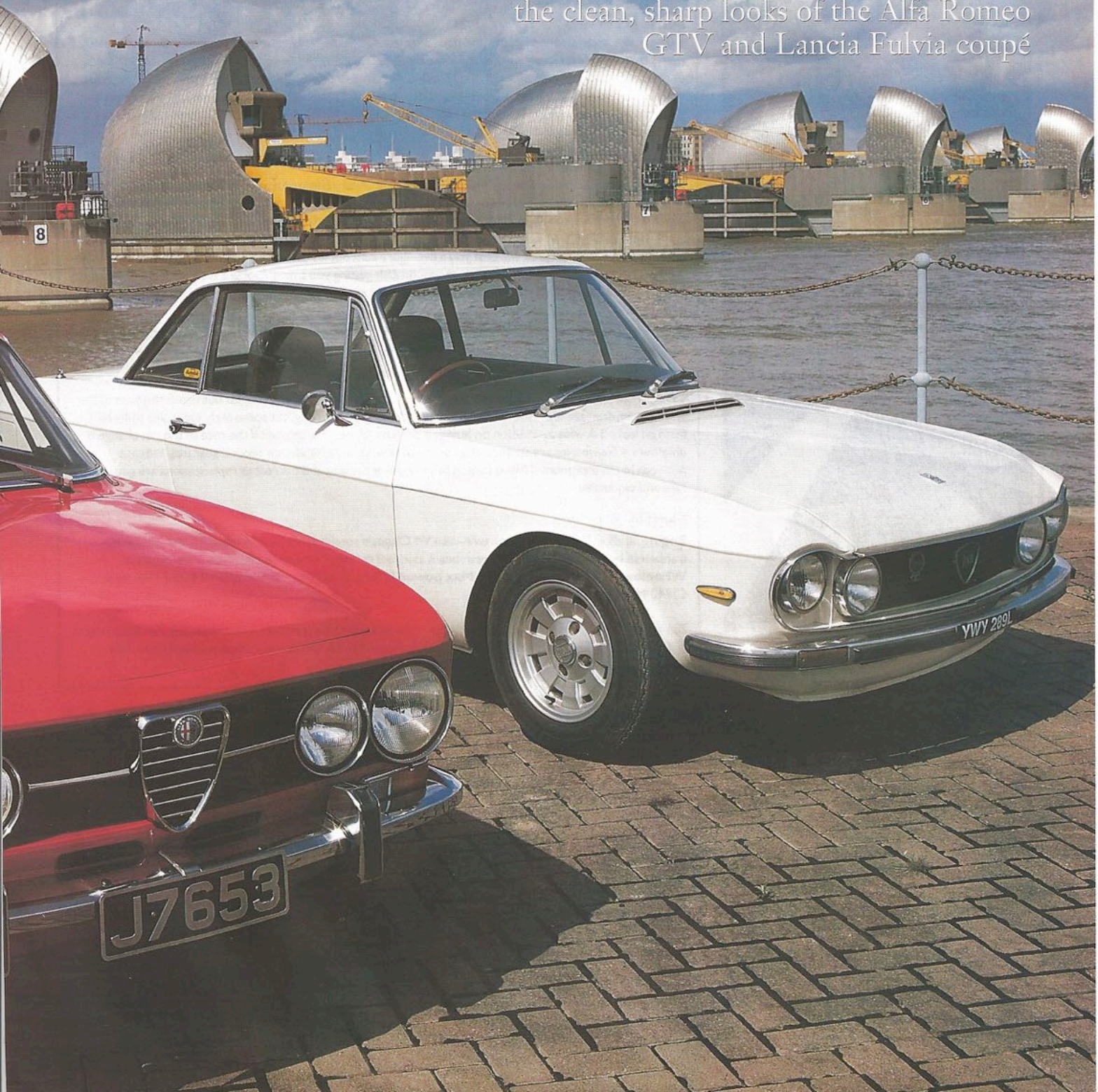


THIS IS THE MODERN WORLD

Styles for the city: Richard Heseltine tries
the clean, sharp looks of the Alfa Romeo
GTV and Lancia Fulvia coupé



Picture the scene: London suburbs circa 1967. You're a 19-year-old mod with mutinous skin and a band called Fuzzy Felt and the Stickle Bricks. Your girlfriend reckons you're a great snog as what you lack in finesse you more than make up for in saliva, but your mother can't fathom why you'll happily spend a month's wages on a sharp suit when your father's hand-me-downs would suffice. When you're not stacking shelves in Owen Owen, you dream of supporting The Who at the Lyceum. Life's full of endless possibilities and, when you've gone platinum, you're going to need an appropriate set of wheels.

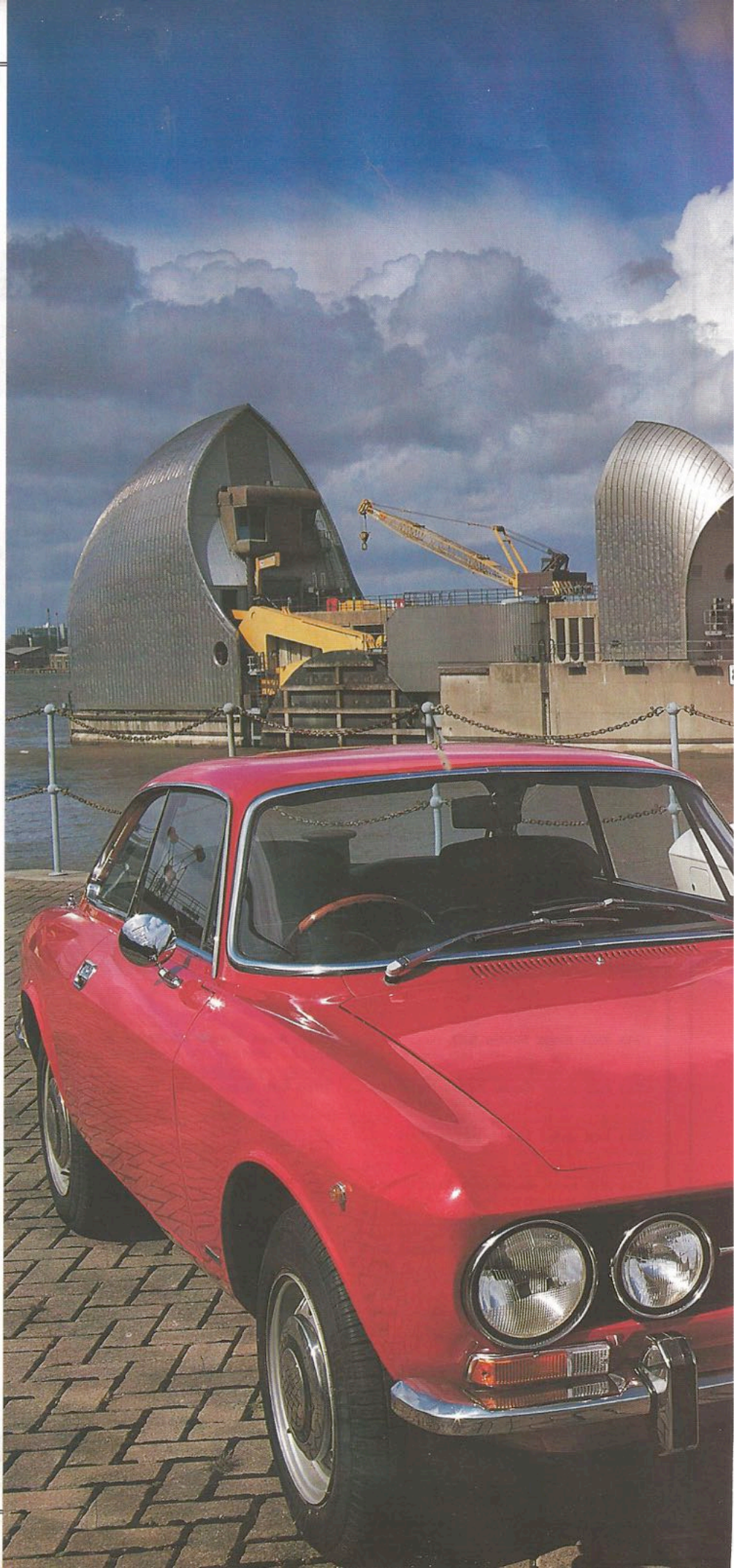
So what's befitting the young, up and coming mod god? Jaguar E-type? Too obvious. Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud? Too gauche. No, something Italian, like your Vespa, except less prone to spewing oil over your Hush Puppies. Perchance an Alfa Romeo 1750 GTV, or would sir prefer a Lancia Fulvia HF?

The two cars are closely matched on price – not that that's a concern any more – and performance. But it's the contrasts in approach that make the comparison interesting. And still does. The Alfa's perfectly proportioned silhouette, drawn by a 24-year-old Giugiaro during his stint at Bertone, is a study in minimalism. There's a self-assured, ready-for-anything swagger to its compact form, the bulging flanks and delicate detailing allied to the expansive glasshouse and narrow pillars adding up to a visual treat that's rarely been bettered. Much like the Castegnaro-styled Fulvia, a handsome, clean-cut GT with just a slight hint of aggression due to its nose-down stance. The lofty greenhouse and spindly pillars, along with that sweetly cropped tail, conspire to produce an outline that's truly timeless.

Step aboard the Alfa and you're rewarded with uncluttered elegance rather than sporting pretensions. With its elegant wooden dash and those stylish Veglia instruments nestling inside jutting hoods, the GTV's cabin's as thoughtfully designed as the exterior, although perhaps a little short on width. The handsome, deep-dished wood-rim wheel is perfectly placed at just the correct angle without obscuring the dials. Pedals sprout from the floor, well-placed for heel and toeing, the only flaw in the plan being the unyielding seats which proffer little in the way of lateral support, forcing your lower back to take the strain on long journeys.

Once inside the Lancia's inviting cockpit, there's a reassuring sense of solidity. Every switch, stalk or door pull looks as if it would crumble to dust if you so much as sneezed but feels as if it has been honed from titanium. The dashboard, fronted by an unlovely, alloy-spoked wheel, is considerably laid out and comprehensively equipped, the bucket seats gripping the driver in all the right areas. Those slim pillars afford the cabin an airy feel and headroom is seemingly infinite. In the Alfa you sit low down; the Fulvia's elevated seating position gives you a commanding view over the flat and featureless bonnet but spend more than two minutes crammed in the back and you soon feel trapped, like a rocker in a crowd of mods on Brighton seafront, legroom being virtually non-existent in comparison to its opponent, even for kids. At least in the Alfa you can just about bear to spend more than two minutes in the back.

On the move, the two cars are even more



TONY BAKER

diverse in character and appeal. With its meaty clutch and dog-leg first, the Fulvia is initially difficult to drive smoothly as it's all too easy to spin the front wheels off the line. As with all Lancias of the period, there's a feeling of well-honed precision, the gearchange stiff but precise with familiarity. But it's still not a patch on the Alfa's five-speeder. Though it requires a long throw for each shift, the actual change is unbelievably sweet, the meeting of metal on metal being barely perceptible. Only the weighty clutch spoils the mood, stop-start pottering around town plating the hamstrings in your left leg.

The Lancia's narrow-angle V4 is a jewel, smoother and sweeter even than the Alfa's enduring undersquare 'four'. It thrives on revs: wind it up through the gears and the Fulvia feels urgent and constantly alive, pulling strongly from 3500rpm as the Solex carbs pop and gobble with a distinctive, intoxicating rasp from the back box.

The GTV's twin-cam has a surprisingly deep-throated cackle, with oodles of low-down torque for what is generally perceived as being quite a peaky motor, but it really comes into its own as you feed in the power from mid-range. Top end punch – from around four grand upwards – is hugely impressive with a heady, spine-tingling whine from the cams. It never stumbles or falters even when full throttle is applied and you really do feel the heart of the car working, as the rev counter needle spirals around the dial. It feels much quicker than its

rival, and though acceleration isn't especially vivid (0-60mph in 9.4 secs), you know that if you need to tap into its reserves of power, you're not going to be kept waiting.

With light, sensitive steering, the Lancia's cornering attitude lacks precision compared to the red machine but is probably more forgiving of less experienced pilots, especially if it's wet. Torque steer isn't especially prevalent and you don't get the plough-on tugging of more powerful front-wheelers. Chuck the car into a bend and the nose invariably runs wide, but it's easily tempered by letting off the gas a touch. The nose obediently tucks in with a little more lock and application of power soon restores perfect traction. Unusually for a front-driver, it's possible to set the car up for a little over-

'The GTV's a hugely rewarding package, a driving experience cars 30 years its junior can only dream of bettering'

steery fun but it takes nerve and preferably plenty of run-off area.

Where the car really scores is in its supple ride which irons out the bumps more convincingly than the Alfa which is harsh over uneven surfaces, the back end bouncing merrily, upsetting the car's handling balance. On smooth roads, the GTV's a hugely rewarding little package, fluent and at ease, repaying your efforts with a driving experience cars 30 years its junior can only dream of bettering. The

The Alfa man

As committed an Alfa fan as you're ever likely to meet, Richard Norris has owned more than 50 including a dozen 105-series models. "It all began in the late '80s when I had a succession of 'Suds,"

explains the affable Alfa parts specialist, "I used to patch them up and drive them until they died and just got another one, but the Bertone coupés have always appealed. This is by far and away the best I've ever had. It only has 19,000 or so miles on the clock and, apart from some touching-up on the boot, is totally original. It's a real timewarp car and

spent most of its life in Jersey with one owner. The car was advertised in the owners' club magazine but, because it was so far away, nobody bothered going for a look. When I saw the car, I just had to have it." It now shares garage space with a Montreal and Richard has no plans to ever sell it on. "Not unless I find a shrink-wrapped GTV with no miles on it." Anyone looking for rare Alfa bits, call Richard's Alfaholics.com on 020 8299 2929.



Going underground: Alfa likes smooth roads – as bumps unsettle the tail. But rear drive allows less compromised steering than Lancia

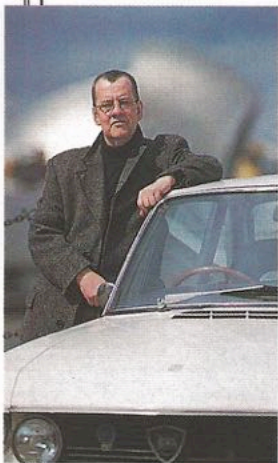
The Lancia lover

"Being front-wheel drive, it's a very different driving experience to the Alfa," says Fulvia owner Ron O'Connor. "I view it as being a sort of refined, oversized Mini. It's certainly a more

pleasurable car to drive on a long journey than a GTV."

A long-time Lancia devotee and one-time mod, Ron has previously owned a Fulvia Sport Zagato. The '71 HF Lusso has been in his keeping since 1988. He's also well versed in Alfa lore, his other classic being a Radford GTA, possibly one of only half a dozen converted in the

late '60s: "I love them both but for very different reasons. Bertone Alfas are lovely cars but are a bit floppy compared to Lancias, which are always very together. They've got lots of character and can be enormous fun to drive, but if it's raining they can be a nightmare, especially on roundabouts. The Fulvia by comparison always feels sure-footed and comfortable too. There isn't that much that goes wrong with them either as long as you maintain them properly."



effortlessly smooth, if light, steering is infinitely more communicative than the Lancia's, providing an intimate sense of what the front wheels are doing with mild understeer never far away, shifting to progressive oversteer if you attempt to carry too much speed into a corner. But you swiftly find yourself kicking out the tail just for the hell of it because it's simplicity itself to catch it again. The car feels so taut, so natural as the tail squats down under power, it's hard to perceive any other model that could be more entertaining cross-country.

The icing on the cake is the superb brakes that don't feel overly assisted and have minimal pedal travel but stop the car straight and true without a murmur. The Lancia's set-up, by comparison, lacks the desired pedal feel of the

'The Lancia is easily the more refined and polished of the two, quality oozing from every pore. But it lacks the GTV's soul'

Alfa, being soft and initially uninspiring.

The Lancia is easily the more relaxing car to drive long distance with a natural motorway gait of around 80mph. Drive one some distance and you won't discover that you have bones in your backside as with the GTV. Unlike with the Alfa, wind noise is never overly intrusive, and the front end always feels reassuringly planted. At cruising speeds, the GTV's engine noise is only drowned out by droning tyre rumble which grates after just a few miles while

lashing rain swiftly upsets the car's equilibrium. The contrasting dynamic abilities due to weather conditions comes as a surprise – the Alfa really isn't a happy bunny on wet roads while the Lancia appears generally unperturbed and indifferent.

Ultimately, driving appeal is what these cars are all about and, for all its faults, the Alfa ultimately comes out on top. It's a hoot to drive in the dry and eager to please. Both cars captivate but it's the GTV that pulls on the heart strings. The Lancia is easily the more refined of the two, quality oozing from every pore, and the crackle and fizz proffered by that idiosyncratic V4 never ceases to bring a smile to your face. But it lacks the GTV's soul. The Fulvia's the more polished of the two but, almost inexplicably, you'll invariably find yourself grasping for the Alfa keys – as long as it's not raining.

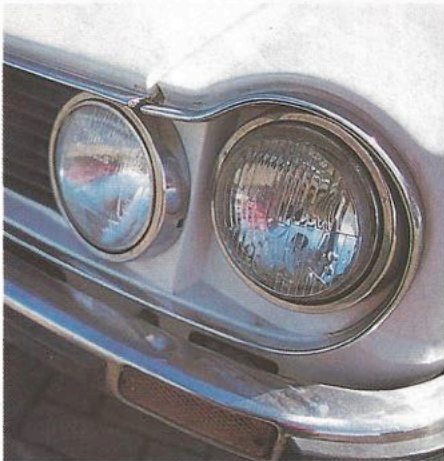
And while styling is always going to be a subjective matter, the Alfa's delicious silhouette proves the biggest draw. It's arguably Giorgetto Giugiaro's finest design (apparently he

prefers the Fiat Panda) and is more overtly masculine than the slightly effete Fulvia. Parked up, the GTV never ceases to arouse attention and affection, more so than the pert and pretty Lancia. And it's the whole 'look at me' gig that's surely what every self respecting mod craves most. ♦

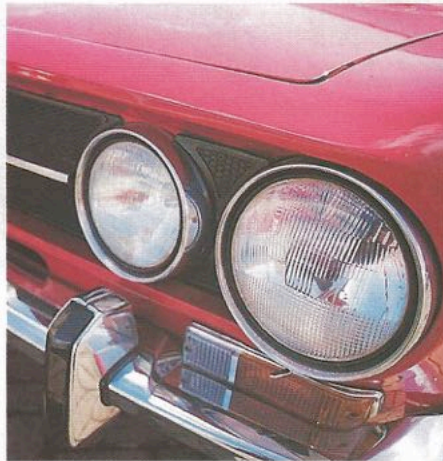
Thanks to Alfa Romeo Owners' Club: 01223 894300 and Lancia Motor Club: 01978 750631



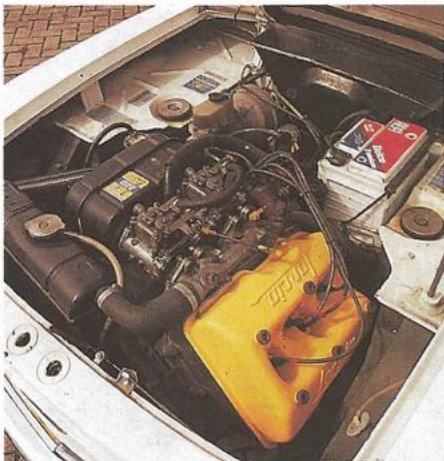
Fulvia expresses itself with delightful fizzes and pops from tailpipe. Can oversteer, and handles wet roads better than the Alfa



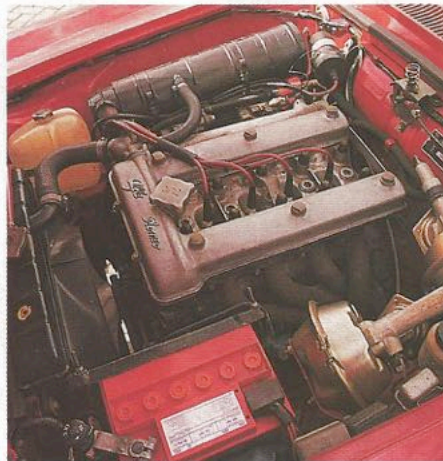
Headlamps raised for British market regs



Late model GTV has twin headlight set-up



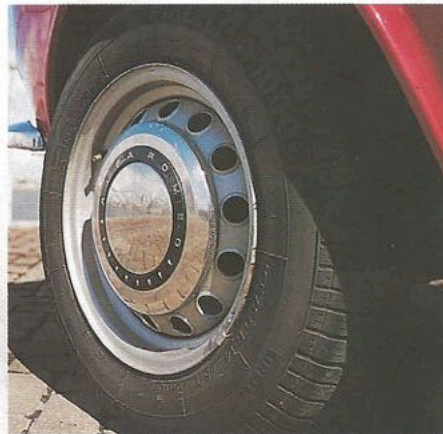
Narrow angle V4 in most potent 1.6 HF form



Alfa's noble twin-cam has truly classic looks



Attractive alloys unique to HF Lusso only



Perforated disc wheels an Alfa constant

The rivals

Volvo P1800

Sold 1960-'72 (c39,000 built) 1778/1986cc, 90/115bhp @ 6000rpm

Top speed 102/115mph **0-60mph** 12.8 secs

Price new £1845 **Price now** £4-7000

Who can forget Roger Moore as *The Saint* aboard a P1800? Quizzical of eyebrow, he looked every inch the dashing man about town. Sadly, the Volvo was a dynamic dullard. Draw your own conclusions.



TVR Vixen

Sold 1967-'73 (738 built), 1599/1798cc, 95bhp @ 5400rpm **Top speed** 106/112mph, **0-60mph** 8.4 secs **Price new** £1723 **Price now** £6000

Plucky Blackpool sportster enormous fun to drive but arsenumbing ride quality lets the side down.

Ford four-pot power (first 12 had MGB lumps) means brisk rather than neck-snapping acceleration but it's more user-friendly than Tuscan brother.



Gilbern Genie/Invader

Sold 1966-'76 (c800 built), 2495/2994cc, 140/158bhp @ 4750rpm

Top speed 110-125mph **0-60mph** 9-9.7 secs

Price new £1752 **Price now** £4-6000

Wales isn't exactly renowned for its motor

industry and, for several years, Gilbern was that industry. Reasonably well made and fast too. Styling vaguely Alfa-ish – sadly more ish than Alfa.



Fiat 124 Coupé

Sold 1967-'75 (279,672 built), 1438/1592cc, 90/118bhp @ 6000rpm

Top speed 100/110mph **0-60mph** 8.9 secs

Price new £1797 **Price now** £2-3000

Closed version of the slinky 124 Spider never entirely happy looking, square-rigged facelift from '72 even less harmonious. A keen performer and handy through the twisty bits. Rust a problem.



Ford Capri Mk1

Sold 1969-'74, (1,172,900 built), 1298-2994cc, 61-138bhp @ 4800/4900rpm

Top speed 84-126mph **0-60mph** 8.4-14.6 secs

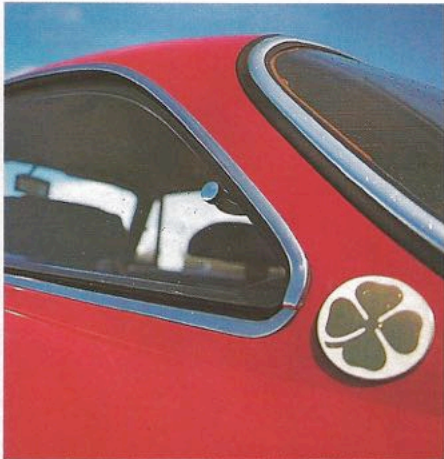
Price new £1004 **Price now** £500-£5000

'The car you always promised yourself' apparently. Huge range of engines and specs offered. Tail happy V6 model enormous fun but image a turn-off.





Actually, it's 1779cc, giving a useful 112bhp



GTV's roofline apes earlier 2600 coupé



Plunging roof means HF's cramped in back



HF most desirable of customer Fulvias



Alfa Romeo GTV What to look for

1 Check sills, arches, tops of doors and boot floor for rot. Some body panels are available but usually costly. If rust is caught early, it can be isolated **2** As with all Alfas, checking the oil regularly is imperative. Look for excessive blue smoke on start up **3** Alloy block suffers from freezing up if there's no antifreeze or corrosion if the wrong antifreeze is used **4** Dampers, particularly at the rear, have a short life span and lower front suspension balljoints wear ahead of the rest **5** Ensure brightwork is in good order as some chrome jewellery is impossible to find

Factfile & prices

Engine all-alloy 1779cc twin-cam 'four' **Chassis** steel unitary **Suspension** front: wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar; rear: live axle, coil springs, radius arms **Brakes** discs all round **Wheelbase** 7ft 8.5in **Weight** 2293lbs **Max power** 112bhp @ 5500rpm **0-60mph** 9.5 secs **Price new** £2248 (1969) **Now** £8000

A GTV like the one pictured will cost you a five-figure sum but it's the exception rather than the rule. Prices start at around **three grand** for a runner, around **£8k** getting you a nicely sorted, usable car. Buy carefully as there are some rogue cars out there and the 1750 edition generally commands a premium over the more torquy 2000GTV.

Lancia Fulvia HF coupé What to look for

1 Fulvias don't corrode to any greater degree than most of their contemporaries but check the base of the windscreen, drainage channels and inner arches **2** V4 engine is strong, but some early examples suffered from oil leaks **3** A wise precaution on buying a car is to replace the cambelt if the date of the last change is unknown **4** Gearboxes are strong but poor synchromesh, in particular on second gear, may indicate previous harsh treatment **5** Make sure all brightwork is present and correct as replacements are getting rare and expensive

Factfile & prices

Engine all alloy 1584cc 13 degree twin-cam V4 **Chassis** steel unitary **Suspension** front: wishbones, transverse leaf spring, anti-roll bar; rear: beam axle, leaf springs, Panhard rod **Brakes** discs all round **Wheelbase** 7ft 7in **Weight** 1977lb **Max power** 115bhp @ 6200rpm **0-60mph** 9.4 secs **Price new** £2940 **Now** £8000

Top whack for a Lusso is about **12 grand** but it would have to be concours. Ultra-desirable Fanalone model will command a **few grand more** – if you can find one. For **£6-8k** you could land yourself a nice, fully sorted example with an MoT.

