



**TEST
EXTRA**

Alfa Romeo 33S 16v Permanent 4

Permanent four-wheel drive is probably Alfa Romeo's final attempt to iron out the 33's shortcomings and the driver now has full access to one of the most charismatic engines around

YOU CAN'T ACCUSE ALFA ROMEO of refusing to listen to the 33's critics. Lambasted from the outset for failing to provide the same thrills as the 33's legendary predecessor, the Alfasud, Alfa was soon hard at work providing more power from a bigger engine to make up the shortfall. Then, when the 33 sprinted as well as the opposition, the critics turned their attention to the appallingly heavy steering with its attendant torque steer problem. Alfa responded with a thorough redesign that involved even more powerful engines, power steering to lighten the load and

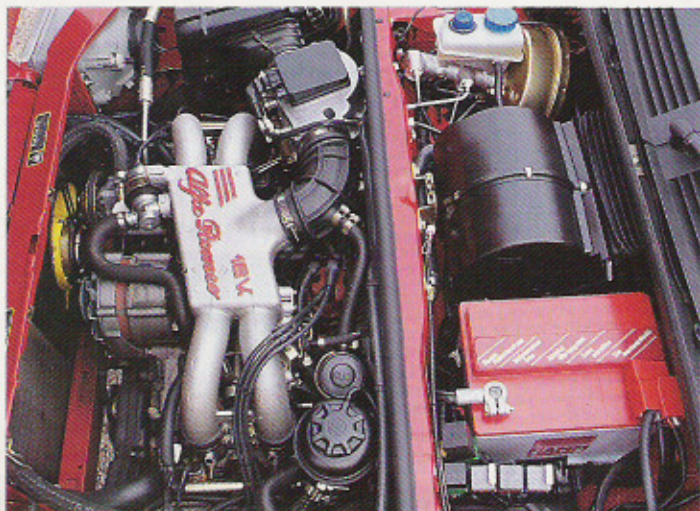
front suspension revisions to sedate the hyperactive helm.

But even that was not enough to earn the 33 a quiet life. The added urge of the new quad-cam flat four engine not only cancelled out much of the benefit of the suspension tweaks but revealed another problem: for a pukka hot hatch, the 33 had only adequate grip in the dry and insufficient in the wet. Now Alfa has an answer to both problems with one solution: four-wheel drive.

Not to be mistaken with the selectable fixed-split all-wheel drive system found on



Four-wheel drive has cured the 33's torque steer and improved grip, but the car still breaks traction at surprisingly low speeds. Recaro seats and Nardi steering wheel are welcome but the driving position is as uncomfortable as ever. The 1.7-litre 16-valve flat four is charismatic but less flexible than the eight-valve unit



33 estates of yore, the Permanent 4 is fitted with a central viscous coupling developed exclusively for the 33 by Steyr-Puch. Usually it doles out 95 per cent of the 1712cc engine's 137bhp and 118lb ft of torque to the front wheels, but up to 65 per cent can be directed aft if it is required.

For those who have been plagued by the neurotic twitchings of a front-drive 33 under full acceleration, the Permanent 4 will be the perfect tonic. No matter how wet the road or how tight the turn, the steering is a model of propriety. Which, in truth, is the least that can be expected from a four-wheel drive system.

The unexpected bonus of the Permanent 4's extra hardware is how little it dents the 33's performance. Indeed, thanks to its new-found ability to direct all its power forward instead of from side to side, it is a good deal quicker off the line, taking 8.6secs to reach 60mph as opposed to 8.9secs for its 176lb lighter front-wheel-drive sister. Top speed has fallen 4mph to 124mph and the Permanent 4 is 0.8secs slower from 50-70mph in top than before, taking 12.4secs. Unaccountably, the slog from 30-50mph in fourth is dispatched a fraction quicker than the standard 33 16v. Only fuel economy has taken a dive, sinking from a superb 29.7mpg to an unimpressive 25mpg.

But if the Permanent 4's performance has lost less than expected, its handling has gained less too. Apart from the welcome absence of torque steer, many of the 33's less desirable traits remain. Chief among these is the steering's lack of feel. Although the wheel is well weighted and turns the car precisely, when the tyres do start to lose purchase there

is little warning through the rim. And although the power is now fed through all four tyres, it is still possible for it to overwhelm their grip at surprisingly low speeds. It is just as well that the chassis has a natural balance; it never requires more than a brief lift to pull the car back on course. Naturally it clings to the road more tenaciously than before when it's wet, but it still starts to slide at disappointingly modest speeds for its advanced driveline.

Yet Alfa enthusiasts should be grateful for small mercies, because if nothing else the Permanent 4 now gives you full access to one of the most charismatic engines around. Previously when you accelerated up to its 6750rpm red line, you were distracted by the steering's histrionics. Now you can sample its delights and sublime exhaust note unimpeded. It is still a flawed powerplant — it is less flexible than the eight-valve unit and only gives its all above 4500rpm — but many will forgive that for its throttle response.

As ever, this 33 is a car for individuals. At £14,997, it remains good value, with a roomy interior and a wealth of standard goodies. Also remaining, though, is the offset, short-legged driving position, rubbery gearchange and noisy motorway progress. Four-wheel drive has had little effect in most areas but is worthwhile for negating the torque steer alone.

It's likely that the Permanent 4 will be Alfa's last attempt to right the 33's wrongs. It is still far from perfect and lags behind the opposition in many respects, but until its all-new replacement makes its debut at the end of 1993, the Permanent 4 will satisfy the 33's small but devoted band of followers. ■

ALFA ROMEO 33S 16v PERMANENT 4 LAYOUT

Transverse, front engine, four-wheel drive

ENGINE

Capacity 1721cc, 4 cylinders in line

Bore 87mm Stroke 72mm

Compression ratio 9.5:1

Head/block alloy/iron

Valve gear dohc, four valves per cylinder

Fuel and ignition electronic injection, Bosch

Motronic 4.1 fuel injection

Max power 137bhp (PS-DIN) (102kW ISO) at 6500rpm

Max torque 119lb ft (161Nm) at 4600rpm

GEARBOX

Five-speed manual

Ratios Top 0.85, 4th 1.03, 3rd 1.32, 2nd 1.86, 1st

3.14 Final drive ratio 3.89

SUSPENSION

Front struts, lower wishbones, anti-roll bar

Rear tubular axle, Panhard rod, coil springs

STEERING

Rack and pinion, power assisted, 3 turns lock to lock

BRAKES

Front ventilated discs Rear discs

PRICE

£14,997

PERFORMANCE

MAXIMUM SPEEDS

Gear	mph	km/h	rpm
Top (mean)	124	200	6230
(best)	126	203	6330
4th	117	188	6750
3rd	86	135	6750
2nd	61	98	6750
1st	36	58	6750

ACCELERATION FROM REST

True mph	Time (secs)	Speedo mph
30	3.2	34
40	4.7	44
50	6.6	54
60	8.6	64
70	11.9	75
80	15.1	86
90	19.5	96
100	25.8	105
110	35.5	115

Standing 1/4 mile 16.9secs, 85mph

Standing km 30.7secs, 107mph

30-70mph through gears 8.7secs

ACCELERATION IN EACH GEAR

mph	Top	4th	3rd	2nd
10-30	—	—	8.1	4.6
20-40	13.7	9.2	6.0	4.0
30-50	11.1	8.3	5.9	3.8
40-60	11.3	8.6	5.8	3.9
50-70	12.4	8.8	5.8	—
60-80	13.7	9.0	6.2	—
70-90	14.9	9.9	—	—
80-100	17.4	11.3	—	—

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Overall mpg 25.0 (11.3 litres/100km)

Fuel grade unleaded (95RM)

Tank capacity 12.1 galls (55 litres)

WEIGHT

2401lb (1090kg)

Distribution % F/R 59/41

Test 2831lb (1285kg)

TEST CONDITIONS

Wind 12-14mph

Temperature 8deg C (46deg F)

Barometer 1021mbar

Surface dry asphalt/concrete

Test distance 1000 miles

Figures taken at 4200 miles by our own staff at the Lotus group proving ground, Millbrook.

All Autocar & Motor test results are subject to

world copyright and may not be reproduced

without the editor's written permission.