

the engine developed 190 bhp at 7000 rpm, but the 246L race engine produced 270 bhp at 8500 rpm, assisted by four-valve heads and 48 mm carburetors. The dry weight of the car was 888 kg and the consequent power/weight ratio of 3.2 kg/hp played a significant part in the Stratos' rise to fame, though until the four-valver came along the two-valve, 230 bhp engine proved more than useful.

In many ways the change in Lancia's fortunes brought about at the end of the 1974 season by the homologation of the Stratos was quite unprecedented. From being an also-ran, the company was elevated to the role of principal contender for a crown its parent, Fiat, had come to consider as its own.

To the delight of everyone except Fiat, a rather dull, disrupted season suddenly came alive as the Championship moved across the Atlantic for the two American rallies, the Rideau Lakes in Canada and the Press-on-Regardless in the USA. Lancia had fortunately taken the precaution of making nominal entries for these events and with great haste they despatched a pair of Beta coupés and a Stratos by air to Canada.

Once again luck was with them. Fiat suffered a collapse in the Rideau Lakes that was similar to their San Remo failure. By the end of the first leg all three of their cars were out, leaving the Stratos of Munari/Mannucci and the Lampinen/Davenport Beta coupé in an unchallengeable lead. Team orders dictated that the Stratos should win, which led to the Beta having to park briefly to allow the leisurely Munari to overtake. The second Beta, driven by Pregliasco, also parked, but for more profound reasons, having blown up its engine.

The Canadian victory put Lancia on top of the Championship table by four points. Greatly heartened they set off for Lake Superior and the POR Rally, based in the town of Marquette in Michigan. Unfortunately, any hopes of three wins in a row were dashed when the Stratos lost a rear shock absorber, which smashed a distributor as it flailed about. Alen, in the Fiat, and Therier, driving a Renault, were back on form and the final result gave victory to the French car followed by Alen in second place. Lampinen and Davenport were fourth in the Beta coupé.

This relegated Lancia to second place in the Championship, but only by one point. Much therefore depended on the RAC, which started from York Racecourse at 9 am on Saturday, 16 November. Lombard North Central Banking

sponsored the rally for the first time in 1974, support which did much for its prestige. For the competitors it was as rigorous as ever; 3500 km to be covered in four and a half days, including 80 special stages totalling over 650 km of forest tracks and worse. The experts were keen to see whether the Stratos would survive such a test. It had proved itself on tarmac but at first sight appeared too fragile for harsh off-road rallying. In fact, its appearance was quite misleading. Bertone's sheet-steel monocoque was as tough as a tank. No flimsy space frame of complex tubes and troubles but a rigid shell that would have met with Vincenzo Lancia's full approval.

Lancia's surge to prominence in the Championship had been achieved with one car, TOL65176, chassis number 1542. The RAC, however, saw the company's colours carried by an earlier Stratos, chassis number 1512, now registered as TOL52901. This car, previously registered as A616044, was unrallied when it arrived in Britain to be driven by Munari and Sodano, Mannucci being unable to take part because of illness. The single Stratos was once more accompanied by a pair of Group 4 Beta coupés, one of which was fitted with the 16-valve 195 bhp Abarth engine similar to that in the Fiat 124.

Fiat, by now, were completely demoralized. Poor team management had bedevilled them throughout the season, with unpredictable changes among the drivers leading to low morale. They entered four cars for the RAC, but lost the services of Alen, their star driver, to Ford. His replacement was Rauno Aaltonen, but by now the heart had gone from the team, which certainly made life easier for Munari, Lampinen and Ballestrieri in the Lancias.

Right from the start Munari put the Stratos on the leader board and kept it there through every sort of special stage. As was to be expected, the car performed brilliantly on tarmac, but as soon as the loose of the Clocaenog Forest was reached it went even better, much to the surprise of the uninitiated. From then on the competition was clearly between Munari and the Scandinavians, who had come to regard the rally as their own. Makinen, the eventual winner, set his conventional, powerful RS1600 Ford against the exotic Italian car and Blomqvist's Saab added its own brand of orthodoxy to the contest.

By the time the cars reached Machynlleth in mid-Wales, Munari was in the lead. From that point, however, he was under orders from Fiorio to conserve the car. Although going against his normal