

das was no blinkered, nostalgic fanaticism, admiration for Vincenzo's artistry. That evening, in more relaxed surroundings, Arthur why he was so fond of vintage. This grand old man, looking like a well-Cornish fisherman with his fine white beard and C-badged blazer, replied with gruff frankness, "Lancias have always had a certain feel factor for me, not confirmed in any other car. I've sold enough of them in my time. They are really robust, with mechanical tolerances beyond reason. Look at the brakes, strong enough to stop a lorry, and the bearings are real, not toys on cars." Arthur is one of the most respected Lancia engineers in England, but came to the event only quite recently. In the late sixties he had a Dilambda as literally a box of bits from

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Scott-Moncrieff. The pistons were so heavily seized in the bores they had to be clouted out with an oak beam, but within nine months this £170 'heap of scrap' as Arthur called it, was fully restored, complete with its elegant Carlton carriage body. After that, it was running-in on its first test drive to the International rally. Arthur is one of those motor engineers who stands no nonsense, and knows all the tricks of the trade, and greatly respects all who know him. He covered nearly 100,000 miles in his old Dilambda before he sold it to a young man in Turin. There is clearly something very special about vintage Lancias.

The next day the 86 entrants met at Laxenberg in a very regal setting for some light-hearted driving tests, which certainly entertained the local Lancia club who gazed in amazement at the car gymkhana. They were particularly amused at the point when the entrants' wives and girlfriends leapt from the car, with their hands and ball attached to their waists, and proceeded to walk astride and gyrate their hips in an attempt to clear a wooden block!

This gave me an opportunity to examine the impressive line-up of entrants, beginning with John Olson's stately 1911 Eta. This rare survivor has a wonderful patination, never having been restored. The Italian Lancia club were most enthusiastic, and I was naturally grateful to John for trailering his discovery home the way from England. Its 5-litre 50hp engine has an advanced shaft-driven overhead-camshaft layout. John proved it still worked effectively by knocking down almost all the bollards in the driving test, the week earlier in the week this Edwardian limousine had been seen lapping the Salzburgring. He later collected more prizes than anyone else at the well-gala.

The line-up contained a great selection of various Lancia models, with a wonderful variation of Italian coachwork. The oldest car present was an Alpha Romeo Spé de Ville from the works museum, with Oscar Capellano's racy 1911 Epsilon next up. Six Lambdas, of various series chassis, took part, including Sandro Bazzani's wonderful long-chassis tourer appropriately equipped with beaded edge tyres, and a handsome Weymann Berlina, ideal as vintage Mafia transport. Other highlights of the entry included two ex-Steady State cars which now live in Italy. The first was an elegant Dilambda Landulet, which had everything to give a handsome Italian chauffeur and prima donna board. The other was Luciano Nicolis' Astura Spyder Corsa, which actually has two V4 Aprilia engines mated together. This post-war ex-Cortese/Alfa Romeo racer was once described by Steady as an 'oversized carpet cleaner', but it has now become a prized Mille Miglia retrospective entrant. Apart from two limousines designed as governmental

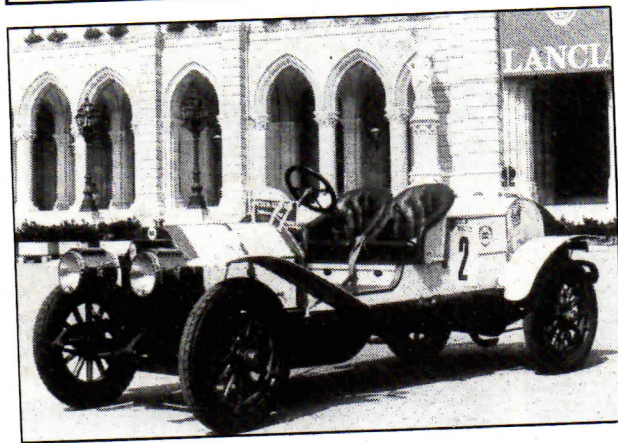
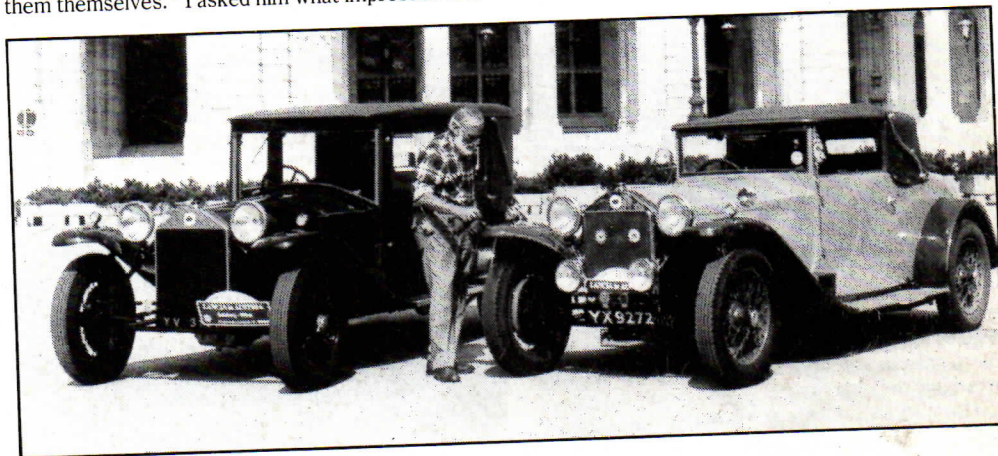
transport, there were no glamorous coachbuilt Asturas, although a rare Viotti-bodied two-tone tourer found many admirers.

Almost every type of Lancia had distinctive coachbuilt variants, and it was these rarities that spiced the entry. A Ghia-bodied spyder stood out amongst the nine Augustas, but my favourite was a cream and black Aurelia saloon styled by Pinin Farina. Its elegant detailing, two-tiered bumpers and pillarless top epitomised Italian custom styling in the early fifties. Its young owners couldn't have looked more chic if they tried! Also amongst the Aurelia B24 Spyderys was a special fixed-head coupé, while the most modern cars present were a clutch of Fulvia HF's with colourful Club Jolly badging.

Having savoured the styling delights of this line-up, I could clearly understand the pride of Lancia ownership from the Eta to the Fulvia. Gerald Batt (knowing of my enthusiasm for Alfas) jokingly confirmed this. "People drive Alfa Romeos because they are expensive. People who drive older Lancias are realistic people, who choose so because they enjoy driving them, and genuinely enjoy maintaining them themselves." I asked him what impressed him

so much about the Lancias he had owned. "Definitely road ability. The steering, braking, and cornering. I always love driving them, whether my Lambdas or Aprilias. Not many cars will go round a roundabout faster even today than an Augusta little or Aprilia saloon. They were expensive when new but the standards of engineering from the superb aluminium castings right down to a simple exhaust bracket are superb. The Lambda, for example, has more engineering in the front axle than the rest of the car, while the Aprilia's independent suspension and inboard rear brakes would embarrass most so-called sports cars decades later. To my mind it is Vincenzo's finest design, and hugely underrated."

I looked back at the line-up and realised that the cars I had passed by were the standard Aprilia saloons. The car's technical brilliance was so discreet, its inspired concept so refined, its styling so simple I'd completely ignored it. I doubt if any other marque has produced one single car crammed with so much innovation. Here, I felt, was the secret of Lancia enthusiasm, and I left Vienna with determined ambition to drive more of these brilliant, yet so underrated machines.



Far left: Flaminia Sport Zagato heads post-war cars for driving test. Above: Arthur Keeling with his Lambda cabriolet (right) and Gianni Ruscalla's Weyman version. Left: Second oldest Lancia present was Oscar Capellano's Targa Florio Epsilon. Bottom left: Mille Miglia Lambda leads convoy. Below: Touring Flaminia in amusing driving test

