

SPECIALE

Patrick O'Brien traces the history of the Alfa Giulietta Sprint Speciale and tells us how he restored one

ANNOUNCED at the 1957 Turin Motor Show, and based on the Giulietta Sprint structure and running gear, Alfa Romeo's Speciale was the culmination of five

years' intense aerodynamic studies by Bertone's chief designer Franco Scaglione. Made in small numbers, the car was really a 'special', providing performance out of all proportion to its

1.3-litre engine capacity — a 125mph top speed. Built entirely at the Bertone works rather than by Alfa Romeo Milano, the Speciale was expensive and very well finished. Consequently production figures



were never great with only 742 cars made in the peak year, 1961. Nuccio Bertone professed himself "profoundly satisfied with the car from every standpoint. Its aerodynamic qualities are truly excellent. The structural integration of the design is such that there is not a body being made today that has greater torsional rigidity."

In all, 1,366 Giulietta Sprint Speciales were made between 1959 and 1962. There were two series, the first 100 units becoming known as the 'low-nose' model. They were devoid of bumpers and had 'plexiglas' side and rear windows, and weighed 1,968lb. In 1960 Alfa decided to

expand production and revised the Speciale. It now featured curvaceous bumpers, a longer boot lid aperture and, to comply with American requirements, the headlights were raised 2.36ins, as was the nose. Extra headroom was facilitated by lifting the roofline by 1.5ins. This second series model was consequently 143lb heavier.

A grand touring car *par excellence*, contemporary reports praised the Speciale highly. *Autosport* reckoned it was "a real jewel of a motor car", while *Motor Sport* said "The car is a revelation..."

The Speciale's forte was long distance touring. At 100mph, the absence of wind noise was, and still is, uncanny and restful. Strangely, engine noise too, is quieter than in the standard Sprint. Particularly advantageous are the five-speed gearbox and the 17.5-gallon fuel tank. With fuel consumption between 28 and 35mpg, this provides a range of 500-600 miles! The boot is virtually consumed by spare wheel, battery and huge tank, but luggage accommodation on the carpeted shelf behind the seats is adequate. The all-round visibility is superb, with so much glass and such slim roof pillars. Build quality is excellent. Made before the age of plastics, everything is of steel or aluminium, welded or fixed with fine-thread metric bolts and machine screws. According to *Road and Track* in 1961: "As a road car, the Speciale is ideal: fast, comfortable, safe and economical."

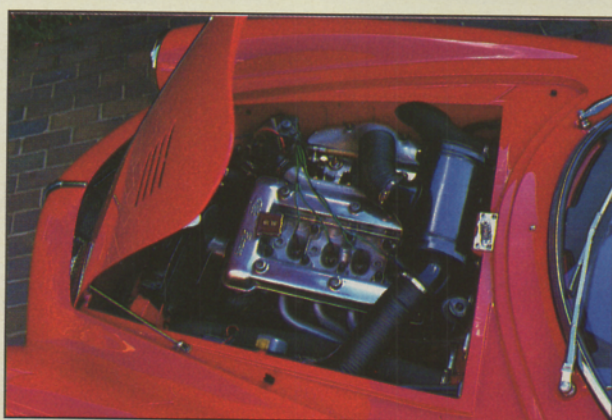
As this Alfa Romeo was so rare and little-known, it helps to put it in its contemporary market context by comparing it with other cars. Because of the flowing style and proportions, the Speciale looks very long. Yet it is no longer than a VW Karmann Ghia or Renault Floride. At 49ins to the top of its domed roof, it is as low as the Austin-Healey 100/6. The kerb weight of 2,128lb is within a few pounds of the Triumph TR3, MGA, Austin-Healey 100/4 and its principal rival, the Porsche 356.

Despite its Mini Cooper-sized engine the Speciale's 200km/h puts it ahead of the contemporary 4-litre Jensen 541R, 3.4-litre Jaguar XK150, 3-litre Aston Martin DBIII, 1.5-litre Porsche Carrera, 2-litre Aceca Bristol and 5.2-litre Ford Thunderbird. In 1957 only the Ferraris, Mercedes 300SL, Pegaso, Facel Vega, fuel-injected Corvette and Maserati 3500 GT were faster. In acceleration up to 62mph, the Speciale's 11 seconds is quicker than the Austin-Healey 100/6, Porsche 1600, Allard Palm Beach 2.6, BMW 503, Jensen 541, Lancia Aurelia GT and Peerless GT — all with much larger engines. To 100mph it will beat the Porsche, Healey, Aceca Bristol, Lancia Aurelia and Jensen.

Aerodynamics

No wind tunnel figures are available for the Speciale, but by comparing frontal area, horsepower, gear ratios and maximum engine revolutions with the best of the opposition, the 1972 Lotus Europa Special and Lotus Elan +2, whose





Above, fully stripped out and waiting for paint

Far left, the home-restored interior looks excellent

Left, classic Alfa twin-cam in 1300cc form

values are 0.29 and 0.30 respectively, one can extrapolate that the value for the Speciale must lie between 0.27 and 0.28. To put this remarkable figure in perspective, the Jaguar E-type and Porsche 928 have figures of 0.44, the Ferrari 308, 0.40, Mazda RX7, 0.38 and Porsche 924 Turbo, 0.34. The Speciale's 125mph from only 1,290cc — representing 96mph per litre of engine capacity — must rank it as one of the most efficient road cars ever made.

In its major overseas markets — the USA and UK — the Speciale was expensive. Its £3,100 (or so) price tag put it in the same bracket as the Porsche Carrera, Lancia Aurelia and Flaminia, Mercedes 190 SL, Jensen 541R, Aston Martin DB III and Corvette. In South Africa at R3,300 it compared with the Porsche 356 and Daimler SP 250, but was over 50% more than the Triumph TR3, MGA or Sunbeam Alpine and over 30% up on the Austin-Healey 3000. No wonder then that only 1,366 rolled off Bertone's line, making the Speciale as rare as the Mercedes 300 SL Gullwing, the Aston Martin DB4 and Facel Vega HK500/2. By comparison, during this period its most prolific competitors were VW Karmann Ghia at 200,000, MGA 92,000, Triumph TR3 75,000, Sunbeam Alpine 70,000, and

356A Porsche at 21,000.

The exceptional performance of the Speciale is really highlighted when realising that in its class — 2-seater coupés up to 2-litres, very few competitors have surpassed its top speed even now — 30 years later!

Local history

Of the handful of Speciales which came to South Africa and Rhodesia between 1959 and 1965 only the first two became well known. Imported by the Pieterse brothers of Continental Motors in 1959, the first (chassis no 78) cleaned up the sports car races at its debut at Grand Central. The field included three-litre Austin-Healeys, two-litre Triumphs, Porsches and Twin Cam MGAs. Greatest success was achieved by their second Speciale, one of only four Allegerita models with all aluminium bodywork (chassis no 5) — outright victories in the 1960 Maritzburg Six Hour Race in November, and in the Lourenço Marques Three Hour Race. During the Rand Daily Mail Nine Hour Race at Grand Central, the car was running third overall — all 1290cc of it — to a Porsche Spyder and a Lotus XV when a stone shattered the windscreen. After removing the rear screen, the intrepid drivers battled on, dropping to

fifth at the end!

The car illustrated (chassis no 491) is a 'second series' with bumpers and raised headlights. It was produced in April 1961, and imported by Continental Motors for Philo Pieterse. Nick Kingwill later took it over, selling to Koos Roets in the mid-sixties. It then passed through four more hands before Johnny Laurysen of Venturi Motors, Pretoria, acquired it in 1974. Dawie Breed of Alfa Boksburg took over in 1978. It was in Dawie's showroom that I found the car in December 1980 — the first Speciale I'd seen since Ernest Pieterse's at Grand Central twenty years ago!

Alfa fan

My first Alfa Romeo was purchased in September 1979, a four-year-old one-owner, immaculate 1600 GT Junior with only 35,000km on the clock. Very impressed with the dynamics and engineering, and having just joined the Alfa Romeo Club of South Africa, I was casually asking how many Sprints, Spiders and TIs had survived, and if they knew of any Speciales? One languishing in a Boksburg showroom was casually mentioned. . . It had been looked at by some club members but they steered clear from the car which had been badly and

incorrectly repaired after a front end crash, lacked a grille and numerous other items and had bonnet scoops, two radio aerials and disc brakes added. Having been impressed by the car's sheer beauty in 1960, I was hooked. Within a week my brother and I drove the faded, patchy, tomato-red car home — slowly and listing to starboard. It was December 7, 1980: price paid £1,750. (All prices quoted here were for the period 1980-1984 when S.A. R2.00 = UK £1.00.)

So much was missing or incorrect on my car that the first six months were spent examining it and looking at Sprints, Spiders and the only other complete Speciale I knew of — in Pretoria, 40 miles away.

With so many owners, the inevitable deterioration had set in. Sills and door skins were badly corroded; the seats, upholstery and carpets were all incorrect; disc brakes had been fitted at the front and narrow Berlina drums at the rear. Worst damage of all was to the nose, which had suffered a front end crash. The grille was missing altogether, the once-shapely front bumper damaged and so badly repaired that it was scrap; the bonnet was too flat, fitted 1½ins too low and equipped with forward-facing scoops. The nose panels above and below the misshapen grille opening were built up with filler up to ½in thick. The original engine was replaced with a later Giulia 1300 unit. The Veloce-type air cleaner, aluminium fan, the ventilation ducts, one chassis cross-member, electric fuel pump and filter, hooters, toggle switches, spare wheel, tools, jack, rear view mirror, visors, badges and script, all were gone.

The rebuild

The daunting task of searching for parts was made interesting and enjoyable by the generosity and enthusiasm of the many Alfa Romeo Club members and enthusiasts throughout the country. Leslie Hegedus of the Sprint Speciale Register in Toronto was a great help with his vast knowledge of the model. Most critical were the grille shield and side bars which were non-existent on my car.

Within two weeks I had located a grille after telephoning many Alfa agencies. Unbelievably a Pretoria dealer had imported one in 1962, but the owner had never collected! Price charged £2.50! A side bar was given by the owner of a superb white Giulia SS, also in Pretoria. This was later copied by an ex-Loganda sheet metal worker, who refused payment. Body parts and trim for this rare model are virtually non-existent. Four approaches to Alfa Romeo Milano and Arese were unsuccessful, but a fifth, obviously landing on the right desk, yielded the last bonnet skin and the upper and lower nose panels! They kindly let me have them for the 1960 sticker prices: £140 for the lot. A separate request resulted in a new windscreen at £180 — complete with good quality packing case. The screen on the car was OK, but scratched by a bladeless wiper. The gold 'Giulietta Sprint Speciale' script and Bertone badges for the flanks came from AFRA — a new-and-secondhand Alfa

parts specialist in Milano. They also supplied one sun visor, rear tail light lens and a new tool bag.

When originally looking to purchase a Classic sports-tourer, I went for Alfa, not only for their inherent qualities but because many components were shared with the TIs, Sprints and Spiders. In addition, almost 90,000 Alfas were made up from CKD in South Africa between 1958 and 1985, so mechanical parts are readily available. Suspension components, bolts, bushes, brackets, plates were taken from abandoned or scrapyards TIs and members' Sprint or Spider parts' bins. Similarly interior door handles, window winders, toggle switches, rear numberplate lights — even a chassis crossmember and fuel filter — all of which were missing! Most of these were generously supplied free of charge; most notably the Bendix electric fuel pump which an enthusiastic member whipped off his running 2600 Sprint saying: "I just want to see your SS going"! No charge.

Meanwhile progress on the body took place — slowly and intermittently, a common problem here with restorations. They always seem to be treated as fill-in jobs, despite offers/bribes of monthly or progress payments. Two-and-a-half years

"Everything went together easily — Alfa's engineering is really superb"

later the shell was complete, beautifully sprayed in the original paint colour formula Alfa Rosso — that deep blood red used on the early Speciales, not the more common light orange tone. Some phone calls to club members and eight turned up, one with trailer. They carried the shell into my garage on December 7, 1984.

Assembly

Once each part, nut, bolt and washer had been cleaned then assembly began, working nights and weekends. The first job was the wiring, which was a mess. Having waited for three weekends in a row for an auto electrician who didn't turn up, I climbed in myself. Fortunately Alfa were possibly the earliest users of vinyl for cable sleeving; the main loom behind the dashboard was filthy but otherwise OK. All the ancillary wiring was cleaned off with thinners, wire wool and rags — new connectors/ends soldered on, new sleeving slid on with the aid of talcum powder where long lengths were required. Very satisfying: the job was completed in three weeks. The next job was to replace all the brake pipes, unions and connectors, again DIY with the aid of a small flaring tool-kit and careful hand bending. This took about a week. Assembly was delayed as more missing bits were discovered. Whenever there was a problem, knowledgeable club members came to the rescue. One of the items of most concern was the brakes. The original huge finned aluminium drums had long since been removed; narrow Berlina units being substituted at the rear, ATE discs at

the front. The correct items were gathered over a period of four years — rear backing plates from AFRA, rear drums individually from Port Elizabeth and Pretoria, the huge three-shoe fronts from Johannesburg. Bleeding and adjusting the latter were quite tricky, but help from my brother and a friend had it done in a weekend.

The 1300cc engine was totally rebuilt at home. All the pistons, sleeves, bearings, gaskets, etc, were bought direct from a Johannesburg Alfa dealer for £325 in 1982. Everything went together easily — Alfa's engineering is really superb. A new clutch was put in and the differential serviced. A full set of the original-type brand new Pirelli Cinturato tyres were obtained, still with the stickers on — one coming from a club member who had bought it recently, the other three from another source.

In October of 1984 we went for the first test drive — the car still incomplete. Over the next year it was driven on temporary permits to have the exhaust system and alignment done and then to the upholsterer, who worked from my full-size drawings of each carpet and panel. An authentic PVC black and grey scheme was chosen. In between, missing bits such as the horns, regulator, correct handbrake system and other minutæ were collected, cleaned and fitted. The last item still missing, and definitely unobtainable worldwide, was the lovely curvaceous front bumper. As a last resort I had it made up by David Cohen's restoration shop. This work of craftsman's art was completed in one week, copied from another, and even better than the factory job. The first attempt at obtaining a roadworthy certificate failed — but only on details. A split-pin was required for the handbrake compensator, the foot-brakes were pulling to one side and unbelievably — the chassis number stamped on the firewall was "too difficult to read. You must scratch the paint off"! A week later and after obtaining a police clearance on the chassis number, the car sailed through. It was October 1986, five and three-quarter years after initial purchase. Total cost, excluding labour, was about £10,000, despite all except the bodywork and upholstery being done at home.

Over the next year Speciale no 491 managed a third place in the 1986 National Classic Concours d'Elegance and third in the Classic Section of the 1987 Alfa Romeo Club of SA Annual Concours. Far better than I had expected. Without the help and encouragement of my family, friends and Alfa Club members, I don't think I'd have managed. Our high altitude dry sunny climate is also an advantage. The car goes very well: smooth, softly suspended and quiet, totally untemperamental — and it's very fast. Having just driven a Triumph TR6, Austin-Healey 3000 MK III and DB4 and DB6 Aston Martins, I'm amazed at how much more modern and refined the Alfa is. After falling for the beauty of Ernest Pieterse's Speciale twenty-six years ago at Grand Central and now realizing the dream, it would be difficult to part with this Classic coupé.

