

# JUBILEE LINE

The Giulietta saved not just Alfa, but Pinin Farina and Bertone, too. As this benchmark model celebrates its 50th anniversary, **Richard Heseltine** drives all five variants

PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER





635 UXB

With the power of political patronage, there's every chance it could get messy. A state-backed motor manufacturer desperately needs cash for its vital new model so devises a fiendishly clever way of raising funds. A lottery scheme attracts punters into parting with large amounts of money for the chance to win one of these new cars. A date is set for the drawing, but then it all goes very quiet. The press gets whiff of a story and a scandal slowly brews: it transpires that the promised prizes are still in bits. To save face, a coachbuilder is persuaded to create another new car – an altogether sexier one – from the parts to appease aggrieved ticket holders. Everyone, or at least the winners, goes home happy. Job done.

Sounds fanciful? It happened 50 years ago, and no great surprise that the manufacturer was Alfa Romeo, routinely driven to the point of extinction yet hanging on in there even today. Without the Giulietta, it wouldn't have seen out the '50s.

At the end of WW2, Alfa was in dire straits, its Portello factory lying in ruins. If it was going to survive, it needed a volume product. The first 'real' post-war model, the 1900, failed to deliver in terms of numbers, but the Giulietta changed all that. A four-door saloon, with a strong family resemblance to its predecessor, the new Berlina inherited the 1900's basic engine configuration but with a block cast in alloy, capacity being reduced to just 1290cc from near 2 litres. Underneath the staid skin, it followed 1900 practice of coil and wishbone independent front suspension, worm-and-roller steering and a live rear on coils, located by radius arms and an A bracket.

With a history of bespoke sporting machines, Alfa Romeo needed an enormous amount of money to renovate and re-equip before it could build the car, hence the unusual method of financing. Due for release in 1954, the Berlina was still some way off. Enter the Giulietta Sprint. In an effort to counter mounting bad press about non-existent prizes, Alfa recruited Nuccio Bertone's tiny *carrozzeria* to create a new coupé in time for that year's Turin Salon. The legend that he and his team managed it in just 10 days is just that.

In the autumn of '53, test mules had left the factory with styling houses being asked to quote for a prototype sporting model. Felice Mario Boano, then of Ghia, produced an ambitious design while Bertone stylist Franco Scaglione created an elegant shape that won the toss even though Bertone was in no position to build the mooted 1000 units. A compromise was reached whereby Ghia would make the production bodies with Alfa responsible for final assembly.

The Sprint was a sensation. It was clear that, lottery winners aside, Alfa had grossly underestimated demand. Then Boano and Ghia split amid much rancour and the deal to produce shells came to a juddering halt. Bertone was pressed to up its capacity, which it managed largely through state funds, making the switch from wooden formers to steel dies in a much larger workshop. In '55 the belated Berlina finally arrived, joined by a further variation of the 750-series theme: the Spider.

Influence behind the new lid-less model came from America. Max Hoffman imported Alfas in the immediate post-war years, but it wasn't a happy relationship. In a bid to woo him back, the entrepreneur was invited to view the Sprint. Preferring an open car, he had a look at some Pinin Farina mock-ups and nonchalantly remarked that it would sell better with wind-down windows. And that's how the Spider arrived. Sitting on a much shorter wheelbase than the Sprint and Berlina (86.5in against 93.7in), it shared no body panels with its siblings.

All that was lacking was more power. From 1956, Veloce versions of the Sprint and Spider were offered with raised compression ratios and a brace of double-choke Webers meaning 90bhp at 6500rpm, column changes giving way to four-speed floor shifters. The hotter Sprint model gained Perspex side glazing, lighter doors, boot and bonnet which all helped the Sprint reach an impressive 112mph from 1.3 litres. Not that the Berlina was left out in the horsepower race. In 1957, there was the option of a 65bhp engine (and later up to 74bhp) for the TI, enough to shave three seconds off the 0-60mph time to 11.5 secs.

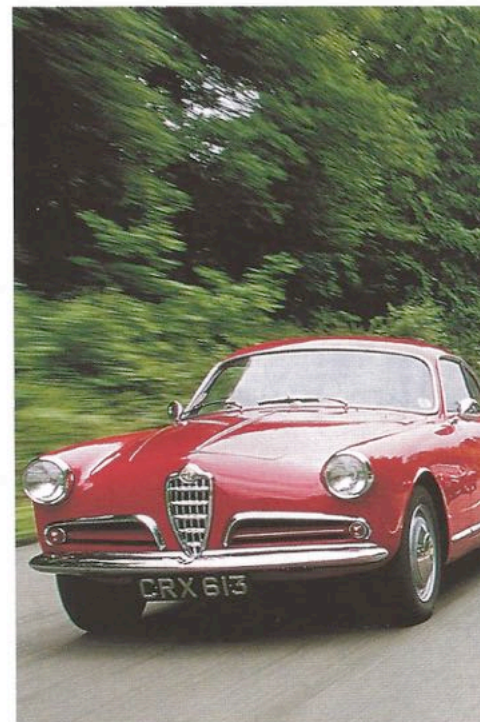
Further revisions aside – regular sporting models getting 80bhp and the end of 'lightweight' Sprint production from '58 – there were few changes until the arrival of the 101-series Giuliettas in 1960. The enduring twin-cam received a raft of detail improvements aimed at strengthening the unit, accompanied by a sturdier 'box, although specific output remained the same.

By then the Giulietta was making a name for itself in competition, the Sprint Veloce in particular taking on the big guns, winning its class everywhere from the Mille Miglia to the Sebring 12 Hours, while taking the occasional overall win such as the '57 Tour de Corse. It didn't take long to appreciate the potential of a proper racer. Step forward Bertone's Sprint Speciale. Unveiled at Turin in '57, and based on a Spider platform, the SS was a study in streamlining, Scaglione's outline later recording a drag coefficient of an astonishing 0.29cd. The shape was refined for production – a couple of inches being removed from the nose, and added to the roofline – but the SS was welcomed into the Alfa family from June '59. With a claimed top speed of 125mph, it was the world's fastest 1.3-litre production car.

The initial batch of 101 cars, built to satisfy homologation regs, had lightweight ally panels (with as many as 20 all-ally examples). Problem was, Zagato had already beaten Bertone to the punch by building its own competition Giulietta, albeit not one that was officially sanctioned.

The SZ's roots grew out of a one-off order by brothers Carlo and Dore Leto di Priolo. Having crashed their Sprint Veloce on the '56 Mille Miglia, they approached Elio Zagato to reclothe the crumpled remains. Thus the SVZ was born. In this form, and when driven by third brother Massimo, this ultra-lightweight (785kg) device beat Jo Bonnier's Sprint Veloce across the line of the Coppa Intereuropa GT race at Monza by 22 secs. Before long, drivers were queuing up at Via Giorgini for replicas. From '57 to '59, 19 were made and, with a hot Virgilio Conrero-tuned engine, there was little to touch it. Certainly not the SS. Aside from class honours on the '59 Targa Florio, the 'flying saucer' was shown up so much that, with the switch from 750 to 101-series, it was promoted purely as a road car, the SVZ becoming a production model (as the SZ, with Kamm-tailed 'Coda Tronca' bodies from '61).

The Giulia saloon arrived in '62 and spelled the beginning of the end for the Giuliettas. The base Berlina was dropped that year, although the TI lingered for another two. From '62, the Sprint and Spider received Giulia upgrades such as longer-stroke 1570cc motor plus five speeds, and disc brakes from '64. That year, the entry-level 1.3-litre Sprint was dropped, only to reappear briefly as a home market tax-break edition, before being canned again. Similarly, the SS was discontinued midway through '62, reappearing the following year with increased engine capacity. By '65, it was all over for the Giulietta, although one Sprint Speciale was built the following year.



Giulietta TI one of few in UK. This car has later Giulia upgrades including 1570cc twin-cam and five speed 'box. Cabin is comfy, but far from plush



Above: early 750-series Sprint is the oldest in UK; 1290cc alloy twin-cam derived from 1900 unit. Left: each of this diverse family has ardent fans



### GIULIETTA SPRINT

**Engine** 1290cc all-alloy twin-cam in-line 'four' fed by single Solex carburettor (twin-choke from '58; twin Webers for Veloce editions)  
**Max power** 65/80bhp @ 6000rpm, 90bhp @ 6500rpm for Veloce, 112bhp @ 6500rpm (Giulia)  
**Max torque** 79.5lb ft @ 4000rpm, 90lb ft @ 6500rpm for Veloce, 105lb ft @ 4000rpm (Giulia)  
**Transmission** four-speed manual; column change until '56; Giulia with five speeds  
**Suspension:** front double wishbones, anti-roll bar rear live axle, trailing arms, upper A-bracket; coil springs and telescopic dampers all round  
**Steering** worm and roller  
**Length** 13ft 2in **Width** 5ft 2in  
**Wheelbase** 7ft 10in **Weight** 1940lb  
**Top speed** 112/103mph  
**0-60mph** 10.5/13.2 secs  
**Price new** £2262 **now** £14,500

### GIULIETTA SPIDER

**Length** 12ft 9 1/2in  
**Width** 5ft 2 1/4in  
**Wheelbase** 7ft 4 1/2in  
**Weight** 1907lb  
**Top speed** 107mph  
**0-60mph** 11/13.2 secs  
**Price new** £2116 **now** £17,000

### GIULIETTA SZ

**Length** 12ft  
**Weight** 1730lb  
**Top speed** 124.3mph  
**0-60mph** 11.2 secs (standard engine)  
**Price new** n/a **now** £55,000

### GIULIA SS

**Length** 13ft 11in  
**Width** 5ft 11in  
**Wheelbase** 7ft 4in  
**Top speed** 122/125mph (claimed)  
**Price new** £2394 **now** £22,000

### GIULIA BERLINA TI

**Power:** 53 (Berlina)/65/74bhp @ 5500rpm  
**Weight** 2017lb  
**Top speed** 97mph (65bhp model)  
**0-60mph** 17.7sec (65bhp model)  
**Price new** £1928 **now** £4000

### PRODUCTION FIGURES

- 750B Giulietta Roadster 8828
- 750B Giulietta Berlina 28,588
- 750D Giulietta Spider 5759
- 750E Giulietta Sprint Veloce 1463
- 750F Giulietta Spider Veloce 1439
- 753 Giulietta TI 27,924
- 101 Giulietta Berlina 7132
- 101 Giulietta Sprint 15,767
- 101 Giulietta Spider 8606
- 101 Giulietta Sprint Veloce 1541
- 101 Giulietta Spider Veloce 1380
- 101 Giulietta TI 22,735
- 101 Giulia Sprint 8081
- 101 Giulia Spider Veloce 1091
- 101 Giulia Spider RHD 398
- 101 Giulietta Sprint Speciale 1371
- 101 Giulia Spider 9958
- 101 Giulietta Sprint Zagato 218
- 101 Giulietta Berlina 3882
- 101 Giulietta TI 39,159

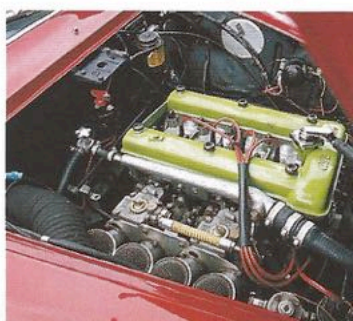
Spider variant produced at behest of US importer Max Hoffman: experts reckon late Giulia with 1.6-litre engine and five speeds the one to go for

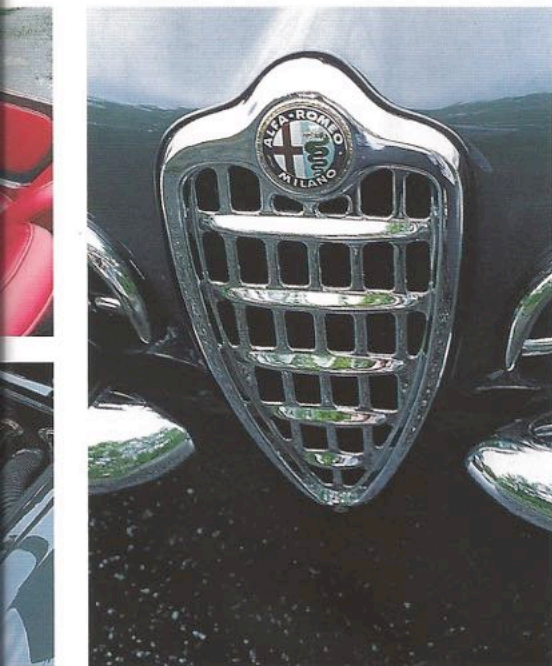


Late-model Giulia SS borrowed heavily from Scaglione's earlier BAT aerodynamic concepts. In early Giulietta trim, it could reach 125mph



Sensational SZ was not official Alfa model until the SS proved a flop on the circuits. Later cars had longer Kamm tail





Seeing the whole family reunited, the shared DNA is obvious, even if there's little real physical similarity barring wheels and corporate grilles. The Berlina TI looks most out of place, but it's a splendid thing. With its upright stance, thoughtfully used brightwork and vestigial tailfins, it's more understated than many more mainstream rivals, but that could be down to unfamiliarity: only 1017 – just over 1 per cent of production – were made in rhd so your chances of having seen one are slim. At £1928 in '59, when a Sunbeam Rapier cost £928, it's even less of a surprise.

The Sprint, by comparison, is a vision of loveliness. This early 750-series edition, an original UK market '56 car, is utterly gorgeous with a styling purity that was partially lost on later cars once the headlights were recessed and tail-lights enlarged (a make-over performed by a young Giugiaro). It's certainly a lot less flashy than the Spider, here an interim model with 750 and 101-series features. Pinin Farina's characteristic dazzle hasn't dated: the proportions are spot-on even if the liberal use of chrome is heavy handed.

The SS still divides opinion. This late-model Giulia SS, as tested by *The Autocar* and campaigned in rallies by Nick Brittan, is either a styling masterclass or a design hoax depending on your point of view. What is beyond question is that it has been cribbed *ad infinitum*, especially the glasshouse and gracefully swept-in tail (take a look at the back end of a series 1 XJ6). Remarkably, considering it isn't a big car, the SS dwarves the Sprint Zagato. This ovalar device is typical of the styling house, function over form a prerequisite. It's utterly captivating and looks as if it has melted over its tubular frame. There's nothing to get in the way, no styling trickery, just curves.

And it's a pig to get into, thanks to the low roofline and roll-cage. Once inside, it's sparse, not least the instruments in a (non-original) crackle-black dash. With the short-backed driver's seat mounted directly to the floor so its pilot can wear a crash helmet (no double bubble here), line of sight is directly in line with the top of the wheel.

The SS is similarly starved of luxuries, but it is swish. Enrico Nardi's wood-rim wheel fronts a delightful painted dash with little instrumentation while Lancia Sport Zagato seats replace the shapeless originals. It's cosy and, for a competition car, you'd soon get very familiar with your co-driver, but the overall effect is as comfortable as it is stylish. Same too for the Spider and Sprint – the less is more approach totally in keeping. In open form, there's more room than you might think, the doors not crowding you in unlike period rivals. In the Sprint, you seem to sit high relative to the wheel even if the roofline doesn't encroach. The TI is poles apart, being sparse to the point of austerity save for the stylised dash. Again, you feel slightly perched, the seats not offering much in the way of support. But it's airy and there's decent room in the back, despite the entire car fitting within a Mini One's footprint.

Meaningful driving impressions are negated by the fact that this rare survivor isn't entirely original: at some point it gained a Giulia 1570cc unit and five-speed 'box, making it an excellent Q-car. It keenly ushers off the line, the gearchange with its direct lever being among the best of its type back in the '60s. Steering is unexpectedly heavy at low speed but loads up beautifully at speed with real precision on turn-in. And it hangs on in there in the twisties. Roll is pronounced but adhesion is exemplary. You can feel the back start to shimmy, a characteristic of all Alfes from this period, and the rear wants to step out, but it's happy there. The pedals might take acclimatisation for the

unfamiliar – the accelerator is hinged from the top, the others from the floor. The clutch demands more respect than you'd imagine while the brakes on this example initially lack feel, the nose weaving under even moderate pedal pressure. Otherwise, this is a truly enjoyable car.

For a 48-year old of such small displacement, the Sprint is a remarkable machine. Like the Berlina, the ride is pliant and, with 2.5 turns lock to lock, the steering is about as precise as it gets with real feedback. Anti-roll bar notwithstanding, lean remains pronounced, but it's just so faithful with it. You never get the impression that it's going to do anything untoward. This gorgeous machine isn't fast by modern standards, but it will rev its little heart out (the tachometer doesn't read below 2k – how cool?) and there's useable torque, too.

With the same basic architecture, the Spider feels much the same, although the reduction in wheelbase does have a negligible effect on ride quality. With a lower centre of gravity, the payoff is more seat-of-the-pants feel through switchbacks where you can make real use of the fabulous steering. Cornering limits really are a lot higher than you can rightly expect of a car of this age.

In standard trim the SS has greater stability at speed although roll is more immediately evident, even if it never threatens to fall off. This car has suspension mods for competition that have nearly eradicated any vices. Cornering is eerily flat despite the modest rubber. You can feel the back end testing your resolve but that's as far as it goes. The warnings are telegraphed but remain just that. And it has real power, due to the extra capacity, with added refinement thanks to the extra cog. Anyone new to these cars may be surprised at the amount of pedal travel before you get any feel from the brakes but they do stop well.

And then the SZ. Which is barking. With an owner-imposed redline of 7000rpm, it sounds like it's going to explode long before, but that's the illusion of an unsilenced racer. There isn't much below 4000rpm but, by five and a half, it's screaming. Weighing 240lb less than a Sprint Veloce, and with a race prepped twin-cam, it really is a flier. Worn synchros make gaunching inevitable despite double declutching but, like its sisters, you can leave it in top just about everywhere. With some negative camber at the front, near zero ground clearance and sharing the Spider's wheelbase, the ride isn't exactly supple but you wouldn't expect that from a racer. Turn-in is rapid and there's the sense that you could really throw this car around. A view backed up by owner James Wiseman: "Having raced an SS before, you had to be that much more precise, which I think had a lot to do with weight and the overhangs. The SZ is more like a 105-series GTA – a hooligan's car."

You can understand why these cars were so popular: there was nothing like them. They're worth acclaim if only for saving Alfa Romeo. And Bertone. And Pinin Farina. All would have gone to the wall without the Giulietta. Choosing a favourite is pointless but, if push comes to shove, it would be the SZ for its looks and restless character: like a five-year old after too much Sunny D. You just want to spank the SZ to within an inch of its life. Whether you could live with it on the road is debatable, but the owner often drives this Targa veteran from his Cotswolds home to London. So, best to have a hotted-up TI as back-up then. ■

Thanks to John Britton (TI), James Wiseman (SZ), Roger Peirson (Sprint), Russell Ware (Spider), and John Williams (SS, tel: 01264 711003), plus Peter Yaxley of the Giulietta Register (tel: 023 80 731391; [www.giulietta.com](http://www.giulietta.com)) for sourcing cars