

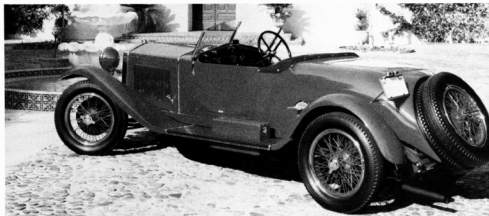
A L F A R O M E O

"Every time I see an Alfa Romeo pass by," Henry Ford is supposed to have said, "I take my hat off." The remark is not unlikely. The man who had given the world the Model T began his automotive career on the race track. He could but be impressed with an Alfa Romeo. In its first four decades of motor sport, this *grande marque Italiana* won more competitive events than any other automobile. Comparatively, Alfa's 560 checkered flags represented about 100 more than Bugatti, well over twice the figure for Mercedes. The man responsible for this success during the Classic Era was the brilliant engineer Vittorio Jano. Hired away from Fiat in 1923 by Nicola Romeo, the industrialist who had acquired A.L.F.A. (the acronym for Società Anonima Lombarda Fabbrica Automobili), Jano was instructed, as he remembered, "to accumulate a few respectable competition record." His first Grand Prix car, the legendary P2, won the first race it entered in 1924 and was still winning in 1930 when it was superseded. Meanwhile,

Jano had developed his first production car for the Milanese company—the equally legendary 6C (six-cylinder) series which commenced with the 1500.

"A Classic among Classics," comments Jack Becronis of his 6C 1500 Zagato Spyder. "Everything about an Alfa Romeo is significant, but most of all the double-overhead-cam layout of its engine. The 1500 demonstrated the value of twin cams

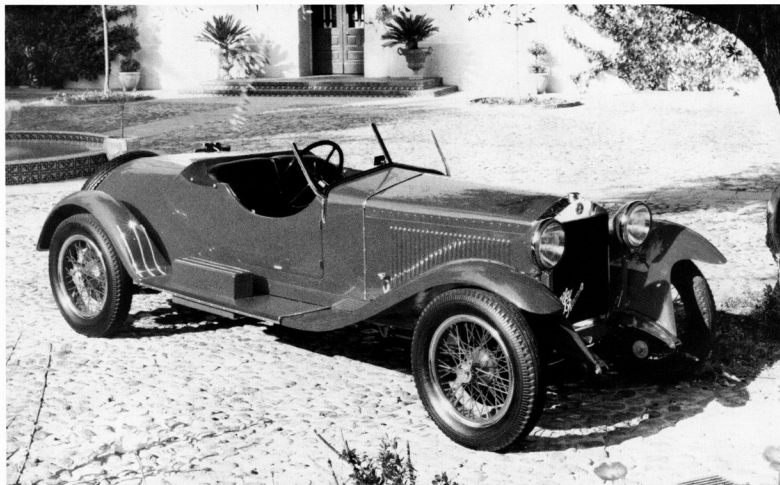
for high-performance street engines and showed that a small efficient powerplant in a lightweight car is an ideal combination for sporting drivers. With modification and enlargement, this engine continued in production until 1950 and established a great road race reputation. Alfas of this period are famed for their wonderful handling and driveability. Annual production was only in the hundreds. My car, which I've owned for a dozen years, was one of just three made in this '3-posti' body style by Zagato to be sold exclusively by Thomson & Taylor, Ltd., the London Alfa Romeo dealer."



1928 Alfa Romeo Tipo 6C 1500 Sport Spyder, Zagato

Owner: Jack Becronis of San Marino, California

Photo: Roy Query, Automobile Quarterly

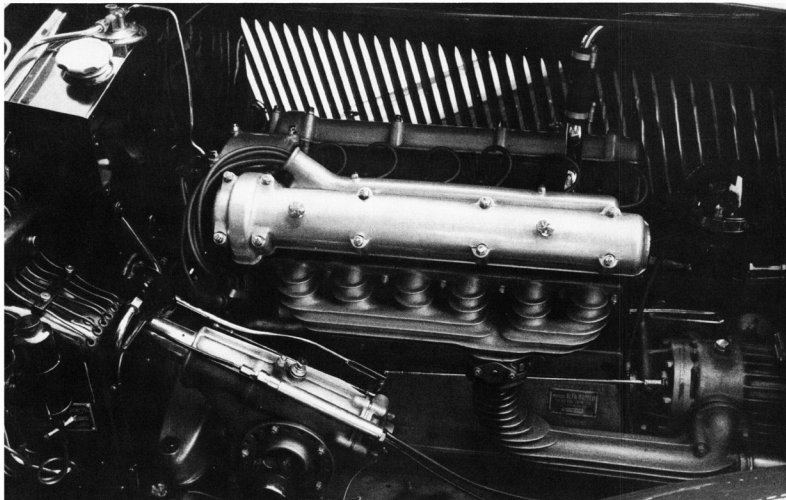
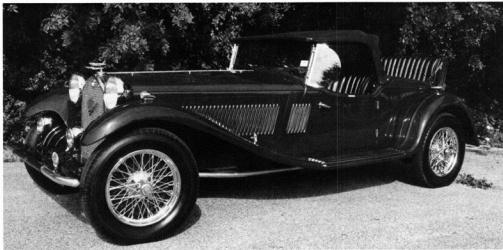


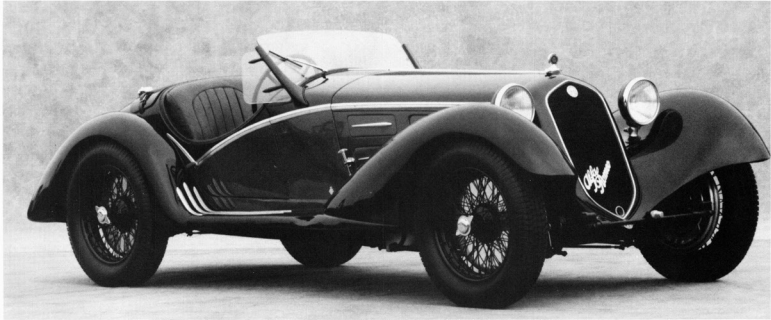
Few more than a thousand 6C 1500 Alfas had been built by 1929 when the car was enlarged from a liter-and-a-half into the 1750, available with or without supercharging. Blown 1750's for the marketplace produced as much as 95 mph from 85 hp. In competition trim, 102 hp was on tap for a 105 mph top—and victories in the Mille Miglia and Tourist Trophy, amongst many others, followed. Total 1750 production was 2,579 cars from 1930 through 1933.

Edsel Pfabe's supercharged 1750 was a one-of-a-kind built by the British coachbuilding house of Freestone & Webb: "The original owner was a pilot and the radiator mascot is a model of the Supermarine seaplane which won the Schneider Trophy. When I acquired the car in 1971, the original registration and manual came with it. Total mileage to date is 20,804."

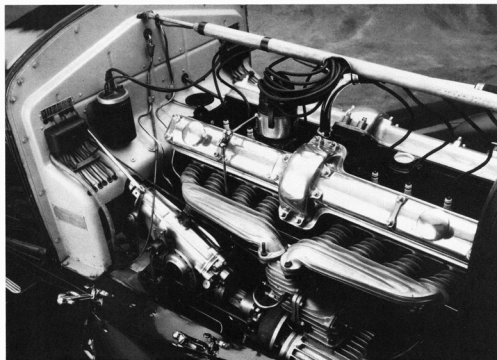


1932 Alfa Romeo Tipo 6C 1750 Gran Turismo, Freestone & Webb
Owner: Edsel H. Pfabe of Ft. Pierce, Florida

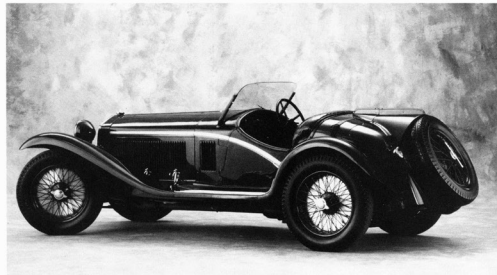




1934 Alfa Romeo Tipo 8C 2300 Corto, Touring
Owner: John Mozart of Palo Alto, California

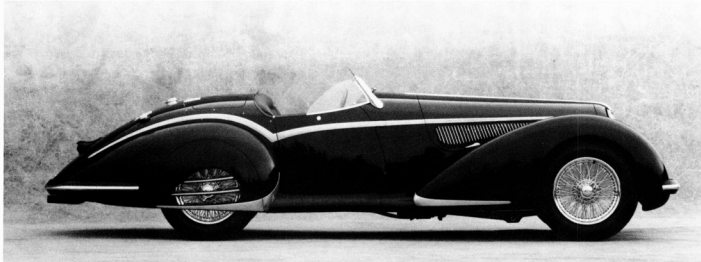


1934 Alfa Romeo Tipo 8C 2300 Corto, Touring (engine above)
Owner: Miles C. Collier of Naples, Florida



The record says it all. The 8C 2300 Alfa Romeo won Le Mans for four successive years and wouldn't allow another car in the top four at the Mille Miglia (unless it was a more powerful Alfa). While similar in basic dimensions and layout to the 1750, the eight-cylinder 2300 engine was unusual in having the camshaft and supercharger drives between the fourth and fifth cylinders, taken from two spur gears in the center of the crankshaft. The engine had ten main bearings and dry sump lubrication—and, in production form, 142 hp at 5000 rpm. The 8C 2300 was designed as a road racer that could also be made available for fast touring in 122-inch lungo (long) and 108-inch corto (short) chassis versions. The price was about \$10,000 and bought astonishing acceleration (zero to sixty in under ten seconds) as well as flabbergasting flexibility (the 2300 was as docile in traffic as it was feraral on the open road).

Historians today relish finding fault with the 8C 2300, if only to demonstrate the thoroughness of their research.* Vittorio Jano himself insisted the design was no masterpiece because the "chassis was simply too heavy." With the car's total weight a comely 2200 pounds, Alfa's engineer was taking himself too severely to task. A genuine failing was the sequestering of the dashboard instruments under the cowl which made them difficult to check for anyone reasonably tall. But, given the remarkable automobile the 8C 2300 was, that is truly nitpicking. From 1931 through 1934, just 188 of these cars were produced, most of them two-seaters, many of those with Touring coachwork like the Collier and Mozart cars seen here.

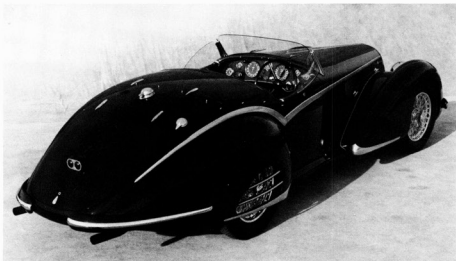


1937 Alfa Romeo Tipo 8C 2900 B Corto, Touring
Owner: John Mozart of Palo Alto, California

Again, evolution with a dual purpose. Alfa Romeo wanted to continue dominating the Mille Miglia and needed a prestige model to succeed the 2.3-liter production car. Ergo the immortal "Two-Nine" which magnificently achieved both aims. The 2900 A made its debut in the 1936 Mille Miglia, easily finishing one-two-three. In '37 the 2900 B followed, detuned from 220 to 180 hp for road use. It bears mention that the engine of the 2900 A had itself simply been detuned from the 255 hp of Alfa's P3 Grand Prix car.

Just twenty-six 8C 2900 B Alfa Romeos were built. Many of them had *superleggera* (super light) coachwork by Touring. John Mozart's car, the first Touring 2900 B produced, was delivered new in New York City to MacClure Halley. "One of the greatest cars of all time," comments John, "matching great performance with great style."

"Probably the most famed sports



car of the late thirties," says Bob Bahre of his Touring 2900 B.

No proud owner exaggeration is present here. Many impartial

observers likewise view the 2.9-liter Alfa Romeo as the ultimate evocation of a sports car which arguably had been the ultimate to begin with.

1938 Alfa Romeo Tipo 8C 2900 B Corto, Touring

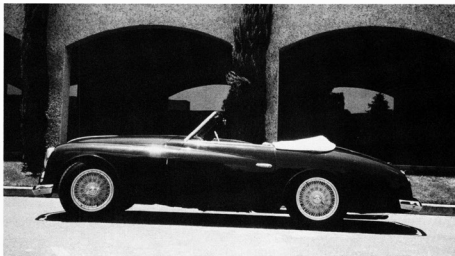
Owner: Bob Bahre of Oxford, Maine





1948 Alfa Romeo Tipo 6C 2500 SS Drophead Coupe, Ghia

Owner: Jean Gorjat of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania



Evolution once more. Vittorio Jano had always provided elegant transport for those discriminating motorists for whom supercharging was too much of a good thing. In the mid-thirties his unblown d.o.h.c. 2.3-liter six had replaced the 1750 and 8C 2300. This car was developed by Bruno Treviso into the Tipo 6C 2500 of 1939, available in both Sport and Super Sport as well as Turismo and Coloniale guise. Interestingly, these cars remained in production, in very limited numbers, throughout World War II and were continued when peace came.

Production of the 6C 2500 totaled 451 cars in 1948 when Jean Gorjat's Super Sport Ghia Coupe was built: "This is one of the few Alfas with a Ghia body in aluminum and, I'm told, was a gift from Prince Aly Khan to Rita Hayworth. It behaves like a modern car and, on mountain roads, equals the performance of a VW GTI. To my mind, the 6C 2500 represents the last of the real Alfas."

Jean's point is well taken in the historical sense—for in 1950 Alfa Romeo moved into unitary construction and production that would ultimately reach six figures annually. The Alfa Romeo that was solely a luxury car handbuilt in small numbers could not survive in the postwar era.