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**COVER STORY** ALFA 155 Q4

Alfa 155 plus Lancia Delta integrale equals Q4. *Jeremy Walton and Andrew English* test the formula

# Borrowed





# Wheels



**A**lthough it is the basis on which Alfa Romeo built a super new BMW-beating racing saloon, the Alfa 155 Q4 is not a disguised racer. And while it uses the revised mechanicals from five-times world rally championship winner, the Lancia Delta integrale, the Q4 is no souped-up refugee from the forests.

The refined four-door may be far from the total driving experience of its Fiat family cousin, the Lancia Delta, but it does open up an autumn sales opportunity for Alfa Romeo that could yield as many as 2,500 profitable sales per year. Britons will get their first chance to buy in September, a couple of months after the sales of the front-drive 155 start over here.

As a basis to build a performance saloon, the Alfa Q4 shows a smothering Fiat Group influence. The floorpan, sporting the ubiquitous MacPherson strut suspension, began life in the Fiat Tipo. It also provides the mid-range Lancia Dedra with underpinnings.

On top of this floorpan goes the somewhat understated Alfa Romeo 155 coachwork, although we should add that, when finished in a particularly fine midnight black, the body is distinguished and rather beautiful.

Implanted sparkle comes from the four-wheel drive system, and much of the DOHC 16v heart of the Lancia Delta integrale; a thoroughly modern marriage made in Fiat Corporate's heaven. In fact, Alfa big fish wheeled out for the launch denied integrale influence, and stated

There's a lot of good car in the Q4. We hope more of it will come out with development. Q4's aim should be to entertain but, in that respect, it is one grape short of a full bunch

that the twin-cam, 16v, turbo-charged and inlet-charge cooled four pot started out as "an Alfa project of 1987". They did admit the transmission is mainly Lancia, right down to the slight rear-wheel bias in torque split (53 percent rear, 47 percent front), and the gear ratios, but it is all fine-tuned to suit the 155.

In fact Lancia's 200bhp are traded for 190bhp in the Q4, but hefty mid-rpm overboosting gives the Alfa a similar torque figure developed 1,000rpm lower than the final version of Lancia's HF integrale.

Alfa's performance claims are logical, with the lower-drag body giving a higher top speed (up to 140mph), but the greater bulk (3,058lb) taking the edge off the standing start times. It looks unlikely that 0-60mph will come up in under seven seconds.

In everyday use Q4 owners get the benefit of lower noise levels and better fuel economy from the counterbalanced four than ever accrued to Lancia drivers.

The other thing about everyday driving in the Alfa is that you could be in danger of thinking it is just another rather uninspired Eurobox. The cabin lacks the fine materials of the integrale's (Alcantara suede, and soft leathers), and is dominated by hard plastics with a knurled finish.

While the driving position is a slight improvement on the traditional Alfa stance, the seats are uncomfortable and distinctly lacking

Wolfgang Falk



## ALFA 155 Q4

in side support. Instruments are massively better than Alfa's or Lancia's previous best, but although they include an oil temperature gauge, there is no inlet manifold depression indicator available to give you an idea of how much boost you are getting.

Steering too, is a disappointment. It gains another turn, lock-to-lock, compared to that of the integrale, and it lacks that car's amazing feel and directness. You have lost a primary line of communication, and it doesn't get any better if you speed up.

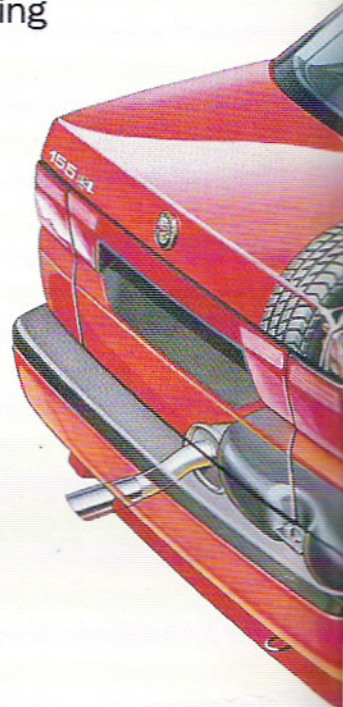
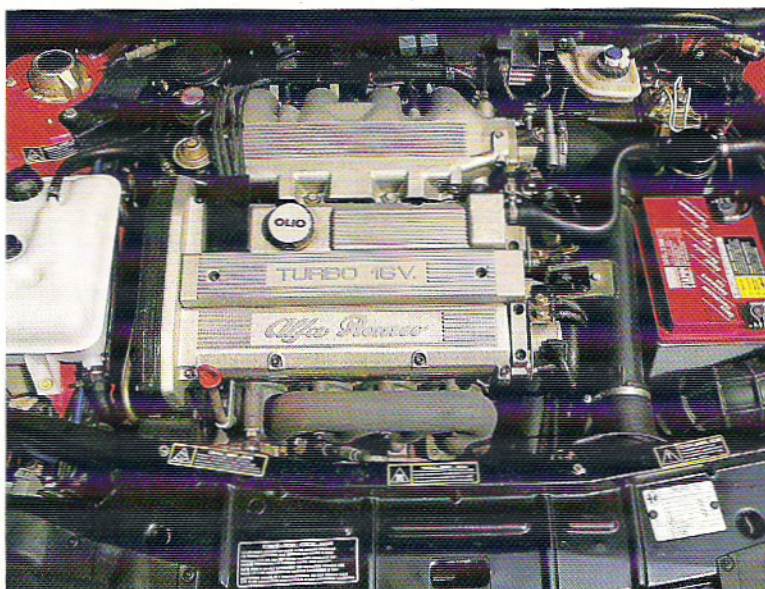
What does get better, though, is the handling. Initially the safety-based understeer dominates, affecting every turn you make, and all the responses. The Q4 ambles into corners, although it is easy to balance on the reserves of its considerable adhesion.

It would be easy to dismiss the handling here without further comment, but if you start to work at the car, turning into corners off the power and brakes to allow the nose to point at the apex under the body's natural tendency to lift-off oversteer, then bashing out of the corner fully on the boost, even with a trace of four-wheel drift in the wet, it responds magnificently. It sounds like slow in, fast out, and to some extent that's true. It can be fun, but it is harder work than it should be.

Understeer is very comforting to have, though, and the driver can commit the grossest errors in mid corner without being punished, even to the extent of putting on the brakes when fairly committed. And the quartet of anti-lock monitored brakes are terrific, without detectable fade, even on the track.

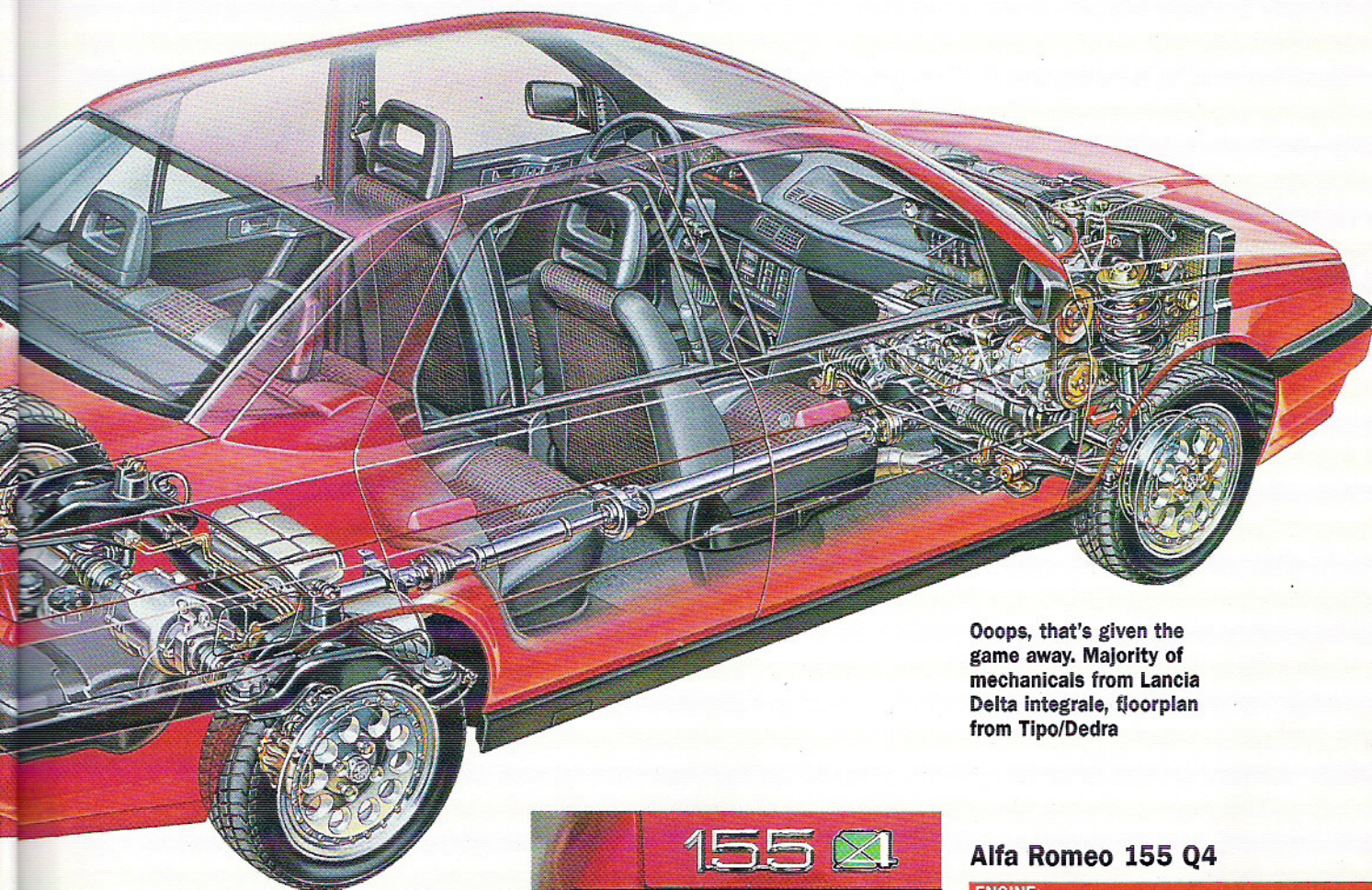
You have to work hard to get through that initial oh-so-safe understeer, but then the Q4 really starts to swing

**Tried and trusted DOHC 16v 2.0-litre engine from integrale gives 190bhp, and 216lb ft of torque at 2,500rpm**



Wacky styling excesses of past Alfas noticeably absent in understated 155





Ooops, that's given the game away. Majority of mechanicals from Lancia Delta integrale, floorplan from Tipo/Dedra

The engine is as superb as you would expect, and huffs and puffs like Mansell between 2,300 and 3,000rpm, after which it goes into 'force-ten-from-Turin' mode all the way past the 6,500rpm red line, and on to the rev limiter at 6,800. In fourth and fifth gear, the Alfa gathers speed with a fine blend of executive express luxury and sporting composure. The gearbox doesn't add to the effect one iota, unfortunately, with a nasty baulking in lower gears at lower speeds that really only sorts itself out when it gets to high rpm.

For all that, however, Q4 always seems to have a little bit of unexploited reserve left in handling and engine power; a characteristic that continued right on to the race track as well.

Initially only left-hand drive will be sold in the UK (approx 100 per year), but by 1993 we are promised a right-drive version. By then, of course, BMW will have the conventional rear-drive, six-pot, 270 plus bhp, M3 coupé on sale; stiff opposition indeed.

We think Alfa Romeo will need to inject a little more sporting spirit (and probably appearance) to meet the challenge. As it stands, the Q4 is worthy opposition to the V6 Audi 80 quattro, but for our money, it still hasn't the required "gotta have it" factor. ■



Alfa 155 Q4 a far cry from the racing saloon version. Just 100 LHD versions a year will find their way into the UK - RHD versions slated for late 1993



Attractive 15in split-rim three-piece wheels add a welcome touch of class

## Alfa Romeo 155 Q4

### ENGINE:

Four cylinders inline, 1995cc, front transversely mounted, DOHC, four valves per cylinder, Weber Marelli P8 electronic ignition and fuel injection management, Garrett T3 turbocharger, air-to-air intercooling, twin catalytic converter exhaust.

**PEAK POWER, bhp/rpm:** 190/6000

**PEAK TORQUE, lb ft/rpm:** 216/2,500

### TRANSMISSION:

Five speed manual gearbox with Borg Warner synchromesh, Permanent 4x4 with 47% front to 53% rear engine torque split using viscous coupling and Torsen limited slip differentials. Front, transversely mounted.

### CHASSIS:

**BODY TYPE:** monocoque steel body, four door saloon, four seater

**CLAIMED KERB WEIGHT, lb:** 3058 lbs.

**SUSPENSION, front/rear:** independent by MacPherson struts, cast iron lower wishbones, offset coil springs, rod-linked anti-roll bar/trailing arms, separated coil springs and telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Boge automatic/sport damper control.

**STEERING:** Speed sensitive hydraulic power-assisted rack and pinion.

**BRAKES, front/rear:** ventilated discs/solid discs. Bosch 2S ABS, 6-sensors, servo assistance.

**WHEELS/TYRES,** Alloy 6Jx15/205/50ZR-15 Pirelli P700-Z

**CLAIMED PERFORMANCE:** top speed 140 mph, 0-60 mph 7 sec

### PRICE:

£21,309 in Italy, including 19% VAT

### MANUFACTURER/UK AGENTS:

Alfa Romeo (GB) Limited  
266 Bath Road  
Slough  
Berkshire SL1 4HJ