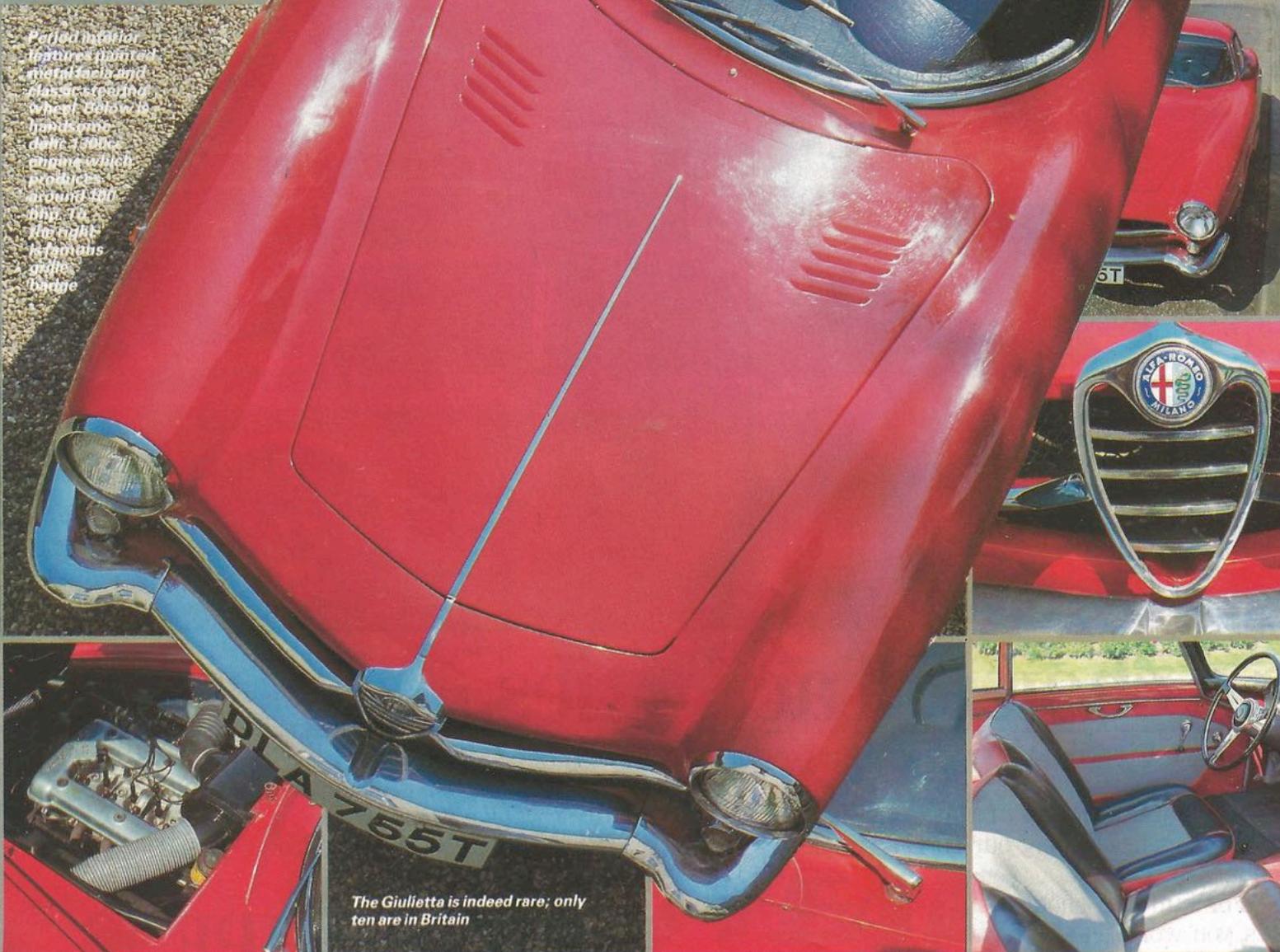


# Rarity: Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint Speciale

Alfa Romeo Giulietta is a truly beautiful shape, especially from above and profile (left) is sleek, causing little wind resistance



Period interior features painted metal facia and classic steering wheel. Below is handsome 1600cc engine which produces around 110 bhp. To the right is famous Alfa Romeo badge



The Giulietta is indeed rare; only ten are in Britain

Every so often Richard Banks from Chatteris, Cambridgeshire, considers selling his Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint Speciale. But because he has a thing about Alfas, his immaculate red coupé finds its way back into the garage at the end of the day.

And while every Alfa Romeo is very much a driver's car, it is easy to understand why Richard would find it very hard to part with his Giulietta. For one thing it is a very rare car on British roads; between the years of 1957 and 1962 a total of only 1366 of this version were produced, all at Bertone's small workshop and using components from Alfa Romeo. Not only was the car built in very small numbers, but it was never officially imported into Britain and at the moment there are only ten cars known to be registered in this country. All cars made were left-hand-drive. When production ceased, the chassis and body carried on with a 1600cc engine, and was renamed the Giulia SS.

The specification of the Giulietta is the other reason why it is such a desirable car. Under the curving bonnet of this remarkably pretty little coupé lies a double overhead camshaft engine of only 1290cc which produces around 100 bhp at 6500 rpm (the manufacturers claimed 116 bhp but this was an SAE rating, achieved without engine ancillaries such as dynamos and fans fitted) and which is fuelled by two twin-choke carburettors. Transmission is by a sweet and precise five-speed gearbox.

The result is an incredibly quick car for such a small engine capacity; the road tested top speed was 124 mph which in fact was the same maximum as a later 2600cc six cylinder Alfa Romeo!

The suspension of the Giulietta is by wishbones at the front and a live axle at the rear, and steering is a worm and roller system, something unusual for such a sporting car even in those days. In the late fifties disc brakes had not yet been universally adopted, and the Giulietta uses enormous drums all round, a type similar to those of one of the company's contemporary Grand Prix cars.

Using the floor panels of another Alfa – the Giulietta Sprint – the Sprint Speciale was designed as a two-seater coupé, and featured some aluminium body panels. And although the interior is very obviously from a previous era of Alfas, it is nevertheless very elegant and stylish even by the stan-

# Latin lover

## Life with this rare and beautiful Alfa Romeo has turned into something of a love affair

dards of today. Compared with the traditional British sports cars of the same period which were almost completely lacking in any sort of creature comforts at all, the Giulietta came very well appointed. Seating was comfortable (unheard of in British sports cars) and being a closed coupé, there were no leaks or draughts.

The Bertone body styling of the Sprint Speciale was indeed beautiful – from all angles except the rear possibly – and its shape also gave the car a very good aerodynamic efficiency. An interesting detail was the little perspex fly screen mounted several inches in front of the windscreen, designed to help keep the screen clear. So exotic for such a small car was the Giulietta that many collectors regard this car as being one of the most desirable Alfa Romeos of all time.

Because the cars were never on sale in right-hand-drive, magazines in Britain which carried out road tests of the Sprint Speciale had to go to some lengths to get hold of one. *Autosport* magazine in 1960 borrowed a car from a garage in Leeds, and in fact this example had been on the Alfa Romeo stand at the 1959 Earls Court motor show and at the time was the only one in the country.

"A jewel of a motor car" was how the magazine's road tester described the car all these years ago, commenting that it was one of the prettiest cars ever to be produced. Interestingly, the tester praised the lack of wind noise at high speed, a tribute to the aerodynamic efficiency.

Probably to the envy of most sporting drivers today, the road tester was able to assess the high speed capabilities of the Alfa on the newly constructed M1 motorway without fear of prosecution, as of course there were then no speed limits on these roads. Road hold-

ing came in for praise: "As for understeer or oversteer, I feel that the car possesses something in between – other words, it is just right!"

Over 20 years on, the Giulietta belonging to Richard Banks nestles in between two more recent examples of Alfa Romeo engineering – a couple of GTV coupés, one being restored, and the other which is Richard's day to day transport. His passion for Alfas started in 1977 when he was involved in racing a most recent style GTV, and he bought the Giulietta the next year.

Since the car was bought, Richard has carried out considerable restoration on the car, but oddly enough, the beautiful red paintwork on his example is not the original colour – traces under the bonnet reveal that it used to be Modena Blue. And of course it goes without saying that the Giulietta needs a lot of attention lavished on it to keep it in its fine condition, even though Richard drives the car purely for pleasure, and sparingly at that.

Driving the Sprint Speciale on the flat but bumpy roads of Cambridgeshire revealed that for such a sporting car, the ride was very impressive indeed, with none of the jarring and crashing of rock hard suspension which is usually associated with sports cars. Also, still instantly noticeable, is the almost complete lack of wind noise, the aspect which drew praise from the testers of 20 years ago. One can have the window fully wound down and not only is it quiet, but there is little wind intrusion.

But thankfully the car is not so quiet as to preclude the traditionally delicious exhaust note of Alfa Romeos. To those outside, the exhaust may seem rather too sharp, but from inside the cabin there is simply a subdued growl,

reminding the driver of the potent twin-cam engine.

As a car for everyday transport, the Giulietta is of course not exactly ideal, as not only is there the constant worry of damaging it – on this count the difficulty of tracking down spares is probably of more consequence than the actual cost – but luggage space is very limited and the car is a two-seater. Being left-hand drive is not too much of a problem but it does demand just that little bit of extra care all the time. It is economical though; Richard reckons that with such a finely tuned engine, careful driving can return up to 40 mpg, but that is assuming the complicated carburettor set-up is precisely right.

There can be little denying that the Giulietta, and most other Alfas for that matter, are well worthy of the title of classic cars. But curiously, old Alfas do not seem to command the prices of other classics, many of which are clearly less well engineered. Why should this be so? It's probable that the problems of maintenance have some bearing. Modern Alfas are well known for rusting badly, and this may of course sour the delightful prospect of owning an old one, though any car of the fifties or early sixties is likely to need careful bodywork care. It's also very difficult to get spares for a car like the Giulietta, which was never officially imported (Richard does in fact have a spare windscreen, which would be almost impossible to get) so breakdowns could be difficult.

But Richard himself thinks that part of the reason his Giulietta is not particularly valuable in relative terms – he thinks it is worth about £3000 – is because some people generally do not know the car, and it obviously cannot stir the memories in the way an old MG or Austin-Healey can. This may or may not be a good thing for the classic Alfa Romeo trade; the cars are bought and sold at lower prices, and are therefore within the reach of more people, but it also means that there is less incentive to carry out expensive restoration on cars in marginal condition.

But the state of the market apart, the Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint Speciale remains a piece of engineering supremacy. It's quicker than most 1300cc cars since, it's a very civilised car for everyday driving, and few cars have been produced which possess such sensational looks. With these qualities rolled into one car, we can quite understand why Richard is reluctant to part with it.