

The road to success

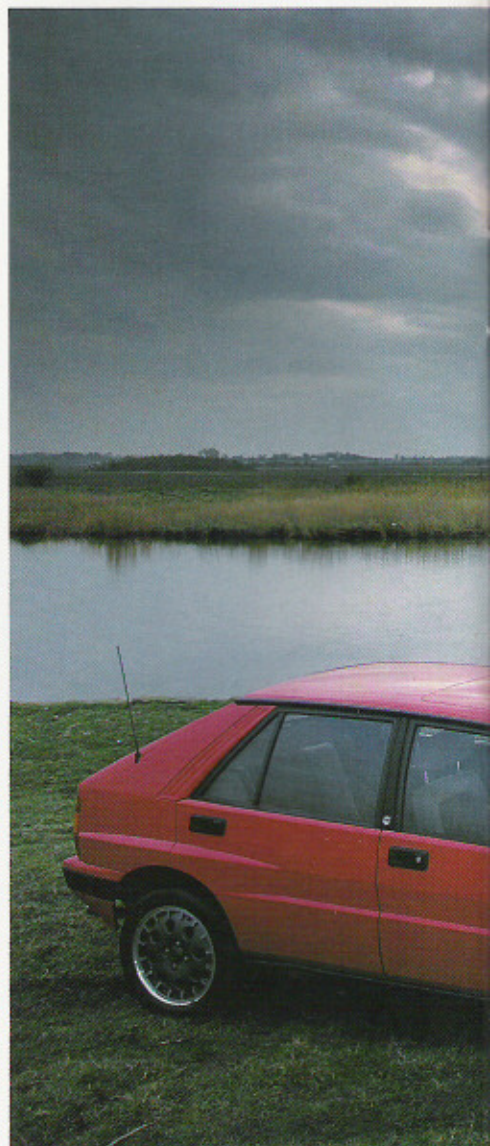
The Fulvia 1.6HF was the car which set Lancia off on its remarkable run of success in World Championship rallying. Like the HF integrale today, it may have been a fine road car, but competition success was a priority in its development.

Few rally enthusiasts will not mourn the passing of those stupefyingly fast Group B supercars. Yet their demise has, in truth, returned the sport to its road car roots.

But, while speeds may be a little slower now, success is certainly no easier (and probably no cheaper). For, as any competition manager will tell you, finding that winning amalgam of performance and reliability in a production car is a lot harder than in one purpose-built for the job.

And that's where Lancia's last 25 unbroken years of competition experience is unrivalled. Few teams have such an encyclopaedic knowledge of the sport and its rules. The Delta HF integrale is the current product of all this wisdom: a cleverly engineered 'homologation special' that is both fine road car and instantly adaptable rally winner – but it certainly isn't the first.

That honour went to a Lancia of 20 years ago; the Fulvia 1.6HF, the little coupe which took Lancia to two World and two European Rally Championships. Like the HF integrale now, its principal objective was competition success, and a rather special road car emerged as a by-product.



Two classic world rally championship winners

The coupe was introduced in 1964 as sister to the boxy new Fulvia saloon. It ran on a shorter, 91 inch wheelbase version of the saloon's floorplan, which allowed for respectable 2+2 accommodation inside the distinctive exterior lines. These were styled in-house at Lancia and surprisingly efficient for the day, too, with a claimed Cd value of 0.39.

The Fulvia continued a tradition of sophisticated Lancia engineering, with an 80bhp, 1216cc version of Lancia's remarkable V4 engine – a canted, narrow angle vee unit, with twin chain driven overhead cams.

Drive was to the front wheels of course via a four – later five – speed gearbox, while suspension used double wishbones and coils at the front and a beam rear axle on semi-elliptic springs and located by a Panhard rod.

Competition soon became a Fulvia priority. The semi-private HF Squadra Corse with its famous red elephants badge and Hi-Fi designation was adopted as the official factory team under Cesare Fiorio (still in charge today) and the first Fulvia HF was not long in arriving, with aluminium body panels,



no bumpers and plastic side windows saving 145kgs, and more power too. Then came a 1.3HF with 101bhp and finally, in 1968, the 1.6HF. This all-new 1584cc unit produced 114bhp in road trim; 132bhp in competition tune with bigger Solax carburettors, hotter cams and higher compression. Works rally engines gave 140bhp reliably, eventually increased to around 160bhp.

The familiar homologation tricks were all there: lightened bodywork with huge headlamps, wide-track front suspension with negative camber, six inch alloy wheels, high-ratio steering, plastic wheel arch extensions and a range of final drives – although alongside the technical wizardry of the HF integrale it all seems rather naive now doesn't it?



Relatively small numbers of the original 'boy racer' Fulvia 1.6HF reached the U.K. Rather, most arrived here as the more luxurious Series 2 'Lusso' version with bumpers, extra chromework, an all-steel body, smarter trim including seats with integral head restraints and 14 inch wheels. These British rhd cars also had characteristic raised outer headlights to comply with local lighting laws.

By HF integrale standards, the Fulvia is scarcely quick, but it was no slouch for its day. Contemporary road tests speak of 0-60mph in around nine seconds – though that was partly thanks to low gearing as Autocar magazine only reported maximum speeds of 100-105 mph.

In its 12 years of life the Fulvia coupe sired many other sporting variants, notably the Zagato bodied Sport, which in its ultimate 1.6 form became the fastest Fulvia of all at 117mph.

But the little coupe will be remembered longest for its rally successes. Fiorio signed a young Italian, Sandro Munari, to drive for the team in 1966 – it was to be a good choice! Munari soon became a master of the still novel left-foot-braking technique used to swing a fwd car into corners. With its light and rigidly located rear end, and superb traction from the front overhung V4, the Fulvia couldn't have been better designed for the job!

In 1969, Harry Källström gave the newly homologated 1.6HF victory in the RAC Rally and also became that year's European Champion; the following year he repeated the RAC win in dramatic style after engine problems and a crash. But soon Munari began to dominate, winning the European Championship in 1971 and beginning a Monte Carlo hat-trick in 1972 – the year the Fulvia HF won Lancia the World Rally Championship. The next year Munari and the Fulvia were European champions again and in 1974, the Fulvia (with the aid of its production successor, the Beta Coupe) earned Lancia a second World title. By then though, the era of the purpose-designed rally car – in the striking shape of the Lancia Stratos – was in sight.

25 years of competition experience from the Fulvia 1.6HF to the Delta HF integrale