

## THE CAR

# Alfa Romeo 8C 2900B

*Pinin Farina Cabriolet 412012 gets lost and found*

BY RICHARD S. CAREY

In 1923 an emissary from Alfa Romeo approached the young head of Fiat's design department. The emissary was Enzo Ferrari. The engineer was Vittorio Jano.

Starting at a princely \$158 per month plus accommodations, more than twice his salary at Fiat, Jano's first charge was to design a competitive Grand Prix car. Jano responded with the P2, replete with a 156-hp, supercharged 1987-cc straight-eight. At the 1924 European GP at Lyon, France, Giuseppe Campari's P2 won its first GP and went on to grab the 1925 world championship.

Jano's next design was the 8C 2300. It won the 1931 Italian GP at the Autodromo Nazionale Monza, and this series of 8Cs has been "Monza" ever since.

For 1932 Jano developed the Tipo B for the new Grand Prix formula, and the factory Tipo Bs obliterated the competition. Alfa officially withdrew from GP racing in 1933, but returned in 1935 with the Tipo C, also known as 8C35, with fully independent suspension and a dual supercharged, 2.9-liter eight-cylinder engine, which it transformed later that year into the 8C 2900 sports cars.

The 8C 2900A made its race debut in 1936 when Scuderia Ferrari entered three cars in the Mille Miglia; they swept the board. The performance was nearly repeated in 1937 when they finished 1-2.

In the 1938 Mille Miglia, Alfa Corse drivers Clemente Biondetti and Mario Pintacuda nabbed first and second. Third place went to a private entrant, Piero Dusio, driving an 8C 2900B then fitted with a cycle-fendered spider body. Dusio then finished third in the Pontedecimo-Giovi hillclimb and won the famous Stelvio hillclimb later that year. After passing through several owners, the trail of his 2.9 went cold in 1947.

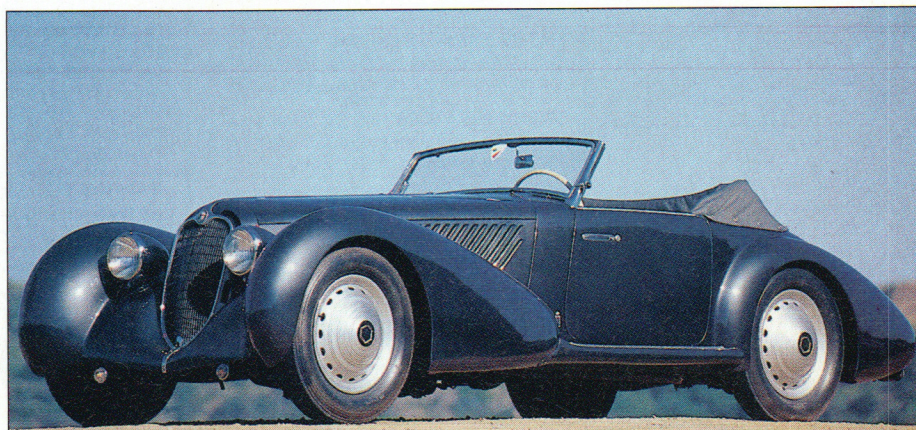
In May 1989 Simon Moore, author of the definitive history of the 8C 2900, *The Immortal 2.9*, received a letter from Jim

Kuzara in Sacramento, California, describing the 2.9 Alfa he had just purchased, Dusio's 412012, with a Pinin Farina cabriolet body.

From Switzerland 412012 found its way into the hands of U.S. soldiers in Germany, at the time powered by a Chrysler Windsor flathead six. It was shipped to the States in 1959. Kuzara sold it in August 1989. Its

quite comfortable while still providing the grip to cope with the 2.9's ample power. Huge brakes dissipate its considerable inertia promptly, smoothly and steadily.

To onlookers this 2.9 is muffled consistent with its fashionable cabriolet coachwork, but it tells another story to its occupants with a cacophony of mechanical noises from its



**THE 412012 STARTED LIFE** clad in a cycle-fendered spider body before getting reskinned with this Pinin Farina coachwork.

**After passing through the hands of several owners, the trail of Dusio's 2.9 went cold in 1947.**

original engine was acquired and the restoration entrusted to classic Alfa specialist Tony Merrick. Completed in 1992, 412012 was the hit of the Louis Vuitton Concours at Hurlingham in London.

The real beauty of this Alfa Two-Nine lies beneath the Pinin Farina coachwork in Jano's engine, drivetrain and chassis. The twin supercharged straight-eight makes over 220 horsepower and pulls strongly at any engine speed, showing how a large car could be quick on a hillclimb such as the 17.5-mile Stelvio with its 70-some switchbacks. It's also apparent that Alfa had quickly adapted from the harsh ride of solid axle chassis to take advantage of independent suspension's attributes with supple springing. The ride is accordingly

plethora of gears, cams and blower drives. From the seats there's little discernible exhaust note, but there is a constantly changing song from the finely made and meticulously adjusted gears that drive everything under the hood, a gearhead's cappella choir.

Miles Morris of Christie's International Motor Cars Department demonstrated 412012's performance Sunday evening at Monterey, only a few hours after the car was sold for \$4,072,500. Alfa Two-Nines rarely change hands, even privately, and 412012 is a prime example of the model, particularly with its racing success amply justifying its price. Still \$4 million is a lot of money. Invested in tax-free bonds, 412012's price would support a very nice lifestyle.

But, tax-free municipal bonds can never duplicate the experience of driving through the almost-deserted roads of Pebble Beach, late on a Sunday night, in this magnificent example of the best car of the prewar era. •