

The Alfa Romeo Spider was built for nearly three decades, leaving a vast choice that could confuse the uninitiated. Here's how to buy well

Words: Keith Adams Photography: Paul Harmer



1966-1993 Alfa Romeo Spider £1500-15,000

Introduction

The Alfa Romeo Duetto Spider might well have made its name in the film *The Graduate*, but as a classic sports car mainstay it's up there with the MGB and Fiat Spider for attracting an enthusiastic following. Underpinned by a shortened Giulia 105-Series platform and powered by a range of twin-cam engines, this car is every bit as good to drive as it is to look at.

Like the MGB and the Fiat Spider, the Alfa enjoyed a very long production run – a side effect of the lack of investment during the 1980s. This resulted in the Spider becoming pilloried for its ageing design as the years rolled by, but today it means you're presented with a huge (and sometime confusing) choice of cars. Do you go for the prettiness of the earlier car, or the usability of later models?

Market view

In simple terms, the earlier the Spider, the more potential value it has. The boat-tail cars command the highest prices: 'As the years go by, the value of the earlier boat-tail cars will pull away from the later ones,' says Richard Norris of Classic Alfa. You need to spend between £12,000 and £15,000 for bodily excellent (or restored) cars, and up to 20,000 for concours. 'Right-hand drive ones are extremely rare,' adds Norris. Cheapest is the 1300 – up to 20% less than the 1600 and 1750. The Kamm-tail S2 and S3 cars with



full-fat 1962cc engines are the best to drive, but the market tends to value them some way behind – a project costs as little as £1500, 'but a well-sorted S2 comes in at around £10,000,' says Norris. 'The S3 tends to be devalued by its clumsy makeover, with MoT'd cars changing hands for £3000-4000, and nice ones for £5000.' The S4 is the odd-one-out: the best appointed and easiest to live with, yet that whiff of 1990s styling holds back values, with even the nicest examples failing to go for much more than £8000.

Model history

1966 The pretty Pininfarina-styled Duetto appears. Boat-tail styling earns it the nickname *Osso di Seppia* ('cuttlefish'). All are assembled by Pininfarina; power from the 109bhp 1570cc twin-cam; fewer than 1000 built in right-hand drive.

1967 The 118bhp 1750 Spider Veloce replaces the Duetto; boat-tail styling remains.

1968 A more basic 1300 Junior is introduced, previewing the exposed-headlamp look that comes with the US and later cars. Even this smallest engine is lusty, with 90bhp on tap.

1970 Kamm-tailed S2 1750 Spider Veloce arrives, offering more boot space and less style. Revised grille and windscreen (with shallower angle) are the most obvious changes, although attractive new doorhandles and top-hinged pedals are small changes; 1300 Junior continues.

1971 The 2000 Spider Veloce brings 132bhp 1962cc twin-cam. **1972** The 1600 is reintroduced as the new Junior model. **1977** RHD production ceases with a few cars being registered as late as 1978/79. The 1300 Junior ceases production in LHD.

1982 All Spider models receive a heavy cosmetic make-over in an attempt to keep the car fresh in a market with fewer rivals to fight against. The main visual differences are the more substantial impact bumpers, grille and black rubber boot spoiler. All subsequent British-market Spiders are converted to right-hand drive in the UK.

1986 Interior receives a new dashboard and seats. Quadrifoglio Verde model with side-skirts and uprated interior is added.

1988 Bosch L-Jetronic electronic fuel injection is now standard globally on the 2000 model.

1990 The Spider mutates into S4 guise. Side-skirts are now standard although slimmer than before, and impact bumpers are redesigned and painted in body-colour. Biggest visual difference is the new bootlid and slimmer tail lamps, for a sleeker look than the S3. Mechanically, the 2000 is improved with the fitment of Bosch Motronic engine management. All UK cars still converted locally. **1993** Production ends, making this Alfa Romeo's final rear-wheel-drive mass-produced car.

In a nutshell

Alfa Spiders have huge specialist support, both in the UK and globally, so they're a great bet if you want a 'sensible' classic with a whiff of exotica.

Corrosion is top of the checklist. 'Areas most effected are door-bottoms, sills, the inner sill area around the jacking points, rear lip of the bootlid, rear wheelarches, floorpan and the boot floor. It's likely just about any car you check will have been afflicted by tinworm, but it's the quality of the repair that matters most,' says Richard.

Also check the front crossmember under the radiator and the chassis members at the rear of the engine bay running under the front floor, plus the area around the front and rear suspension mounts. The soundest advice is to buy a car with the best body you can find. The mechanicals are very strong, and parts are plentiful.

The hood frame is a potential source of problems on Duetto: it needs to be intact because you'll struggle to find a replacement – S2 and newer cars' are still readily available. Those stainless bumpers cost about £1000 apiece too.

The 2.0-litre engines can suffer head

1966 ALFA ROMEO DUETTO 1600

ENGINE
1570cc four-cylinder, DOHC, twin Weber 40 DCOE 27 carburettors

POWER
109bhp @ 6000rpm

TORQUE
103lb ft @ 2800rpm

TRANSMISSION
Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

STEERING
Recirculating ball

SUSPENSION
Front: wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers. Rear: live axle, radius arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers

BRAKES
Discs

WEIGHT
996kg

PERFORMANCE
Top speed 115mph
0-60mph 11.3sec

Below

Duetto's looks are probably responsible for their collectability. Later Kamm-tailed cars are fun and perhaps more rakish.

gasket failure, but a full rebuild for any capacity is typically around £1000 in parts and £3000 for labour. Gearboxes can develop synchromesh issues, especially in second, and typically cost £500 for an exchange unit.

Tired suspension (knocks from worn front bushes, self-steering due to worn rear trailing arm bushes) is also common, but new bushes all-round and replacement springs and dampers will put that right.

'Rear axles are strong, but S4 cars seem to suffer from noisy differentials. Nothing changed in the design, so this is believed to be down to poorer component quality,' adds Richard.

Electrics and trim faults are easily cured. Cracked dashboard tops in left-hand-drive cars are easily replaced or retrimmed – less so right-hand-drive boat-tails. There's more demand for the converted S3s and S4s in the UK, but make sure the cut 'n' shut facia isn't a mess of peeling vinyl and rattling panels.

Some cars will have received performance upgrades, so make sure any modifications have been carried out to the highest standard.



Conclusion

'Something for everyone' is an overused phrase even by cliché standards. But it could well be true here as, with the Alfa Romeo Spider, your choices are unusually extensive.

However, they can be broadly simplified: buy an early car for its looks and future investment; the S2 and S3 for performance and value; and the S4 for all-round usability.

The truly desirable Spiders are, of course, the boat-tail cars. No question about that, given their rarity, originality, style and sweetness. They're the most expensive and offer the greatest potential for your investment.

But don't despair if they're already priced outside your range. The S2 cars, especially, are stylish in their own right and, with the option of the larger

engine, offer a more rounded drive. The S3 tries hard to look like a newer car, but only partially manages the feat, while the S4 comes with more lavish levels of equipment, and the promise of all-year round thrills.

Octane's choice would be a boat-tail car. Its uncorrupted sweetness is irresistible – and its inventman potential makes paying the extra worthwhile.

For sale

Below are examples of cars for sale at www.octane-magazine.com and around the world.



PRICE
\$19,500

1993 S4 Veloce

Chequered Flag, USA. 17,000 miles, immaculate condition.



PRICE
€25,000

1966 Duetto 1600

V50C, Holland. Ex-California car, good body, needs interior retrim.



PRICE
£8900

1990 S3 2000

Private sale, UK car in the South of France. 70,000 miles, RHD, excellent condition.



PRICE
£7495

1971 S2 1750

Private sale via Classic Alfa. Ex-USA, 85,000 miles, bare-metal respray.



PRICE
\$27,500

1969 Duetto 1750

Hyman Ltd in the USA. Recent new hood, engine-out repaint, solid bodywork.

Clubs

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