

Alfa Romeo

Market Review & Buyer's Guide

La rivista del velocissimo e del bellissimo



1937 Alfa Romeo 8C 2900B

Chassis number: 412012
Engine number: 422008

Alfa Romeo retired from racing at the end of a very successful 1932 season when the monoposto "Tipo B" had carried all before it. In 1933 the Tipo Bs were locked away in Portello and Alfa were represented only by private teams, principally Scuderia Ferrari in Modena, who were uncompetitive with outdated 8C 2300 Monzas.

Vittorio Jano started work in October 1934 on a new all independently sprung Tipo C (or 8C 35 as it is now more commonly known) Grand Prix car which was introduced late in the 1935 season. The sports car derived from the Tipo C, the 8C 2900, was developed simultaneously and appeared for the first time at the Paris Salon in 1935.

The 8C 2900 chassis was a boxed frame very similar to the Tipo C with a wheelbase of 2.75 meters. Suspension was independent all around, at the front by double trailing arms and at the rear by swing axles, radius arms and a transverse leaf spring. Alfa designed a clever system utilizing an adjustable pin which effectively shortened the spring length when under load to either wheel, thus eliminating the worst of the swing axle problem. Huge hydraulically activated brake drums proved to be very effective.

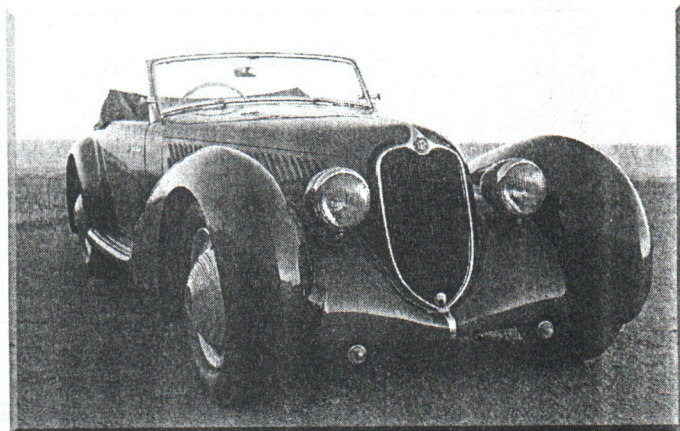
The engine was essentially the one from the earlier 2.9 liter Tipo B (known as the P3). Head and block were *testa fissa* (fixed head), cast in units of four cylinders bolted together in the middle on either side of the gear tower which drove cams, pumps, ancillaries and the twin Roots superchargers. The crankshaft was in two pieces, supported by ten main bearings. Power output varied but the race cars gave at least 220 bhp.

The car offered here, chassis 412012, was first delivered in 1937 to Piero Dusio, who later founded Cisitalia, with cycle-fendered spider coachwork. Raced at the Susa Moncenisio Hillclimb barely a month after delivery, Dusio finished second, splitting the factory 2.9s.

Following its racing career, 412012 was rebodied by Pinin Farina in the present cabriolet style, passing through a number of hands until it disappeared from view in 1947. Its engine was acquired by Bill Clark in New Zealand as a spare for his Tipo B GP Alfa. Then, in 1989 412012 surfaced with an incomplete Jaguar XK engine swap in Sacramento, California.

Reunited with its original engine 422008 and restored by Tony Merrick, 412012 was outright winner at the Louis Vuitton Concours d'Elegance in London in 1992, class winner at Bagatelle in 1992, and participated in the Mille Miglia Storica.

The car pictured was sold at Christie's auction at Pebble Beach, August 29, 1999, for \$4,072,500 including buyers com-



mission. Other than a little dust, it showed scant evidence of use or wear since its restoration.

In "The Alfa Romeo Tradition" Griffith Borgeson, a most astute student of great cars, great engines and great engineers, describes the 8C 2900 as "an ultimate among ultimate cars." Alfa built only 44 of these barely-disguised GP cars and they rarely come on the market, either privately or publicly. It is rare that they have the history of this example. The amount paid appropriately recognizes its history, beauty, condition and significance.

Driven onto the block, 412012's demeanor was surprisingly docile. The exhaust was quiet, the car was tractable. This was no unruly stallion posturing, neck arched and nostrils flared. Instead it did what it was asked without attitude or demonstration.

However, later in the evening, with the new owner's permission, Christie's Miles Morris took me for a demonstration drive that proved that the 8C 2900 is more than worthy of the cavallino which is rampant on the sides of its siblings. Inside the cockpit the measured external demeanor is overcome by a mechanical tone poem of gears, valves and cams, a whirring that communicates elegant concept and careful execution.

The brakes are in fact, superb. The power is all you could ask for, the suspension is compliant and the ride comfortable.

A long stroke straight eight, puffing at 1. atmospheres or so by two mechanical blowers makes serious torque and that translates into a glorious drive steered by wheel and pedal at the driver's preference, or situation.

The only spectators on my drive were the Pebble Beach deer who, bored with Bentleys and Ferraris, turned their amb-

eyes to this stallion with anticipation and envy.

By any measure, 4.1 million is a lot of money. It was very well spent on this 8C 2900B.—Rick Carey

(Photo and description courtesy of auction company.) ♦

Years produced	1936-38
Number produced	44
Original list price	75,000 lire
	\$3,945 USD
SCM Price Guide	\$3-3.75 million
	(long chassis)
Chassis #	firewall plaque
Engine #	rear leg of crankcase
Tune-up	\$700-1000
Magneto cap	approx. \$150
Club address	Alfa Romeo Owners Club,
	10 Raskin Rd. Morristown, NJ 07960-2824
Web site	www.AlfaClub.org
Alternatives	Delage D6S, Talbot Lago
	T 150 SS, Bugatti Type 55