



*Alfa Romeo Guilletta Spider Prototype by Bertone.
Maggi & Maggi photo, compliments of Coit, Lopresto, Milan*



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See it on the Green!

Giulietta Spider Prototype by Bertone

Written by Maurizio Tabucchi, Translated by Pietro Castiglioni

Without trying to give the impression of being sacrilegious, I am convinced that the much loved Giulietta Spider, the "signorina," as the legendary Pinin Farina nicknamed her, was not an innovative model – in other words, this model was not a stepping stone under a stylistic point of view. The Giulietta Spider was a beautiful car with a perfect shape. A car that immediately met unconditional sales success without having many revolutionary stylistic innovations. The Giulietta Spider was styled following the design of the day and met immediate success with the public despite the fact that it lacked originality.

The Giulietta Spider Prototype was a smaller version of the beautiful Lancia Aurelia GT Spider (B24), a model that had been introduced by Pinin Farina in January 1955, and the production model of this car followed the footsteps of the evolution of that same Lancia Aurelia GT convertible.

Pinin Farina took advantage of the success achieved with Lancia to attract the attention of Max Hoffman, who in those days was the person that could make it possible to import this car, in order to get a large order of this two-seater Giulietta convertible. In order to achieve this goal it would have been necessary to build something radical and totally different from those outdated spiders that were coming out of England following the stylistic search of post-war Italy that began with the Cisitalia 202, which was considered a Pinin Farina masterpiece. In order to answer once again to the "Old England" fascination, Pinin Farina was very careful to keep the image that his firm was portraying to the public; and for this reason he kept hidden the fact that Franco Martinengo was the person responsible for the design of this new model. Pinin Farina instead chose to give full credit to Franco Scaglione, who at the time was employed by his company, for the design of the Giulietta Spider. When Nuccio Bertone read in the newspapers that Scaglione was credited for the design of this extraordinary new model that his company built, he became infuriated. Scaglione defended himself by saying that Bertone did not employ him and added that the international recognition given to him was a recognition given only to him personally. Since he never enjoyed having to follow the rules by working for one company, Scaglione offered his services as free lance.

Max Hoffman was an excellent automobile importer, who almost single-handedly established the import vehicle business in the United States. Having Austrian origins, Hoffman was known for his elegance; however, he was best known for his entrepreneurial ability. It was such that he was the first to



Photos compliments of Dott. Lopresto, Milan

discover that the Jaguar XK 120, the Mercedes 300 SL and the Porsche 356, very prestigious European models, would be loved by the Americans. These models, which were displayed in the wealthiest Auto Showrooms of New York, represented the dream that can be fulfilled by a fast growing economical society. Hoffman signed a contract with Alfa Romeo for the purchase of 600 cars, which were mostly going to the wealthy California market. For Alfa Romeo, a company that did not produce a large quantity of cars, 600 vehicles represented a large order! As it had occurred with the Giulietta Spider, Alfa Romeo management, with headquarters still located in the escort of Milan, positioned two of the most important coachbuilders of Turin against one another and commissioned each company to build a prototype that met the contradictory requirements of Hoffman. The final decision was made, and Pinin Farina was chosen. Nuccio Bertone, however, did not lose any sleep over this decision because he was already busy keeping up production of the Giulietta Sprint. The situation took a dangerous development, which threatened the cancellation of the order. It was caused by a disagreement between Hoffman and Alfa Romeo regarding the final version of this model. It was the negotiation ability of Rudolf Hruska, an Austrian manager, who was responsible for the designing and the production of Alfa Romeo in 1954, that the deal was finalized. As a result, the 600 spiders were shipped overseas, bringing happiness not only to the rich Californians, but also to Alfa Romeo management because they opened a door to a very important market, a market that before that moment they had no hope to enter. The fact that both Hruska and Hoffman had Austrian roots certainly had some influence in making the deal happen, and the two of them already knew each other and this helped to smooth misunderstandings. The Pinin Farina Spider had to improve the Spartan look that was featured in the first version, and it became a surprisingly comfortable convertible equipped with side windows that went up and down. The Giulietta Sprint Spider was able to accomplish something that was never achieved by a relatively economical two seater.

This is the end of the story; now let's talk about the beautiful Giulietta Sprint Spider, which was the name given at the beginning to this model. This car was meant to be an open Giulietta Sprint, the second of the only two prototypes that were built by "Carrozzeria Bertone" following the design provided by Franco Scaglione. It had a front-end design that was so modern and pleasant that even today it would be

considered contemporary. However, it was the fact that this model was ahead of its time that probably led to its failure, because instead of the gorgeous spider Bertone, Alfa Romeo chose the nice Pinin Farina version.

It was finally decided that Pinin Farina was the one that best interpreted the concept of a new modern spider. However, Bertone kept this car for a while to confirm that – without any doubts – he liked this car, but most of all, he had paid for it!

Alfa Romeo, in order not to influence the client, placed on the car only the Alfa Romeo emblem, since it did not want to reveal to the client if one or the other "carrozziere" was the one responsible for building each of the two models. However, I can only imagine that Hoffman, who certainly had an attraction for the Arnold Bristol that was designed by Franco Scaglione, had recognized Carrozzeria Bertone work.

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Let's clear things up regarding the two official prototypes of Nuccio Bertone and Pinin Farina which were AR1495*00002 and AR1495*00003. Both cars were purchased by Max Hoffman on February 22, 1955 with invoice number 2063E91 and 2062E90, then shipped by boat to the United States. AR1495*00001 is another Pinin Farina prototype on display in Arese at the historic museum "Museo Storico Alfa Romeo," while AR1495*00004 is the serial number of the car featured in this article. The Alfa Romeo archives indicate that on April 24, 1957, this car was sold used by Alfa Romeo to a certain Renzo Garuti. After that, there is no record. It reappeared a few years ago and those that did see it came up with the conclusion that, since it resembled the other, this car was certainly modified. Had this car been modified, the modifications were so numerous that in order to bring it back to its original condition it would have taken an enormous amount of work and would not have been financially feasible.

When the current owner of this car asked me to take a look at his car and oversee the restoration, this car had the aluminum sheet components already detached from the body.

In addition, a new front end, identical to its sister car, was already made and would have been soon replaced. As soon as I looked at the car, I was immediately certain that the front end that was in the process of being eliminated was absolutely original and I was sure that I had made an amazing discovery!

The second Bertone spider was built with aluminum sheet

metal, and therefore was not identical to the other one, as anyone would have sworn, but possessed a stunning body that was more refined and smooth.

This was a very interesting discovery because over the years there was a certainty that the two Bertone models were identical, and all the Alfa Romeo historians were very convinced of this fact!

As a result, I had to "force" the owner and the restorer to forget all about the new front end and make them put back in place the original aluminum sheet metal they had removed, while replacing only the components that were in direct contact with the body which were corroded. Luckily they were in full agreement with me. After close examination of the structure of the car, Corrado Lopresto, the owner, agreed with my conclusion. The body of this car, with its elegant and smooth style was indeed original. However, my discovery could have suffered an ugly setback if someone found indications that could have proven me wrong. Once the body was restored, even though the aluminum panels and all other components were extensively examined and photographed in the minimum details, all traces would be covered by new paint and all the parts reassembled, proof of its originality would have been erased and anyone could have come up

with vicious accusations. We were kissed by a lucky star when the previous owners produced photos of the car with the identical configuration of the car when it had been found. At this point, there were no more doubts; this was the Scaglione's spider and it had not been modified in any way.

The last endeavor that Lopresto had to endure, which I made clear was a firm condition and he obliged with enthusiasm, was the manufacturing of a missing section of the original seat covers, made of vinyl with a stiff support and a hot embossed design, which would have been impossible to duplicate unless we had available a very expensive tool. However, Lopresto never gives up, and after a lengthy search, he was able to reach his goal: the original interior component was partially recovered and matched with the color of the car, and, with the aid of documentation, was reproduced naturally, using the original nitrocellulose paint.

The genesis of the Giulietta Spider, a classic automobile model of the post-war, a small car that was the symbol of a happy period without any worry and many dreams is now completed. Luckily, none of the prototypes were destroyed and the very first two models that landed in New York on that cold day of March 1956 were reunited once again and today they are part of the same Swiss auto collection. ■



Photos compliments of Dott. Lopresto, Milan