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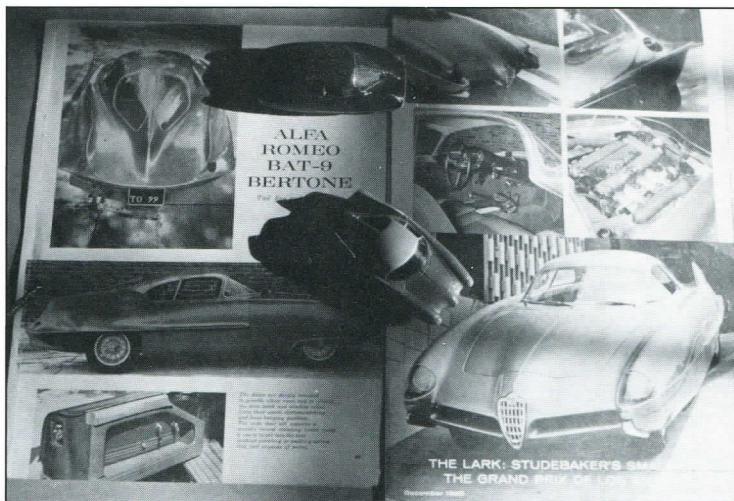
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il CONTENUTO

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30

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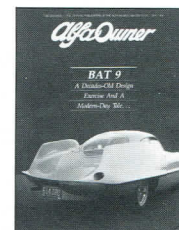
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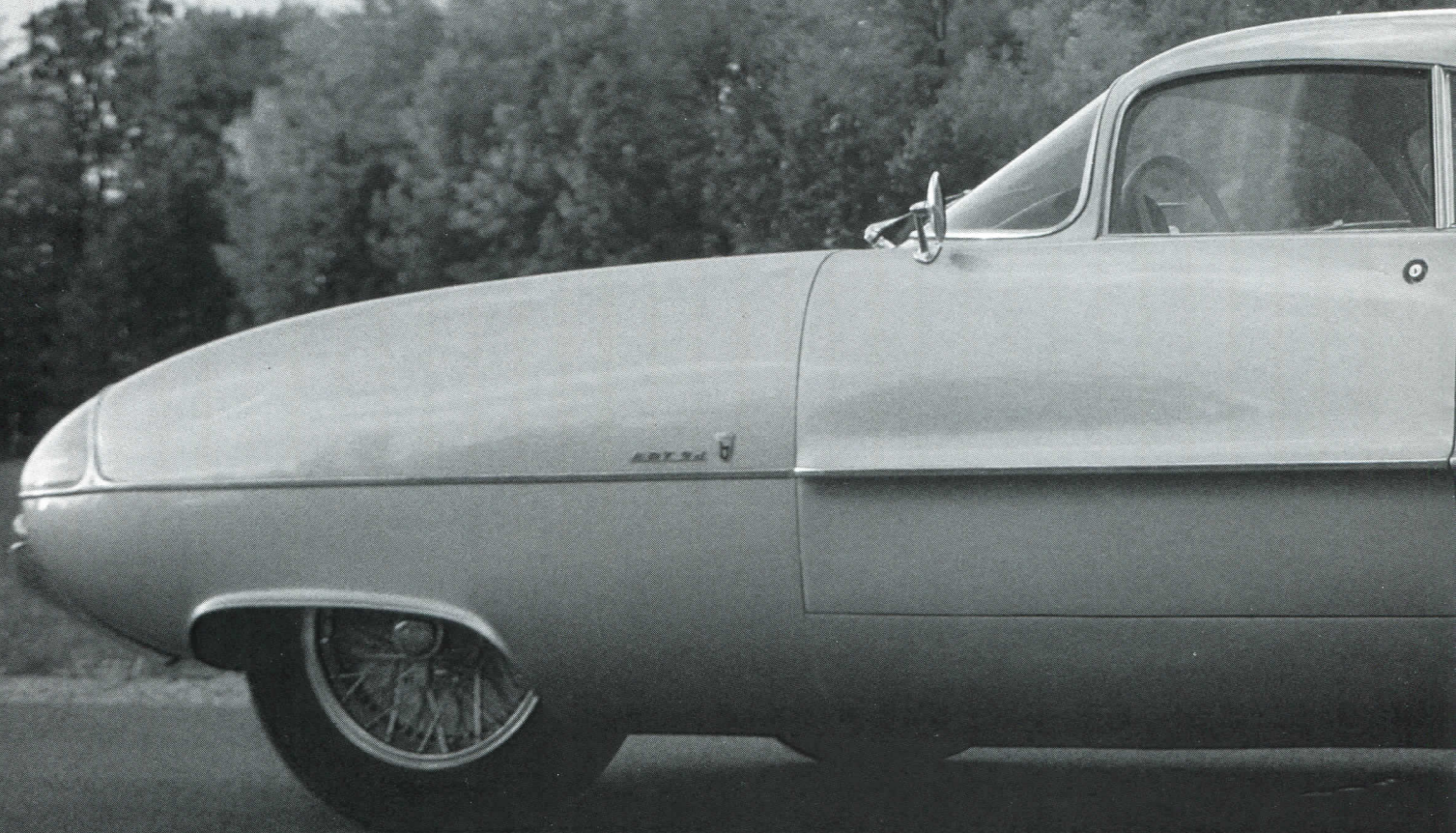


On The Cover: The Bertone BATs were real, not myth as writer Kim Pontius learned firsthand. BAT 9 photo courtesy Dr. Gary Kaberle.

Out of Darkness

*A Chance Meeting Bonds Man And Car
In A Lifelong Reverie*

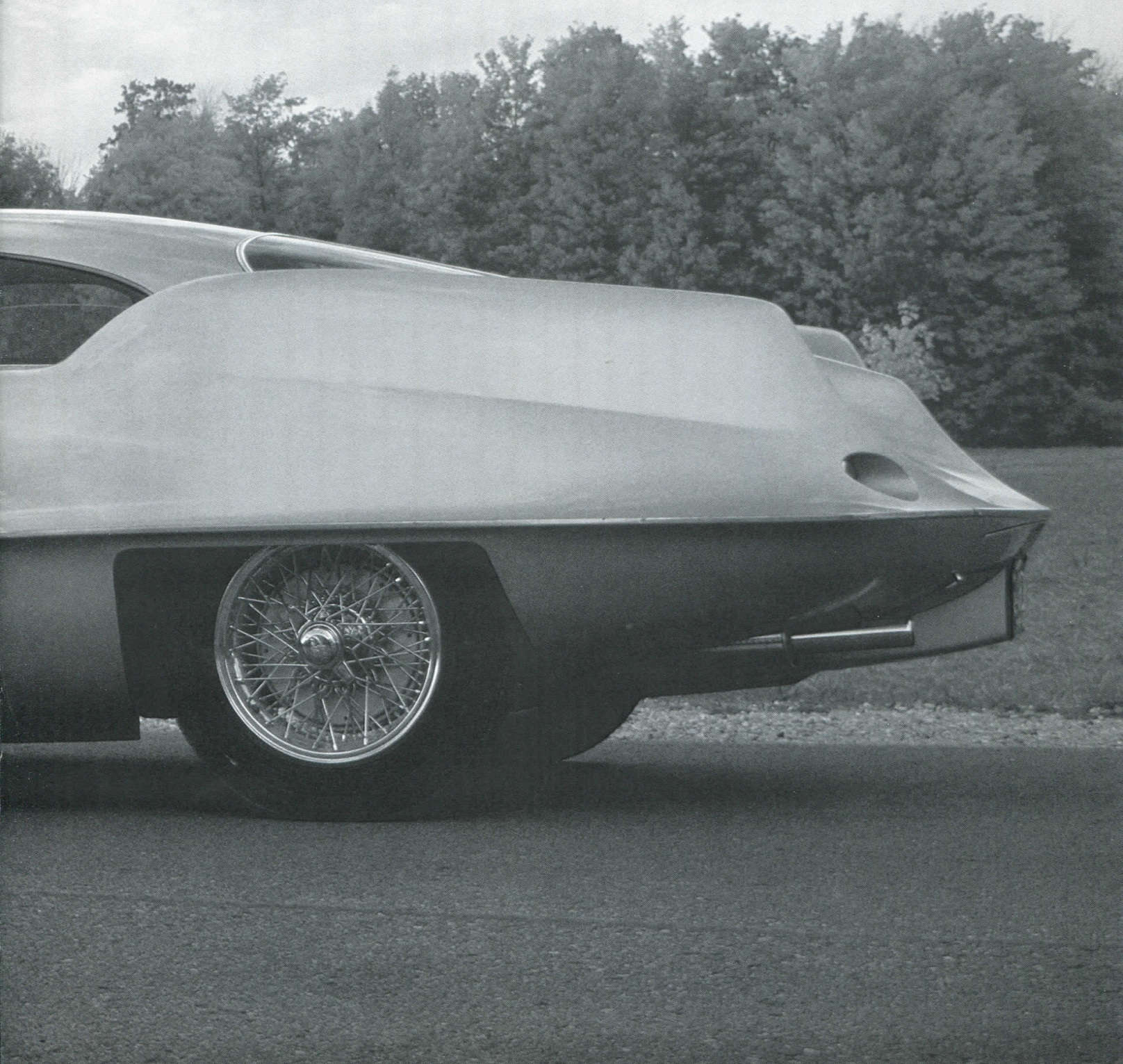
By Kim Pontius



Consider, if you will, your plight as a 16-year-old boy growing up in a small Michigan town during the early '60s. You and a friend are on a short road trip, having some fun, checking out girls and talking about all those things the phrase "wonder years" conjures up—cars surely near the top of the list. Suddenly, as you pass a local car dealer, you see a car unlike any you have ever seen—or will ever see again.

From that moment on, the car becomes an integral part of your being. You cannot get it out of your mind. It haunts your every waking moment, and the only thing you're sure of is that you must have it.

A simple road trip, innocently embarked upon, becomes a quest that remains even now, a quarter century on. No, this isn't the Twilight Zone; this is better. This is real. . . .



AeroBAT: A Prime Example Of Form Following Function

Every fledgling aviator is introduced to the theory of flight by first accepting the concept that air is a fluid. With this revelation in mind, the future pilot is instructed in the basic pretext that aircraft are subject to the laws and principles of fluid dynamics. By controlling areas of high and low pressure upon the surface of the airfoil or wing, forces of lift and drag create stability and flight. Franco Scaglione knew this theory well.

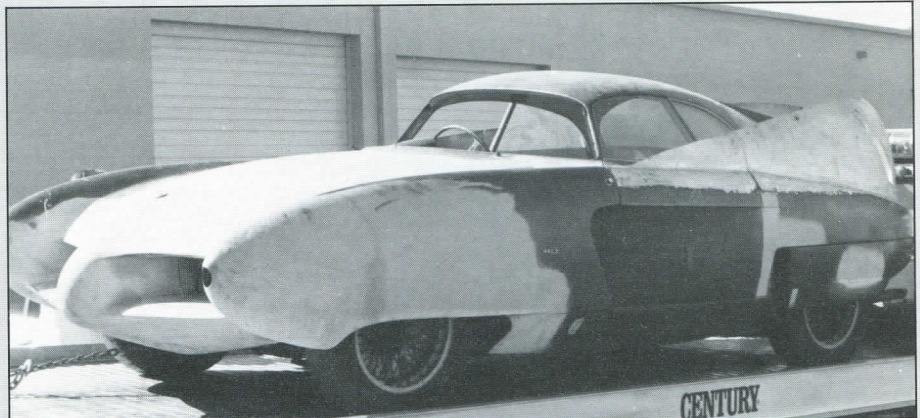
Many years before "drag coefficient" became a catch phrase for selling automobiles, automobile designers were attempting to apply these same aerodynamic principles to their products. When air is sharply deflected, it tends to form swirls or eddies which can cause much more drag than just a pressure area. If the air flow is kept smooth, however, resistance is considerably lessened. The small, turbulent eddies close to a body's surface are commonly called the "boundary layer," and are the source of many aerodynamic ills.

Given the slightest excuse, the boundary layer will separate from the body and take off on its own. At this point, the body is no longer streamlined, and the space between the fluid flow path and the body surface will be occupied by large scale eddies which will consume energy and promote a greater drag rate.

Bertone's BAT series bodies were attempts to conform to the direction of flow in the side boundary layers and limit the disturbance they caused on top of the car. The fins, exclusive to each BAT, were not attempts of fashionable style. They prevented the boundary layers on the sides of the body from interfering with flow over the top. Unlike the impractical, futuristic show cars of Ford or General Motors, the BAT was a fine example of "form following function."

The initials BAT stand for "Berlina Aerodinamica Tecnica" or, loosely translated, "Aerodynamic Engineering Sedan." They were designed by the aforementioned Franco Scaglione, an automobile stylist who rose to a notable position in Italy after World War II, but whose light started to fade by 1957. Scaglione, who would pass away virtually unknown and forgotten in 1980 at the age of 63, would never receive the accolades he so deserved. His application of aerodynamics was at least 25 years ahead of his time. Besides the phenomenal "BAT" cars, Scaglione also designed the Giulietta Sprint, Sportiva 2000, Giulietta Spider, Sprint Speciale and the Type 33 Stradale.

Nuccio Bertone was an enthusiastic patron of Scaglione's creative spirit. Both men came from the Italian school of hard knocks: Bertone worked his way up in the small family coachwork firm. On the verge of bankruptcy, Bertone, through his foresight and vision and some help from a fellow named Wacky Arnolt, was able to turn the tables on the firm's misfortune. Scaglione made his living after the war as an industrial designer while knocking on doors of every known body shop to sell his designs. When the two men connected, it created a total break from earlier Bertone designs. The relationship between Bertone and Scaglione strengthened, and for seven years Bertone built everything Scaglione could



BAT 7 leaves the Alfa Ricambi warehouse last fall en route to a complete restoration. . .



BAT 9 has found a happy and appreciative owner in Michigan resident Gary Kaberle.

design.

Four BAT designs were scrutinized and rejected before one was found and approved for building. BAT 5 was built on the Alfa Romeo 1900 Sprint chassis which had a 98.4-in. wheelbase. The engine was Alfa's standard aluminum block with cast-iron wet liners and aluminum cylinder head with twin chain-driven camshafts. The 123mph top speed and accompanying stability encouraged Alfa to tell Bertone to carry on with the project.

Previously, Alfa had learned some hard lessons from the ill-fated Disco Volante, which had lift characteristics like a Frisbee and was uncontrollable at high speed. BAT 6 never left the drawing board; and then came BAT 7. To say that Scaglione took the design exercise, particularly the fins, to an extreme would be understating the case. Using the same 1900 Sprint chassis, the tail fins were raised to the roof line. Starting at the sides, the fins rose in a graceful curve starting as far forward as the windshield base.

There is a difference of opinion on BAT 8. Some say it existed on paper only, while others contend it was built and that due to the odd-numbering sequence of 5 and 7, it was christened BAT 9 instead. Regardless of its real place in the lineage, the car called BAT 9 made its debut in 1955. Somewhat less futuristic than BAT 7, it set a precedent for future Scaglione designs such as the Giulietta Sprint Speciale. BAT 9 was the most serious design for production of the entire BAT series.

All told, only three BATs—5, 7, and 9—ever

reached the completed and drivable stage. It is highly unlikely that any were ever actually tested in a wind tunnel, as Bertone did not have one at his disposal, but it would be interesting to see the drag coefficient of a car designed over 30 years ago, when such technological theory was but a creative idea in the mind of a genius like Scaglione.

Surprisingly, all three BAT cars can now be found in the United States. Thanks to Nuccio Bertone's business confederate Wacky Arnolt, all three were brought here and here they have remained. BAT 5 is reported to be in a state of disassembled pieces in an obscure garage in South Bend, Indiana. BAT 7, also in a state of disrepair after having its stylish fins once removed and then replaced, has just changed owners and is undergoing a complete restoration. Only BAT 9 is currently intact, restored and as drivable as it was 30 years ago.

BAT 9 was featured on the cover of the December 1958 issue of *Road & Track*. What follows are the closing comments of that pictorial about the BAT cars: "Although interesting, this is not the sort of car that the average person could (or perhaps would) own. The overhang at either end is almost entirely unprotected and would be terribly vulnerable. Still, it has enormous value as a collector's item, and is grand fun to drive about provided one doesn't mind being gaped at."

Franco Scaglione's and Nuccio Bertone's dreams have stood the test of time and survived. Now we must educate the next generation by bringing their visions back into the light. . . —Kim Pontius

Out Of Darkness

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

Can such a fantastic story be true? Of course.

"I'm not a collector of cars, I just happen to own it," explains Dr. Gary Kaberle. "This car is one of the family." With his special "Not for sale" smile firmly in place, Gary spins the story about his particular prize one more time.

"It's funny, but everybody reacts to the car. My dad thought it was kind of wild, but my mom could see it was special to me. Other than my mom, I'm the only one in the family who's driven it."

Gary Kaberle was on his way to the Ionia State Free Fair, not far from his Traverse City, Mich., home, when he first encountered BAT 9. Passing the Greenville Plymouth-Dodge dealership, he spotted the red, Scaglione-designed, Bertone-built dream car. He didn't know or care that it was an Alfa Romeo, only that a feeling told him the car would become a major player in his life.

"It's funny, but everybody reacts to the car. My dad thought it was wild. . ."

Call it destiny, karma or God's will, but Gary was determined to have that car. This particular car, however, was not for sale. The sales manager had purchased the car to use as an attention-getting device, and it must have worked because he didn't really want to part with it. Gary was persistent, however, and ultimately was given a test drive. It didn't matter how it ran, nor that he'd never shifted a five-speed gearbox. This car was his, plain and simple.

After pitching his parents to use it as a traffic stopper in front of their own business, a gift shop, a determined Gary Kaberle set out to acquire his car with money he'd borrowed from them to supplement his summer earnings from a popcorn stand.

A polite person does not ask a man what he paid for his dream. But consider for a moment that this was 1963 and the car was an Alfa in a remote Michigan town. Still, one cannot put a price on something like this, and as Gary says, "From the moment I saw it, the car felt like a part of me."

Berlina Aerodinamica Tecnica Nove—BAT 9—started life as the final design study in a series produced by the renowned Italian coachbuilder Bertone. It made its debut in 1955, the closest-to-production version of the astounding BAT series. BAT 9, like BAT 5 and BAT 7 before it, was purchased by Wacky Arnolt, of Arnolt-Bristol fame, and brought to the United States in 1959. Arriving in Sebring, Florida, it ended up in

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Out Of Darkness

CONTINUED

the possession of Harry Woodnorth of Woodnorth Automobiles, a Chicago-based purveyor of exotic automobiles.

From there the car went to the owner of a firm called Beseler Photographic Products, who painted it red. After this, the trail of the car's whereabouts becomes obscure, but it was this same red car that caught Gary Kaberle's eye in that small town in 1963.

BAT 9 would have remained an obscure treasure, lost in the darkness, had it not been for a series of successive events that brought to the attention of Kaberle the importance of his car: A friend brought him a copy of the March 1987 issue of *Superauto Illustrated*. In it were some paintings of his car. When he contacted the artist to purchase the paintings, he was given the name of one Strother MacMinn, a professor of automobile design in California and author of one of the early articles about the BAT for *Sports Car Press*.

MacMinn persuaded Kaberle to restore the car and put it back into the limelight. An upcoming *Road & Track* article by Mr. MacMinn will highlight this extraordinary car.

When Gary went to have the car restored, he got a hard lesson in rare car economics. After taking quotes from somewhere in the ozone layer, he finally settled on, of all places, Harry Woodnorth Automobiles! The



THE LARK: STUDEBAKER'S SMALL CAR
THE GRAND PRIX OF LOS ANGELES
December 1955

COURTESY, ROAD&TRACK

"Is it for sale?"

Don't ask. You can't

afford that smile."

project was a major undertaking for Gary and his family. Woodnorth totally stripped and repainted the hand-crafted aluminum coachwork and reworked the Boranni wire

wheels, but left the 22,000 mile mechanicals alone.

"Some things don't look as good as they could, but I don't want a new car. It's the original leather, carpet, tires and mechanicals," says Gary. Woodnorth is proud that he once owned the car, and it shows in his firm's dedication to it.

When I first saw the car at the Meadowbrook Concours last summer, I was so dumbfounded to see this Alfa myth (that's what it's been to me all these years), that I never noticed some of the trim was missing. Woodnorth had not had a chance to finish the car for Sunday's Meadowbrook show. The paint, a Lotus silver, didn't start going on until late the previous Thursday. The BAT arrived after midnight the day of the Concours. It arrived at another show again after midnight, setting a precedent. As a fellow exhibitor at Meadowbrook so aptly remarked: "It *should* arrive after midnight; after all it is a BAT..."

The Italian Government has proclaimed it a National Treasure and Nuccio Bertone has tried to buy it back, but the successful small town dentist isn't selling. In his eminent wisdom, Dr. Gary Kaberle has restored a special piece of automotive design history. He sums up his quest eloquently: "The car has given me a lot. It was a confidence builder. Now it's time to give something back to those who can appreciate its unique character."

Is it for sale? Don't ask. You cannot afford that smile. □



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