

Alfa Romeo Giulia Spider

Survival of the Fittest

BERTONE OFFERED THIS PROTOTYPE
TO ALFA ROMEO TO ATTRACT ITS
BUSINESS – BUT PININFARINA GOT
THERE FIRST

*Story by Johann Lemerrier
Photography by Michael Ward*



In all honesty, when the curious Alfa Romeo Spider gracing these pages first appeared in *Auto Italia* as a mystery car a few months ago, we didn't actually know what it was. Although the photo in our possession was undeniably recent, we were ignorant of the car's whereabouts. The truth did not take long to come out, however, as I spotted the car taking part in the Coppa Milano-Sanremo in March. Perhaps I could have guessed that its owner was none other than Corrado Lopresto – the recent best-of-show winner at the Villa d'Este Concours – who collects Italian one-offs and supreme expressions of the art of Italian coachbuilders.

Lopresto had recently finished restoring the Alfa, and was happily rolling along, putting almost more miles on it on that single occasion than in the whole of its previous existence. The reason for this extremely low mileage, which also explains why the design was virtually unknown, lies in the simple fact that the car was born as a design proposal which never received the green light. Miraculously escaping the crusher, it remained forgotten in a dusty warehouse for decades – a time-warp Alfa Romeo design exercise. Now we have the scoop that many a magazine editor would have loved to feature 40-odd years ago.

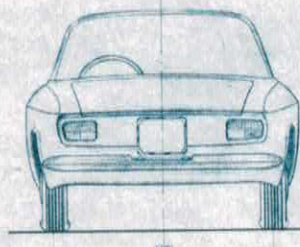
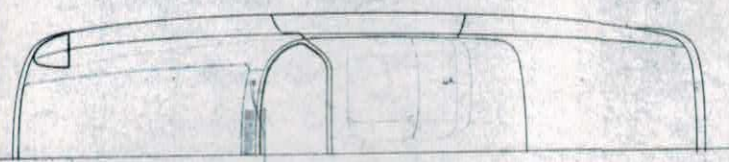
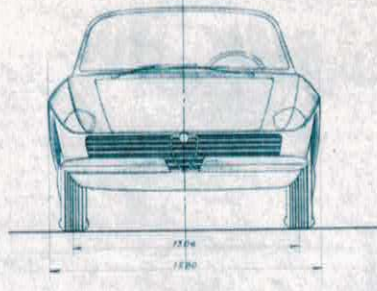
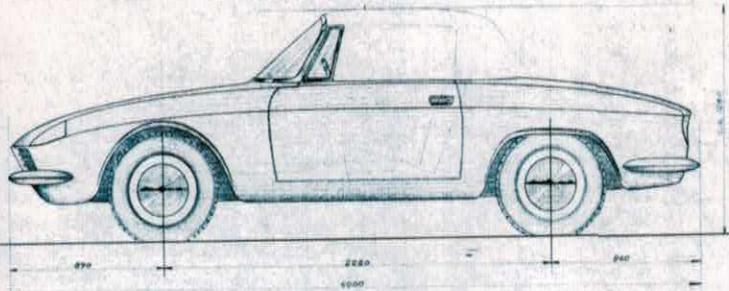
Our story begins in 1962, at the height of the Bertone-Pininfarina battle. The two prominent Turin design houses had established themselves as leaders of the pack, and successfully become industrial realities on the strength of orders from Alfa Romeo. In the 1950s, Bertone had managed to bring home the production of the Giulietta Sprint, Pininfarina the Giulietta Spider, and competitors were left to pick up the crumbs. Alfa Romeo's next model was the Giulia, which was launched in saloon form on 27 June 1962 at the Monza racetrack. At first, the coupe (Sprint) and spider maintained the same bodywork as on the earlier Giuliettas, although the engine now displaced 1.6 litres.

By September 1963, the new coupe shell was ready, dubbed Giulia Sprint GT. It was Giorgetto Giugiaro who gave Bertone a decisive advantage by creating the ultra-modern Giulia coupe that would become known in Italy as 'scalino' ('step', as the leading edge of the bonnet was not flush with the nose). The Giulia GT was an instant hit and boosted Bertone's fame and fortunes.

Pininfarina was determined to score one too, and their reply was the legendary Giulia 1600 Spider, aka the Duetto. Needless to say, competition between rival coachbuilders was the blessing of Italy's car industry, spawning numerous masterpieces as in this case. The Spider surfaced only in 1966, one year after the Giulia GTC. The GTC was a straightforward cabriolet version of Bertone's Giulia GT, albeit actually bodied by Touring of Milan. A thousand units were assembled before the Duetto took over. ↪



Alfa Romeo Giulia Spider



FIGURINO 105.05 PARO 2250
(PARO ORIGINALE)
PROV. OSS. F.

TOP: Alfa drawing of a pop-up headlight version
ABOVE: The Spider with its original step front
RIGHT AND BELOW: Alfa designer Ernesto Cattioni

The prototype featured here appears to be something of a missing link. In fact, the first giveaway as to the car's provenance is a small but unmistakable Bertone badge on the dashboard-mounted ashtray. So is this a Bertone prototype, then? Let's not jump to conclusions too swiftly, for the story is convoluted. A detailed analysis of the car's styling reveals more: the doors and side section are clearly similar to those of the Giulia GT. Mentally replace the twin round tail-lights [see picture on p36] with the squarish Giulia ones and the rear view is virtually that of the coupe. From which model,



by the way, do you think those round lights derive? ... to those who correctly spotted the donor as the Giul... The side indicators on the front wings come from the Ti. The door handles? 2000/2600 Sprint. The windshield, however, differs from that of the GTC and, of course, nose. The inner door panels too are unique, and the mechanism is entirely different from that of the GTC. In fact, the spider pictured here is a strict two-seater and significantly shorter. Clearly, this car is not a homebrew variant of the production GTC, which could seat four.

This is as much as the eye can tell us, but leaves



puzzle far from complete. In researching the car's history, Lopresto had two advantages: for one, he had the car. And then, he found period shots of a Giulia GT Spider, with the original Bertone nose, but with the same Giulietta wheels and a windscreen looking identical to this one. He also knew where his car came from. Alfa Romeo had sold it in the mid-'80s to clear some room in the old Portello works. Lopresto purchased it in the late 1990s. Finished in white and unrestored, it was still in good overall condition. Scraping back the paint revealed a dark bronze metallic finish underneath, more in line with those original black and white Bertone shots.

Sanding down the front wings a bit more, the evidence appeared. As suspected, the nose section was a cut-and-shut job. Having discovered this, Lopresto contacted both Alfa and Bertone to find out more, getting support in his research from Wolfgang Egger and Mario Favilla at the Alfa Romeo Centrostile (styling centre). They put him in touch with retired designer Ernesto Cattoni, who could confirm that the nose job was his own doing. Alfa's design team at the time was trying to give the roadster a distinct personality, with minimum intervention on the body panels. The resulting front end treatment was not unlike that of Carrozzeria OSI's earlier 2600 De Luxe saloon: cute rather than aggressive. Initial drawings suggested a solution to

DRIVING THE GIULIA PROTOTYPE BY PHIL WARD

It's not every day that someone hands you the keys to their one-off design prototype, but that's exactly what collector Corrado Lopresto did in the depths of an underground car storage facility in the centre of Milan.

The plan was to drive out to Castello Borromeo in Peschiera just south of Milan to photograph Lopresto's Giulia Spider and his Alfetta GT prototype.

I prefer a little time to become acquainted with precious machines like this in order to learn the characteristics of the car in relaxed surroundings; to avoid serious egg-on-face more than anything else. Well there was no time for such luxuries and with the car barely warmed up I followed Corrado, who was driving the Alfetta, up the steep spiral car park ramp out into sunny Milan chaos. The road layout in Milan is particularly confusing, the junctions are chaotic, the surface has those huge uneven stone slabs and there's a myriad of tram-lines to divert your steering.

Although the Giulia had only 7800km on the speedometer I was

expecting the car to be difficult to drive, but it wasn't. I would have preferred that the tickover on the 1600 twin cam engine had been a few hundred revs higher – and then I wouldn't have needed to do a bit of heel and toe to keep it running. The long stick gearbox required deliberate and well-timed changes to avoid beating the synchromesh but otherwise the car drove very well. Once out of the city my knuckles began to regain their colour and an occasional foray into the power curve produced that familiar lusty twin Weber gargle.

Considering the Giulia Spider is a prototype it is well bolted together and fully functional; indeed, Corrado has driven the car on several rallies. It amazes me that after 11 years of publishing *Auto Italia* we still manage to find cars that few people have heard of, let alone have the opportunity to test drive. It was a privilege to drive the Giulia Spider and my sincere thanks to Corrado Lopresto for allowing us to feature it.

Alfa Romeo Giulia Spider

with pop-up headlights, perhaps deemed uneconomical.

In restoring this unique witness of a bygone era, Lopresto received plenty of advice from prominent Italian experts, leading him to keep the original interior with only some TLC to maintain as much of the car's authenticity as possible. The two-tone interior trim is neat, in typical 1960s shades, complementing the dark bronze exterior. The hood is particularly smart. Not only is it simple to use and elegant in beige, it also flatters the car's proportions when raised. To drop it down, a clever device inside the boot lifts three round clamps hidden in the chrome base surround and releases it for folding. Tucked away, it is kept concealed by a five-piece leather cover. This nice touch underlines the subtle refinement and attention paid to details on most cars in those days, whether luxury one-offs or more humble creations.

Mechanically, the engine is a standard 1570cc Giulia unit, the well-known light alloy twin-cam four-pot good for 92bhp. No special flights of fancy elsewhere either, with the regular coil springs and rigid rear axle suspension set-up.

How close did the car ever come to making it to production? Nowadays, a project developed to fully operative prototype stage would be deemed very advanced, but back in the 1960s it was still relatively inexpensive and commonplace to transfer ideas directly to the metal. As the proposal derived closely from the Giulia GT, the mechanicals did not require particular attention either. Yet it would appear



TOP: With only 7800km on the clock, the Giulia drives like a new car
ABOVE: The car has always run with a set of Giulietta wheels

that the car was developed on a specific platform rather than a modified Giulia chassis and Giulia engine. Indeed, the chassis number indicates a previously unknown model type, but its 0002 tag leads one to think there was at least one other such platform built for tests.

Presumably, the proposal came before both the GTC and Duetto, yet was eclipsed by them. As a two-seater in search of a proper identity but with little room to achieve it, it was ultimately too compromised. The GTC was more effective as a four-seater convertible, hardly requiring any new tooling. When Pininfarina came up with the 1600 Spider, its attractive styling more than justified the investment. Our little drop-top fellow fell into oblivion as a result. Different times, different outcome. Who knows how many secret prototypes the new Brera-derived Spider walked on its way to cost-conscious production? Watch this space 40 years from now. **ai**



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