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June, 2006 - [Mark J. McCourt](#)

Most automotive styling and engineering exercises built for display at car shows-"dream cars," if you will-have their day in the spotlight and quickly fade away, crushed or stored in a warehouse. The lucky ones live on when production vehicles adopt their styling or mechanical features. Some have become legendary in their own right, including GM's 1938 Buick Y-Job and Volkswagen's 1994 Concept One-and so have the Alfa Romeo BAT 5, 7 and 9 by Bertone.

The Turin, Italy-based firm Carrozzeria Bertone advanced the science of aerodynamics in car design in the early 1950s; stylist Franco Scaglione worked with Nuccio Bertone to create a series of aerodynamic design studies, testing how much speed and stability could be gained by mating streamlined bodies with standard engines. Alfa Romeo contracted Carrozzeria Bertone to build three of these design studies over their 1900 Sprint chassis, and the results were christened Berlina Aerodinamica

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1970 Alfa Romeo GTV 1750 **\$38,000**

Tecnica (BAT) 5, 7 and 9. These cars, like most styling exercises of the day, were road worthy.

BAT 5 debuted at the 1953 Turin Motor Show. This metallic charcoal car featured a tapered body with enclosed front and rear wheels and a teardrop-shaped cabin; its rear windows flowed back with the roof to a raised spine that finished ahead of the tail. A deeply inset grille, split by a protruding nose, was flanked by bowed front fenders with slotted vents behind each front wheel. Aeronautical studies of fin shapes and angles led to the car's striking tailfin design-curved units pierced by slim, angled cuts to relieve air pressure. The result was a slippery drag coefficient (Cd) of 0.23.

One can imagine how revolutionary the BAT 5 looked at the auto show; 1954's BAT 7 was even more flamboyant. The metallic pale blue BAT 7 had a prominent dorsal fin that ran down the roof to bisect compound-curved rear windows. That glass was almost shaded by tall, inward-curving slotted tailfins. Hidden headlamps and careful streamlining around the 16-inch wire wheels allowed BAT 7 to achieve an incredibly low 0.19 Cd, a figure no production car has yet reached. This, combined with the car's DOHC 115hp, 1,975cc four-cylinder engine and 2,200-lb. weight, let it hit 124 mph.

The silver BAT 9 of 1955 was the most production-ready of the trio. It differed from the others with a protruding horizontal line that ran around the rear of the car from the leading edge of each door. BAT 9's rear window design was an amalgamation of 5 and 7 shapes, and its fins were smaller than earlier versions. A new nose treatment used the traditional Alfa shield grille flanked by wide horizontal air intakes, and glass-covered headlamps set in the leading edges of the fenders.

While the cars were too wild to make production intact, the aerodynamic lessons that Bertone learned from the BATs were put to use on the stunning Scaglione-penned Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint Speciale. Although BAT 5, 7 and 9 weren't shown together when new, they were united in 1989 at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, in 1992 to celebrate Carrozzeria Bertone's 80th anniversary, and again on the lawn at Pebble Beach in 2005, all to great fanfare.

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