rocks banging against the floor of the car, and seeing the lights of the city 4,000 feet below as the we slide sideways towards the edge of the road...there isn't anything like it...yeah, you bet I'd do it again!

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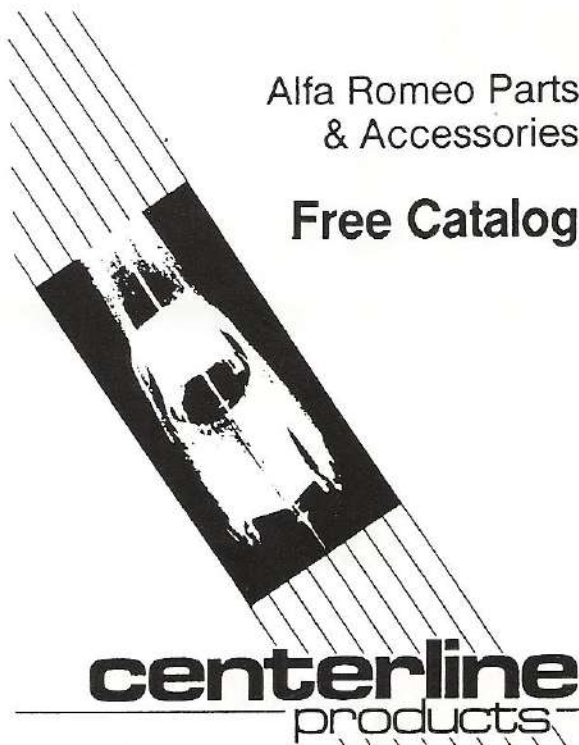
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