

# Steering wheel



## ... from out of the past

June's car "from out of the past" is a particularly interesting and sentimental favorite of your **Steering WHEEL** editor, because this particular Alfa, so strikingly depicted by Steve Amos, is the self-same car the editor drove in his first race, just 10 years ago this month, on the beautiful Estes Park, Colorado, road racing course.

This same 1500 cc, supercharged, Alfa-Romeo, according to former owner Luigi Chinetti, now U.S.A. distributor of Ferrari Automobiles, was the winner of the Tourist Trophy. The car was supposedly running stock, but we understand Luigi removed the cylinder head gasket and painted one on the block to outfox the scrutineers at tech inspection before the race. He still chuckles about that bit of handywork.

A. L. F. A. (Amonima Lombarda Fabbrica Automobile) built French Darracqs back in Edwardian days, but didn't really shake the automotive world until Nicola Romeo, a young automobile engineer, took over the company about 1918. He added his own name and the company has been known as Alfa Romeo since then.

In the early 1920's, Alfa Romeo began to make history on the road circuits throughout Europe with its famous P-2 two-seater Gran Prix cars. The P-2 had a 2-liter, eight-cylinder engine, supercharged, with twin overhead camshafts and dry-

sump lubrication. These cars won the 1925 World's Championship.

Vittorio Jano, who designed the P-2 and some of the most famous Italian race cars of all time and still active, came up with the 1.5-liter (62 mm bore, 88 mm stroke) six cylinder engine that powers this month's feature car in 1928. This car became the basis for a whole generation of sports and racing Alfa Romeos. In fact, even today Alfas and even Ferraris have a certain indescribable feel that is related to this classic predecessor.

The 1500 cc Supercharged Alfa was enlarged to 1750 cc in 1929 and this model was so successful that it was continued through 1934. Meantime, a 2.3-liter followed by a 2.6-liter and a 2.9-liter straight-eight were developed from the 1929 design. In the 1930's Alfa succeeded Bugatti at the pinnacle of sports car racing in Europe.

The example shown here has a Zagato body with bicycle fenders. The 1750 cc version which followed it was very often dressed with the Zagato body which featured a high running board.

The editor bought the car sight unseen from Luigi Chinetti in New York with the aid of George Joseph, Jr. The car arrived the day before the June, 1953, Estes Park races. Dabney Collins, who was then importing cars and unusual classic cars, checked the engine and was

amazed to find it was pumping 125 pounds compression per cylinder on all six cylinders. He changed the plugs and I drove the car to Estes Park learning how to operate the four-speed "crashbox" on the way.

The throttle was located between the clutch and brake pedals and made "heel and toe" operation of the brake and throttle duck soup.

The gearbox on the right-hand-drive Alfa was great sport. No synchromesh in those days! Double-clutching was the order of the day, but after you mastered the rhythm you could get by without clutch just "pause and poke" the gear lever.

The whine from the supercharger and the gear driven camshafts reminds one of latter day Ferrari sounds, real thoroughbreds!

Your editor trailed the field for half of the race, gradually getting used to the idea of racing and to the strange car. The oil system was something of a mystery and on the 10th lap oil surge under heavy braking sent the oil pressure gauge to zero twice. Both times I stopped and the pressure bounded back. Rather than blow up this rare and still unpaid-for gem, I retired from the race and two days later sold the car to Dabney Collins, who in turn sold it to a young St. Louis sports car enthusiast. I've kicked myself ever since and curious to know where and how the car looks today, 10 years to the month since I last drove it.