

1950 - Belgium Grand Prix at Spa Fangio heading for victory in the Alfetta

## Alfetta: a Pedigree Car

«Alfetta» was a name that came spontaneously to the lips of sporting enthusiasts who cheered the 158 and 159 world champion racing cars. In the years immediately preceding the war, the formula 1 Grand Prix were competed for by large racing cars with cylinder capacities ranging from 4,500 cc. down to the three litres supercharged. In comparison with these, the 158 with 1,500 cc, was really a «small car»,

yet it caused no end of worries to the «monsters» of the era (Maserati, Mercedes, Auto Union) as it was swift and responsive as well as small and elegant. The public called it the «Alfetta», a name which expressed the sympathy and enthusiasm of the fans. This name has remained to the present day as a popular title for Alfas in general.

In fact there was a kind of tacit agreement in

Alfa Romeo on the choice of name for the new Alfetta. Just as in a family, when father and mother decide to name the new baby after his illustrious grandfather, then choice presents no problem.

The Alfetta is rather more than just a famous ancestor; it is in reality a bridge between motor racing and mass-production and an outstanding point in the technical development of the auto-



mobile. It was not so much a question of reviving a memory, but of transferring into a mass production model technical experience and sporting success which has long been traditional with Alfa Romeo.

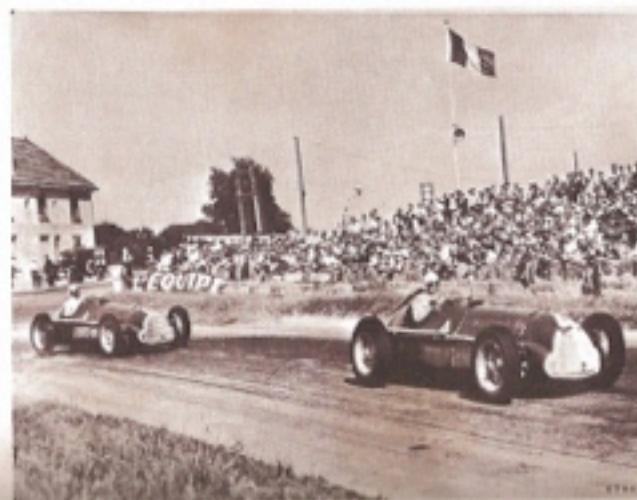
So the younger generations now have a chance to discover what the Alfetta stood for, and appreciate its long history of victories. From the summer of 1938 when it appeared, until 1951, it had fourteen years of virtually uninterrupted sporting fame. No other racing car has lasted so long with such formidable supremacy. And perhaps no other car has ever finished a sporting season unbeaten, as did the Alfetta in 1950, its golden year; 11 races, 11 victories (among which were all the major Grand Prix).

The «Alfetta phenomenon» carried Italian technical skill to the height of world fame, restoring excitement and colour to racing after the second World War, and, as in the days of Nuvolari, enlivened sporting journalism, aroused public opinion and stimulated other designers to introduce radical innovations in order to compete. To quote one of the many newspaper reports in 1947, on the triple success in the Belgian Grand Prix of the Alfettas of Wimille, Varzi and Trossi, a French journalist wrote: «...we seem to have gone back 22 years in time, when right here at Spa, the Alfa Romeo P2's of Ascari and Campari stopped at the pits and the drivers sat down to a leisurely snack, so great was their advantage over their adversaries».

The long life of the 158 and 159 was the result of work of genius: conserving the original formula for construction, basically for economic reasons, and by working above all on the engine, the Alfa Romeo technicians achieved outstanding results, as shown by the successive increases in power: from 195 h.p. in 1938 to 225 h.p. in '39, to 330 h.p. in the '47 version and finally the 425 h.p. of the 159 in 1951. For those who understand, technicians or motor racing historians, the Alfetta is possibly the



1950 - Silverstone  
International Trophy  
Fangio during the race  
in the Alfetta



1950 - Reims Grand Prix  
in France  
Fangio and Fagioli  
1st and 2nd overall,  
during the race



best example of a supercharged car, as it has never been equalled. And Fangio, who won his first world championship in the Alfetta in 1951, and then, when the Alfetta was withdrawn from racing, went on to win four more world titles in other cars, stated that «the Alfetta» — in his own words — «is the finest racing car I have ever driven».

A car like the Alfetta 158 and 159 must necessarily have had an influence, not only on the destiny of Alfa Romeo as a world famous motor manufacturer, but also by inspiring designers in their research on later productions. Inspiration is obviously not a repetition of outmoded solutions: if anything, it is reinforced by fidelity to a technical tradition, to tested

experience, in order to stay ahead with the latest developments.

In fact some of the solutions of the 159, precisely because they are still ahead after 20 years, reappear in the Alfetta of the '70's. This is the case, for example, with the De Dion axle, tested in the longest and toughest races on tracks all over the world, by the Alfetta 159 itself, and now incorporated in a mass-produced car. Basically it is the prerogative of all Alfas «to be born adult», because Alfa Romeo incorporates into production cars innovations which have undergone severe testing in racing competition.

The Alfa Romeo technicians themselves were brought up in racing.

Certainly advanced productive technology has contributed, and over a period of twenty years from the Alfa Romeo 1900 to the Alfetta, it has, one might say, put the racing car onto the production line. That is to say, it has taken these mechanical gems and turned them into production cars available for an ever-growing public.

The Alfetta continues this trend: it contains that combination of mechanical excellence and winning qualities which are derived from its direct link with the World Champion Alfetta which drove the sporting public mad with enthusiasm.



1951 - Silverstone  
Grand Prix in England  
Fangio at the finishing post



# Alfetta: a lifetime of victories

## 1937

Mercedes and Auto Union dominated the race courses of the world. Bugatti had practically abandoned racing, and only Alfa Romeo and Maserati attempted to compete with the German cars; Nuvolari, Varzi, Caracciola, Rosemeyer, Lang, Fagioli, Trossi and other great racing drivers made this one of the greatest periods in the history of motor racing.

Alfa Romeo competed in the races through the Ferrari Racing team, to which it had entrusted the cars, and from Ferrari came the request for

a 1,500 cc. supercharged car, to race in the small car classes.

From engineer Colombo's plan for Alfa Romeo, the 158 was created: engine, eight cylinders in line; 180 h.p. at 6,500 r.p.m.; twin overhead cam shafts; bore 58 mm and stroke 70 mm.; capacity 1,479 cc. supercharged. The chassis had side frames of box sections, joined by four cross members. The suspension was independent on all four wheels with a transverse semi-elliptic spring both front and rear.

## 1938

1938 - Livorno, Ciano Cup  
Start of the race which was  
won by Villorresi with  
Biondetti 2nd in the Alfetta



Alfa Romeo returned officially to racing with the name of «Alfa Corse».

After further tests and various improvements, the engine developed 195 h.p. at 7,500 r.p.m. giving an increase therefore of 15 h.p. and of 1,000 r.p.m. compared with the 1937 version. Thus the official debut of the «Alfetta» was on 31st July at Livorno, in the Ciano Cup for the «small car class», when the three «158» cars were placed first with Emilio Villorresi (average 133.108 km/h.), second with Biondetti and seventh with Severi.

At Monza on the 11th September in the «City of Milan Grand Prix» Alfa Romeo competed with four cars driven by Emilio Villorresi, Severi, Sommer and Marinoni. Villorresi won with an average speed of 147.593 km/h., Severi was placed second.

## 1939

Alfa prepared another four cars, to which various modifications were made. On 30th July at Livorno, Nino Farina in an «Alfetta» won the Ciano Cup with an average speed of 139.053 km/h. At Pescara in the Acerbo Cup four more «Alfettas» competed: Biondetti won, with an average speed of 134.078 km/h., while the drivers, Pintacuda, Farina and Severi were placed 2nd., 3rd., and 4th respectively. In the Berne Grand Prix, on 20th August, three races took place: one for the «small cars», one for Formula cars, and a final race for both classes. Farina won the «small cars» race.

## 1940

Despite the fact that Europe was already at war, further competitions were held in which the «Alfetta» took part.

On 12th May at Tripoli, Farina won that famous Grand Prix with an average speed of



206.347 km/h.; Biondetti, Count Trossi and Pintacuda in the other three «158's» were placed 2nd, 3rd, and 6th.

#### 1946

After the parenthesis caused by the war, motor racing was resumed with enthusiasm: competitions bordering on the absurd, with cars found all over the place and patched up as well as possible. They had widely differing cylinder capacities.

At the Geneva Grand Prix on 21st July, Alfa competed with four cars. Two had two-stage blowers, put together very quickly. Farina covered the course with an average of 103.230 km/h.

By now all the «Alfettas» were supercharged with a two-stage blower. In the last two competitions of the year, held on 1st September at Turin and 29th September at Milan, the «158's» won easily, driven respectively by Varzi and Trossi.

#### 1947

Various methods were studied for perfecting the two-stage blower system, and a larger primary compressor was fitted: the power of these new engines, called 158/47, rose to 310 h.p. at 7,500 r.p.m. During this year the «Alfetta» competed in the following races: 8 June at Berne, Swiss Grand Prix; winner Wimille with an average speed of 153.64 km/h. 29th June European Grand Prix at Spa; again Wimille was first, with an average of 153 km/h. 13th July at Bari; Varzi won. 7th September at Milan, Italian Grand Prix; Trossi came first with an average of 112.48 km/h.

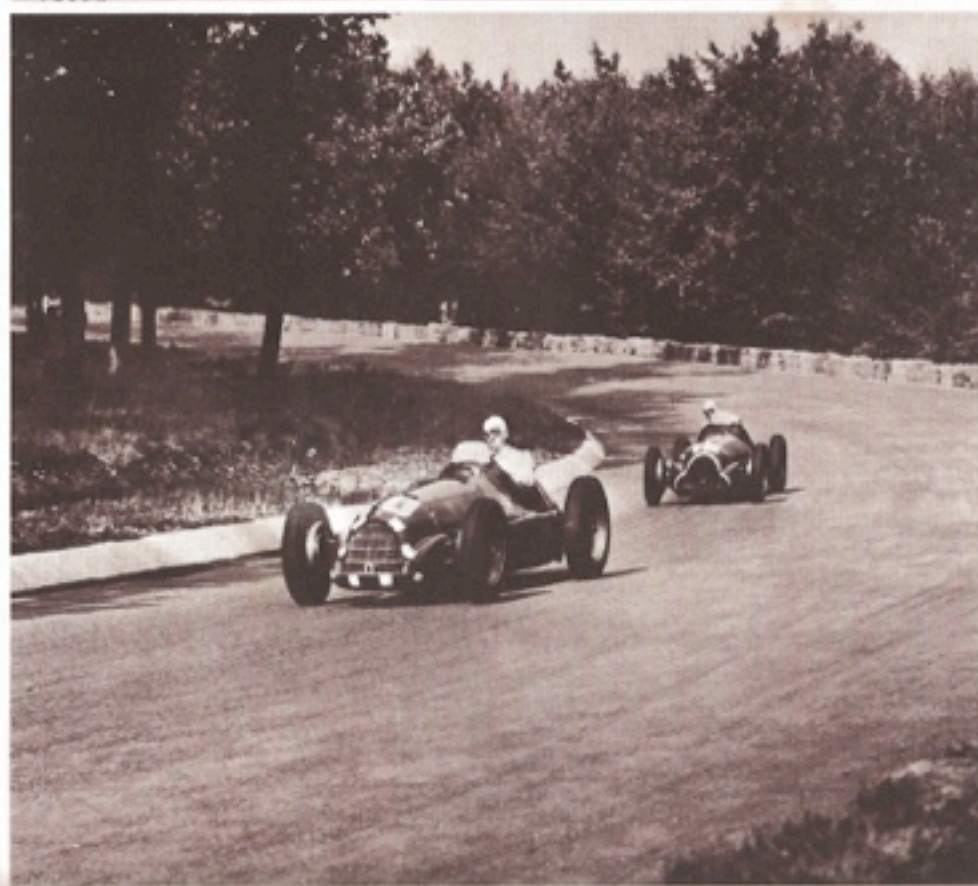
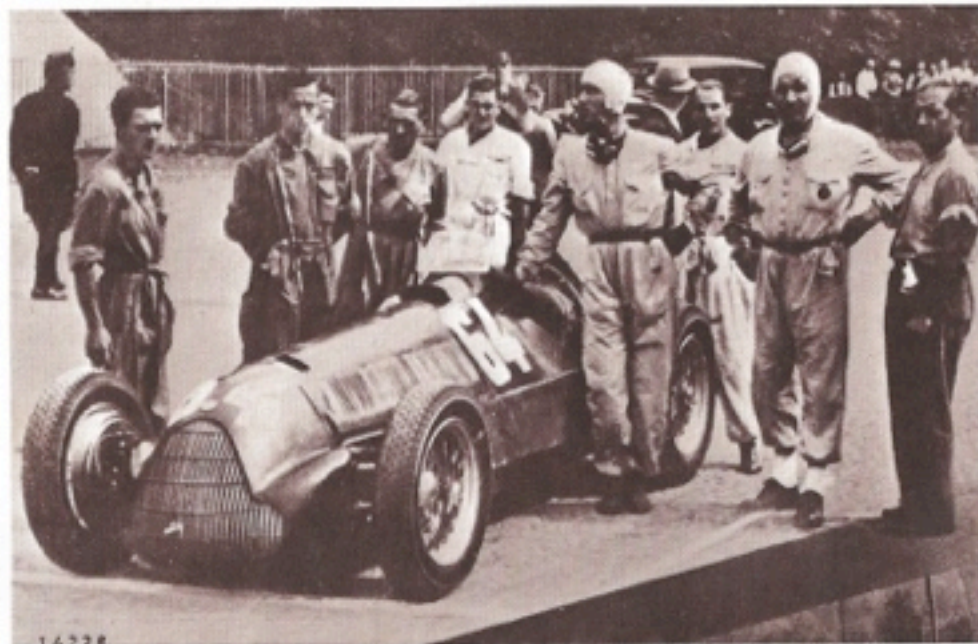
#### 1948

In the European Grand Prix at Berne, the «Alfetta» driven by Trossi was first with an average speed of 145.28 km/h. Then the «Alfetta» won the Italian Grand Prix at Turin and the Grand Prix at the Monza Autodrome, when Wimille was driving.

#### 1949

Alfa Romeo did not take part in racing; this

1939 - Berne Grand Prix in Switzerland  
Farina and Biondetti, 1st and 2nd overall, with their mechanics



1950 - Monza Grand Prix in Italy  
Farina, 1st overall, and Fangio during the race





1950 - Belgium  
Grand Prix at Spa  
Fangio acclaimed  
at the finish





1948 - Berne  
European Grand Prix  
Trossi and Wimille  
1st and 2nd overall,  
during the race



1950 - Silverstone  
Fangio in the Alfetta

period was utilised for development and various modifications were made to the «158/47»: the power was increased to 350 h.p. at 8,500 r.p.m. the front brakes were enlarged both in diameter and width. Modified in this way the «158/47» took part in the races for the world championship the following year.

#### 1950

This was the golden year for the Alfetta: 11

1950 - Monte Carlo  
Grand Prix in Monaco  
Fangio, 1st overall,  
during the race





Grand Prix entered; 11 outright victories. The «Alfetta» was always first with Farina or Fangio.

European Grand Prix at Silverstone, Monaco Grand Prix at Monte-Carlo, Swiss Grand Prix at Berne, Belgian Grand Prix at Spa, French Grand Prix at Rheims, Grand Prix of the Nations at Geneva, International Daily Express Trophy Race at Silverstone, Grand Prix of S. Remo at Ospedaletti, Bari Grand Prix and Pescara Circuit: these were the stages which took Alfa Romeo to victory in the World Championship, with the final apotheosis at the Grand Prix at Monza, where Nino Farina became World Champion. The «Alfetta» had certainly made great strides: from the earliest projects as a «small» racing car to the ultimate symbol of Italian constructional technique recognised throughout the world.

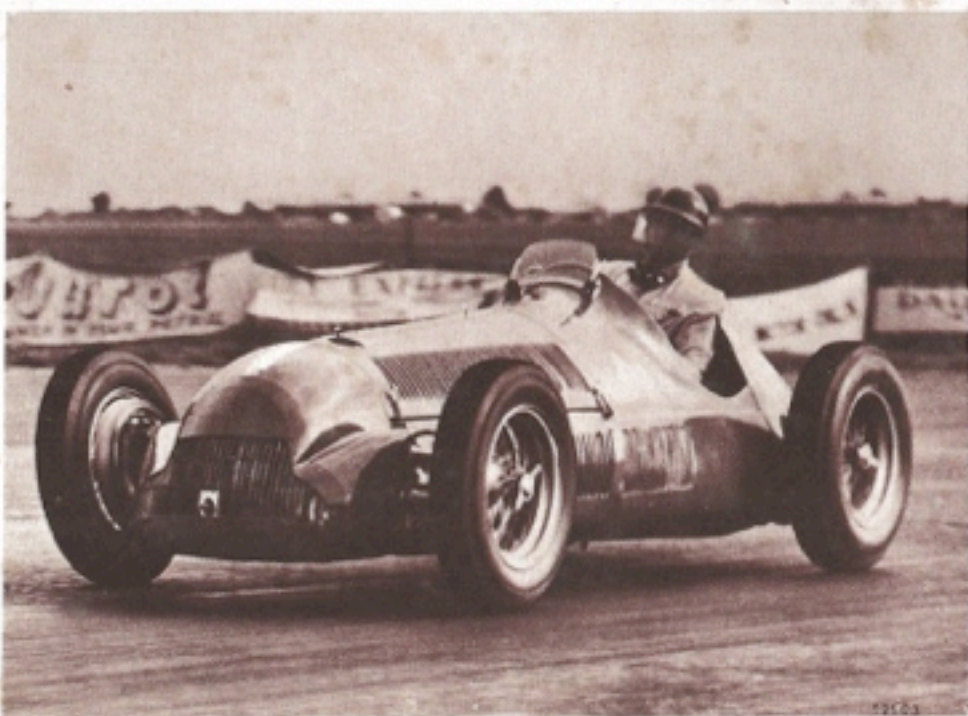
#### 1951

The «Alfetta» was by now called the 159, having a 425 h.p. engine, and redesigned suspension, incorporating a De Dion type rear axle. This was followed by another succession of victories, which by now were becoming customary.

The «Alfetta» repeated the achievements of 1950, from Berne to Spa to Rheims, and concluded the sporting year by winning the Barcelona Grand Prix, thus winning a second World Championship with Juan Manuel Fangio.



1948 - Turin  
Grand Prix in Italy  
Farina, 1st overall, during  
the race in the Alfetta



1951 - Silverstone  
Grand Prix in England  
Farina during the race