

The Tale of AR10120.00001

or how the first Giulietta Sprint Speciale came to the USA

Jeffrey Vogel takes up the story

I'm a life-long Alfista, and it I believe it all started when I saw the Giulietta Spider in the Fellini film "La Dolce Vita".

I have always admired the looks and performance of the Giulietta trio of Spider, Sprint and Ti versions but never had the chance to acquire their more exotic cousins, the Sprint Speciale or Sprint Zagato until the early 1980s. By then I was married to an Italian lady and spending most of the year in Northern Italy just a few kilometers from Arese.

I was fortunate enough to meet and become friendly with the movers and shakers of the nascent vintage racing scene in Italy. At that time, there were scores of small garages and tuners from the 50s, 60s and early 70s, still active to varying degrees. Auto Delta had closed its doors but its employees were spread out all over the Milan area.

There was one man, Angelo Chiapparini, who was well known as a tuning maestro of the TZ series. Out of a small shop near Arese, he repaired racing Alfas both 'in their day', and also for their second life as vintage racers. When I met him, he had some other Alfas on consignment which were for sale. In his garage were both the first Sprint Speciale and the first Sprint Zagato on offer. Even then the SZ was selling at a huge premium to the SS and I had always admired the look of the SS. The car on offer was the first low nose SS with an all-alloy body, it had its original Veloce engine and no modifications from day one. It carried its 1960 Milanese targa (registration plate) and Auto Club d'Italia log book.

I kept the car in Como for a year or so and drove it in a series of Italian Alfa events organized by Scuderia Del Portello and the Italian Registry Alfa Romeo. The car was fine in the flat plains of Emilia Romagna and lower Lombardia but struggled in the mountains. Angelo Chiapparini told me that he was quite comfortable with a 7000 rpm redline but, while the engine was willing, I generally wasn't. The best day of my ownership was attending a meeting at Monza and being able to drive it at speed around the circuit. No helmet, belts or other impediments in those days.

By the mid 1980s, we were spending more time in the USA than in Italy and when we had a container of goods shipped to New York, I elected to put the SS inside. When it arrived at the port of Newark, I spent a day wrestling it from customs and the longshoreman.

Finally, I drove it to New York City and, very early the next morning, enjoyed a glorious run to eastern Long Island into the rising sun. It was steady and quiet at an indicated 130 kph. Oddly, the car seemed to have shrunk since being in Italy.

I kept the car in Bridgehampton and was interested in going VSCCA racing with it. Some minor reversible modifications were called for but the real trouble came when I tried to drive the vehicle with a helmet on. There was no way that this could be done. The roof was so low, I could not get in the car with my helmet on unless I reclined the seat so far back that I couldn't reach the wheel.

I looked into removing the seat (which had been my solution with another racer) but this did not offer a reversible solution. I drove the vehicle to an Equinox event in Vermont and again was frustrated with the ability of the 1300cc to haul the car in the mountains. I was also spoiled because my other Alfa was a 1600cc Giulia Spider with a very potent engine.

Then there came a day when a pre-war Alfa came my way and to make room in the garage I sold the SS.

It went to a well known collector on Long Island and, the last I heard, it was not getting enough regular exercise out on the road. I always drove the SS on the Milan plates and registration and, when local police stopped me, I just spoke Italian at them and would confuse them until they just waved me off!

It was an exciting, original car and if I had had more space and time it would still be in my stable. I can only imagine what it would have been like with a 1600cc engine in place.

For those interested in documentation, the targa was MI 991009, and the car was first sold by Alfa Romeo on 19th July 1960 to Luigi Cervia for 1,750,000 lire, and I was the sixth owner.

This is a fascinating piece of history on an important car. Since the car was built on 3rd March 1959, it appears that Alfa Romeo must have continued to use the car for a considerable period of time, presumably for testing and development purposes, before selling it to its first lucky owner, Luigi Cervia. I wonder if he knew that the car had many miles under its wheels already! Ed.



Top and opposite: The first Sprint Speciale in Long Island, New York, still on its original Milan plates, just to confuse the cops!



Opposite: The engine bay when the car was still in Italy



Opposite: In company with the hot-rod 1600cc Spider

