

Classic Choice

The Alfa Romeo 75 was the last rear-wheel drive saloon made by the Milanese manufacturer and the last to have an easily understood number for a name. Introduced in 1985 to mark Alfa Romeo's 75th anniversary, the 75 replaced the aging Giulietta saloon with the intention of restoring Alfa's image as a manufacturer of cars for the spirited driver.

In fact there was nothing very new about the 75. Styled 'in-house', the angular, high-tailed shape was a final evolution of the 'wedge design' that was fashionable when the Giulietta had been introduced in 1977 and was continued in the 33. Indeed, to many eyes the 75 was a stretched 33 in appearance. The mechanics were well tried, too; the engines were the four cylinder twin cam units in 1.6, 1.8 and 2.0 litre guise, which dated back to the Giulia range of the 1960s and 1970s, and the more modern 2.5 V6 that powered the GTV6 and first appeared in the Alfa 6 in 1979. The 75 also retained the transaxle set-up, with the clutch and

A REVIEW OF THE
WELL-RESPECTED,
IF ENIGMATIC,
ALFA SPORTING
SALOON

Alfa Romeo 75

Story by Chris Savill Photography by Michael Ward

gearbox in the rear axle housing, which the Alfetta saloon had pioneered (for Alfa) in 1972.

Nevertheless the package worked well. The near ideal weight distribution made for predictable, well-balanced handling and, with nicely weighted rack and pinion steering, the driver could enjoy the level of feedback one expects from a sporting saloon. Somehow, the more neutral handling 4-cylinder 75s delivered their attributes more convincingly than their Alfetta and Giulietta parents, while the sonorous V6 turned the potent GTV6 coupe into a four door saloon. Improvements to the remote and baulky gearchange helped, as did the feeling that the 75 was better screwed together.

Build quality, or rather its absence, had become a serious problem for Alfa Romeo and the 75 proved to be a real improvement. The electro-galvanised outer panels with

zincrometal coating, wax-injected box sections and a urethane coated underside meant that Alfa Romeo were confident enough to offer a six year anti-corrosion warranty. The measures worked; the warranty was seldom breached and the many surviving and treasured 75s are mostly rust free.

We had to wait until mid 1986 before right-hand drive 75s arrived and at first only the 4-cylinder 1.8 and the 2.5 V6 were marketed here. By then a 1.8 turbo petrol and a 2.0 litre turbo diesel were available in Europe, as well as the twin cam 1.6 and 2.0 litre cars. Then, in 1987 a twin spark version of the 2.0 litre was introduced offering 148bhp, some 20 more than the single spark engine, and approaching the 156hp of the 2.5 V6 which was immediately replaced by a range-topping 2,959cc ↪





6V iniezione



TOP: Run on an everyday basis this 6V Iniezione has covered 160,000 miles

ABOVE: At the other end of the scale this 'as new' 1.8 is five years old with only 24,000 on the clock

version. In 3.0 litre form the V6 pushed out 188bhp and 184lb ft of torque, enough to howl past the sixty mark in under eight seconds and on to speeds approaching 140mph. The press just loved the flexible, powerful and spirited new engine, while the twin spark also came in for its fair share of praise: 'Brio by the bucketful' according to Autocar.

Both models were available in Veloce form, sporting alloy wheels, a front air dam, side skirts and a rear spoiler, and the two specs – Standard and Veloce – continued through a mild makeover at the end of 1988. The range received a new grille design, which was body coloured on the 2.0 litre Twin Spark and V6, a new front bumper, new all-red rear light lenses and, inside, new seat trims and instrument graphics; the 1.8 litre engine was now electronically fuel injected and the same improvement was introduced on the 1.6 litre engine the following year.

“Eighteen years on from its introduction the 75 is still a satisfying car to drive”

In 1990 the 3.0 litre Veloce was replaced by the 3.0 Green Cloverleaf, with the engine re-rated to 192bhp, and in 1991 a desirable addition to the range was the Twin Spark Limited Edition. The LE, which was the last development of the 75 before the model gave way to the 155 in 1992, was particularly well equipped. Outside there were sideskirts, alloy wheels similar to those on the very special Alfa Romeo SZ, front fog lamps, headlamp washers and body coloured door mirrors. Inside, Recaro seats, a leather-rimmed steering wheel, electric sunroof, central locking, a six speaker stereo system and a numbered plaque completed the changes.

Eighteen years on from its introduction the 75 is still a satisfying car to drive. It's cheap to buy, with good examples between one and two thousand pounds, and rare low-mileage 'minters' not a lot more. The engines are practically bulletproof and like to be driven hard. As usual with any older car, it's the 'bits and bobs' that wear out. Watch out for gearbox whine and crunchy second and third gear synchros, worn rear wheel bearings, seized rear calipers and handbrake adjusters, cracked rubber propshaft couplings and play in the lower ball joints. Look for head gasket leaks on the twin spark engines and oil leaks from the belt tensioner seals on the V6. Replacement exhausts are becoming difficult to find,

“a car that flows well through the undulating twists and turns of Chobham’s hilly section”

particularly for the V6, so make sure that weak supports don’t lead to premature fracturing.

The oldest of the 75s we tried was the 1986 75 Cloverleaf 6V Iniezione belonging to the Alfa Romeo Owners’ Club Secretary, Ken Carrington. An early UK import, this Grigio Verde V6 started life as a dealer demonstrator at Romford Market Garage. Always used as an everyday car, the car has been Ken’s regular transport since 1998 and he has doubled the recorded mileage taking it on past 160,000 miles.

This V6 is a good drive and it is easy to see why Ken has derived so much pleasure from over 15,000 miles of driving it each year. I found the engine sweet and powerful and the Harvey-Bailey suspension kit provides both grippier handling and a level but jar free ride. David has tweaked the steering geometry making this a particularly ‘pointy’ example and eliminating much of the understeer inherent to the V6 versions of the 75.

A contrast in many ways was Graham Oliver’s Champagne Silver, 1988 carburettor engined 1.8 four-cylinder 75, another first series car but with an early life of relative idleness. Graham is the second owner and only routine service has been required in bringing the mileage up to a genuine 24,000. The condition of the cloth interior, the smell of the fabrics and the feel of the controls are all those of a much younger car and what a nice car to drive it is. OK, there’s little of the V6’s spine-tingling grunt but what you get is the best of classic ‘single spark’ four cylinder Alfa motoring in a relatively modern package.

The engine revs freely, pulling strongly from 2,000rpm and singing lustily from 4,500rpm through to the surprisingly low onset of the red line at 5,800rpm. The exhaust’s muted rasp urges you on while the nice front/rear balance and well modulated brakes make the ‘old fashioned’ 1.8 a car that flows well through the undulating twists and turns of Chobham’s hilly section. At the time of driving this immaculate car was for sale at a little over £1,000 – what a buy!

Back to the V6s and it was time to try Wayne Ellett’s 1990 75 3.0 V6 Veloce. Wayne’s car is a good example of how the 75 has lent itself to ‘tuning and tarting’, all in the best possible taste here, and a credit to Wayne’s workshops at EMC Racing in Redhill. At 140,000 miles this may be a high mileage car but it neither looks nor drives like one. The 3.0 litre V6 punches out more than enough power for most in standard form but this one has the higher compression pistons and cams from Alfa’s charismatic SZ and is soon to have a 3.5-litre unit with throttle bodies and a remapped injection system. Brembo 4 pot calipers and Konis take care of the braking and handling while some attractive 17” Azev alloy wheels add more than a touch of tasteful tarting to the Veloce body kit by allowing a set of 205 section 40 profile tyres to add the glue to the improved handling.

Out on the track this example showed why the 75’s chassis has plenty in reserve for those who want to develop the car’s performance. The secret to pushing well past three figures on Chobham’s one ↪

RIGHT: This smart red 3.0 75 Veloce tuned by EMC Racing will soon be further uprated with a 3.5-litre power unit with throttle bodies and remapped injection





SPECIFICATIONS AND PERFORMANCE

	75 1.8	75 2.0 T Spark	75 2.5 V6	75 3.0 V6
Capacity	1,779cc	1,962cc	2,492cc	2,959cc
Bore	80mm	84mm	88mm	93mm
Stroke	88.5mm	88.5mm	68.3mm	72.6mm
Compression	9.5:1	10:1	9:1	9.5:1
Fuel System	2x40DHLA	Bosch ME7	Bosch L-Jet	Bosch L-Jet
Power	120bhp	148bhp	156bhp	188bhp
5th@1,000rpm	20.2mph	20.9mph	20.9mph	24.2mph
Kerb Weight	2,482lb	2,535lb	2,591lb	2,772lb
Max Speed	119mph	124mph	127mph	134mph
0-60	10.3sec	9.1sec	8.2sec	7.9sec
0-90	24.9sec	21.2sec	19.1sec	17.6sec
50-70 in 4th	8.9sec	8.3 sec	6.8 sec	6.1 sec
Original price	£9,399(1987)	£11,899(1987)	£11,649(1986)	£15,799(1988)
Value now (sound to mint)	£650-£1,250	£950- £2,250	£750-£1,500	£950-£2,500

main straight is to carry 'speed with safety' through the preceding long left-hander. This developed car held its line beautifully and was still accelerating strongly before those reassuring brakes were required at the end of the straight.

The newest of the four 75s on test was Todd Wilson's 1991 75 2.0 Twin Spark LE, number 1186 in the series. A contract hire car originally – and, no, not a Mafia sort of contract – Todd traded in a 164 to buy the car in 1996. Three years daily use culminated in a class win at the Owners' Club National Concours in 1999 and regular maintenance by the Alfa specialist, Mobitech, in

BELOW: Newest car of the group was this 1991 2.0 Twin Spark LE, identified by its 'peppercorn' wheels. Used daily this car is also an AROC concours winner

Canterbury has ensured that this example drives as well as it looks. Ball joints, bushes and drive shaft seals have been part of the routine replacements and some cosmetic respraying, due to colour fading, has kept up the appearance of this smartly turned out example.

It is easy to see why the 75 Twin Spark has such a



loyal following. It's the final evolution of Alfa's classic twin cam engine and although it may not be quite as musical as the carburettor engined versions it still sings a pretty good tune while offering a lot more performance. As owners will point out, it doesn't lag far behind the 2.5 V6 while offering rather better handling and fuel consumption. I wouldn't disagree and I would add that the combination of appropriate gear ratios and a freer revving engine than the carburettor cars, allows the Twin Spark to be driven with added panache.

The 75 has a strong and deserved following. Just don't mention those roof mounted window switches, the aircraft hand brake, 'I'll flash when I want to' warning lights or suggest that only those with long arms and short legs are qualified to drive. Be warned, 75 drivers are passionate about their cars and some of the owners are quite large! 