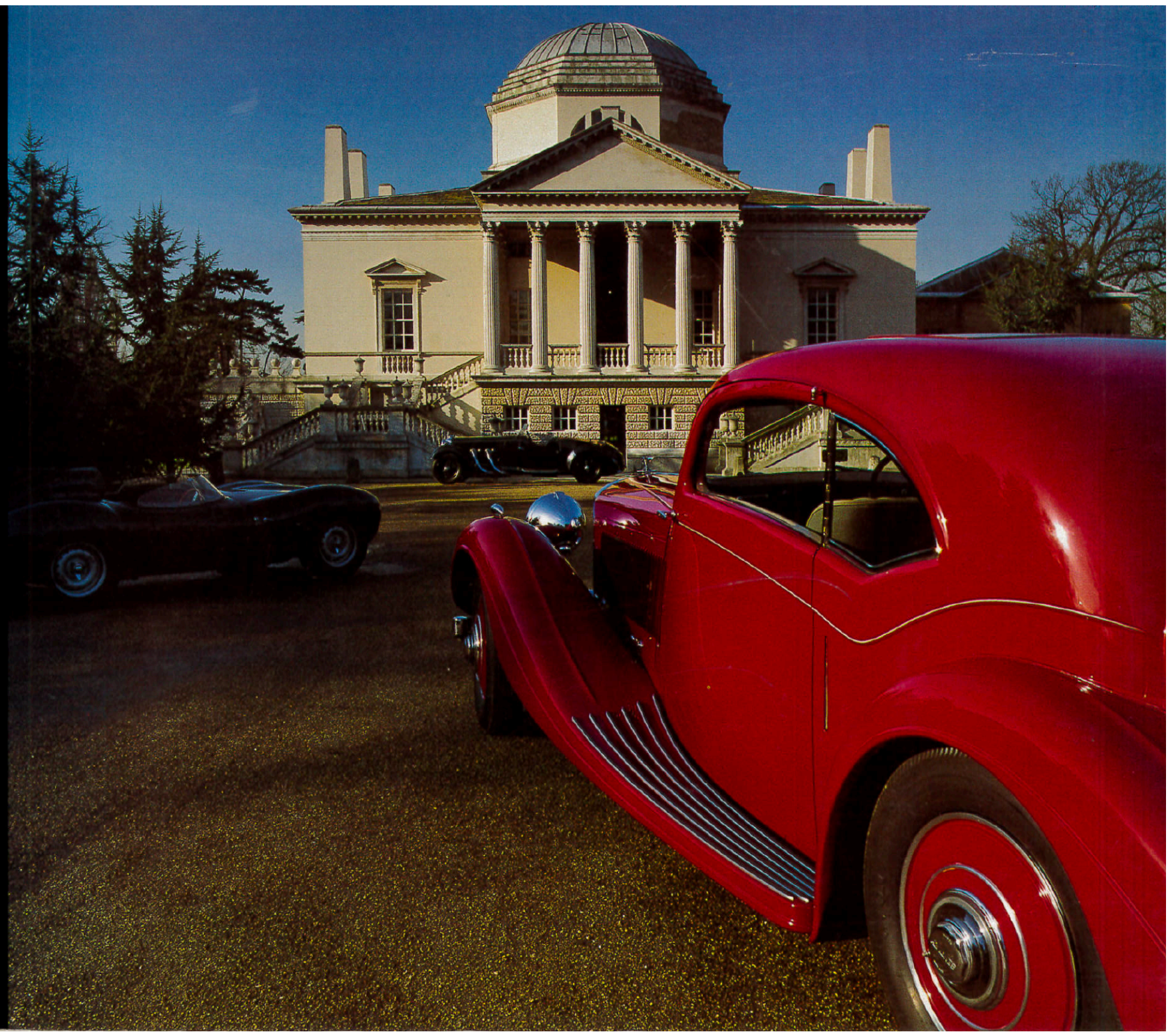


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Formerly the Property of  
*Cavaliere Benito Mussolini*

CAVALIERE

LOT 55

### 1935 Alfa Romeo 6C 2300 Sport

Registration Number: Roma 96005

Chassis Number: 700635

Engine Number: 700635

Cylinders/Capacity: 6/2300cc

Coachwork: Spider by Touring of Milan

Refer Department



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*Il Duce*, driving his personal car, confers with General Badoglio during military manoeuvres in 1935

Many of the cars which are promoted as once having been owned by a head of state are nothing of the sort. Close examination will often reveal that the car was registered to a ministry and was one of an official pool of cars which the said head of state may or may not have sat in.

The car we are proud to offer, however, was the personal property of Benito Mussolini, a dedicated Alfa Romeo enthusiast. The log book, a copy of which comes with the car, records that the original owner was *Sua Eminenza* (His Eminence) *Cavaliere Benito Mussolini* whose address is given (nice touch) simply as *Roma*. Photographs exist of Mussolini in the car both as a passenger and as the driver.

The 6C 2300 was the last of the generation of six cylinder cars designed by Vittorio Jano which had begun in 1925 with the appearance of the 6C 1500.

This model evolved through 1750 and 1900 versions, still with the same chassis, until it reached its ultimate development in the 7th series, the 2300. In 1934 the 6C 2300 scored a 1-2-3 in the 24 hour Targa Abruzzo at Pescara and followed that with a 1-2 in the same race in 1935. Chassis number 700635 was in fact the last 6C 2300 to be made before the Pescara model (named after the race), with an entirely new chassis, was introduced. Equally of interest, this is the rare Sport version, one of a small number of high performance 6C 2300s built by Alfa Romeo using engines tuned to the specification developed by Scuderia Ferrari during the 1934 racing season.

The spider body by Touring of Milan is believed to be the only spider that Touring produced for the model – we cannot verify this, but of the six 6C 2300s in the 1936 Mille Miglia, this was the only open car, the rest were

berlinettas. This shows a personal touch by Mussolini who ordered the bodywork specially for his car; he was clearly a wind-in-the-hair enthusiast. Another personal touch is that after his first year of ownership, Mussolini had the windscreen glass cut down (it is now in its original form).

Just as it is rare to find a genuine 'head of state' car, it is even rarer to find one which was specially ordered by that person to his own requirements. More often than not such cars were built by a company and then humbly presented to the leader as a mark of respect. One would not, however, offer long odds on the chance that *Il Duce* paid list price.

As well as being an Alfa Romeo enthusiast, Mussolini was also a motor racing fan and it was through his direct influence that the Mille Miglia took place. One of the selling points for the race was that the mile had been a Roman measurement, Mussolini was for all things Roman, and another was that every route went through Rome.

It was Mussolini who sanctioned the use of thousands of troops to marshal the route and inspired young *Fascisti* to position themselves on dangerous corners at night to light the way with flaming torches. Mussolini's son, Vittorio, drove a 1500cc Fiat in the 1937 Mille Miglia and a major race in Italy was named after Mussolini's son-in-law and Foreign Secretary, Count Ciano.

Mussolini entered the car we are proud to offer in the 1936 Mille Miglia where it was driven by his personal chauffeur, Ercole Boratto, although it remains a matter of conjecture how much driving Boratto actually did. At the time it was mandatory to have two drivers in a car and the suspicion lingers that the 'passenger' (professional racing driver Mancinelli) did the serious work while Boratto took the credit on behalf of his boss.

In 1936 Italy was going through a severe economic crisis in the wake of its invasion of Abyssinia and the imposition of trade sanctions by other countries. Mussolini was keen to explore ways of making Italy self-sufficient in fuel and that year there was a special class in the Mille Miglia for cars using alternative fuels. This led to the bizarre sight of six entries trailing charcoal burners to provide gas for their engines. The quickest of these averaged a breathtaking 32mph and finished 18 hours after the winner. They were not the most popular competitors with the marshals who manned the check points along the route.

Mussolini entered his car, the one we offer, converted to run on alcohol. Just as the racing exploits of his chauffeur owed more to propaganda than to reality, so this move, perhaps, was not quite as it seemed. There was a tank for alcohol mounted in the dickey seat, and it is still with the car, but there was also a two-way tap on the cockpit floor and the conventional petrol tank remained...

From talks which the present owner had with the late Gian-Battista Guidotti (a former Alfa works team member who co-drove the 1937 Mille



Mussolini in his car on a propaganda tour of northern Italy in 1935

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Miglia with Boratto) it became apparent that this car had the alcohol tank on board to allow *Il Duce* to make a political gesture but it really ran on petrol for most of the race.

We will probably never know the full story, but Boratto and Mancinelli brought the car home 13th overall and third in class. Thereafter Boratto was more selective of his 'passenger' and his success improved in direct ratio to the driving skills of the passenger.

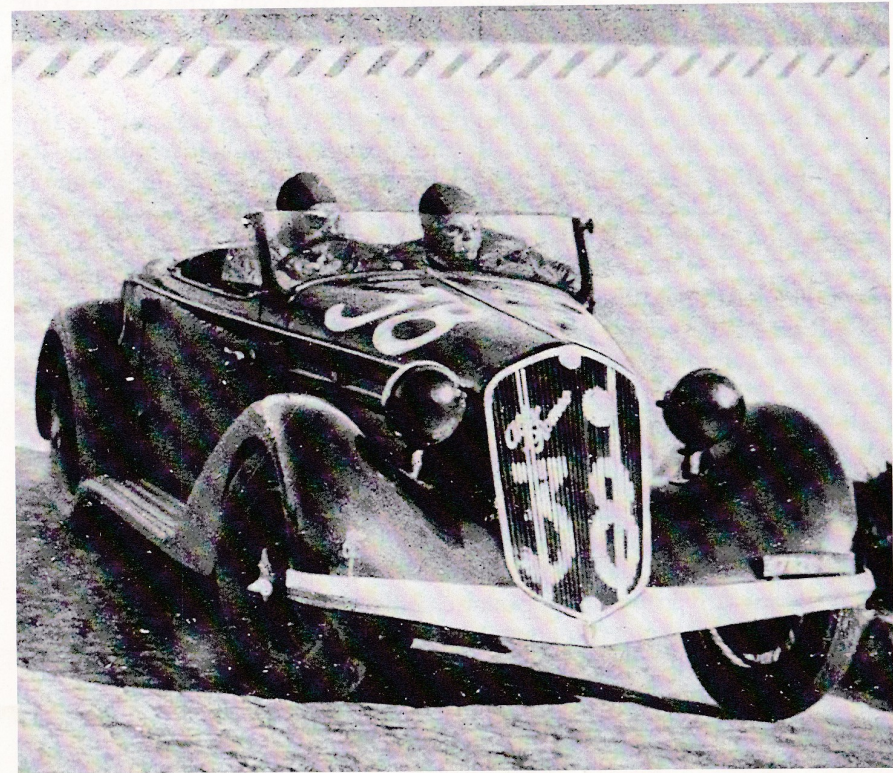
Mussolini kept the car until November 1939 (Italy was still a neutral country at the time) when he sold it back to the works. It then passed to a lesser member of the Fascist party who painted it army green, although we do not know if it was used during the war. At the end of hostilities the owner hid the car, afraid that it might be recognized. He eventually died in the late 1960s, and his relatives inherited the car.

The present owner, a respected historian and collector of classic cars, had known of the possible existence of the car for many years. He eventually tracked it down, complete but in a rather sorry state, and negotiated its purchase from the second owners family in 1972.

As befits somebody with an acute sense of history, he has restored the car with extreme sympathy. The key word is restoration, not replacement. Nothing has been replaced if it can possibly function in its original state, so, for example, the upholstery and hood are original, and even the original phosphorus illumination of the instruments works. Such scrupulousness is rare and, in our view, makes the car even more attractive. The present owner offers his help to the purchaser to complete the restoration, the cost of which, he says, will be minor. It is only in view of his advancing years that he has now, after much deliberation, decided to part with the car.

Any Alfa Romeo 6C 2300 is a highly desirable car in its own right. It was backed by the genius of Vittorio Jano, perhaps the most complete of the handful of really top-line designers in the history of the motor car. It had a successful competition career and, together with its 1500, 1750 and 1900 predecessors, brought the Alfa Romeo marque to its position of eminence amongst sporting car manufacturers.

This truly important car has not been seen in public for over fifty years. The fortunate purchaser will therefore become one of a handful of people to have



Ercole Boratto, in partnership with Mancinelli, representing *Il Duce* on the 1936 Mille Miglia

driven it from new. He or she will also be buying the only known 6C 2300 Sport with a spider body and a car of unusual originality. A wonderful story attaches to it and, above all, it has not been spoiled.

This car was a prop on the stage of world events and from any point of view must represent a unique piece of 20th century history.

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