



ENZO'S *Race*

THE TEST

by Roberto Giordanelli



The race regulations are the same for everyone, but it was the British politician Ian Macleod who said, "Equal opportunity means opportunity to be unequal". As has happened many times before, along comes a new car/driver combination to pulverise the opposition. This year it is the turn of Enzo Buscaglia to 'steamroller' the Le Mans-Auto Italia races as well as the Alfa Romeo race series.

There is always a reason for such supremacy. There are many factors that have led to this domination – this 'inequality'. It's easy really, all you need is plenty of skill, hard work, some money, experience, a sound concept, determination and an organised team behind you.

Enter Julian Birley – boss of Alfacentre and Rare Motorsport (www.alfacentre.co.uk). Enzo's energy, racecraft and 'setting up' talents combined with 'hands-on' in the engineering department, inspire the 'team'

to victory. Gone the days of a one-man-band club race winner – today a team is essential if you want to win.

Enzo's team is from Milton Keynes, but you may not fall off your chair to hear that his family is Italian – Sicilian to be precise, from just outside Agrigento. It is about as far south as you can go and still be in Europe. Enzo was an instructor at Dorington until teaming up with Julian Birley. Julian set up Alfacentre in June '99 to supply Alfa Romeo parts but Rare Motorsport is figuring heavily in the rapidly developing company.

Stop Press – Enzo may move on next year and the black beast may be for hire to the 'right' driver. Go on..., make him an offer he can't refuse.

The 'sound concept' part of the aforementioned equation is the well balanced works-built chassis of the Alfa Romeo 75. You get a 50-50 weight distribution and an engine bay that (under the rules) can house a V6 engine. The first V6 75s came with a 150bhp 2.5-litre V6. Enzo's race car boasts a 24-valve, 3.5-litre V6 with 410bhp at 8,000rpm. The rolling

shell came from Italy – and as can be seen in the history piece, it ran in the Italian Touring Car Championship.

The team has two engines for the savage 75 – both 24-valve V6s. The car normally runs with the 3.5-litre engine but for this track test it had just been fitted with the 'spare' – a 3.3-litre unit.

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The day prior to this Alfa Romeo Owners' Club Mallory Park test day saw this ex-ITCC 75 at the Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground. It was there to check and 'map' the 3.3-litre motor. Here is where the 'team' thing comes in again. They have their own electronics boffin at their disposal. Quiet, unassuming Domingoes is from South Africa, and he made – yes, made – and programmed the ECU.



We drive the Rare Motorsport-prepared Alfa Romeo 75 that is cleaning up on the UK club circuits this season

Domingoes mapped the motor on one of the hottest 'high pressure' days of the year (32°C). This being England, the very next day was low pressure and not quite 18°C. In any case, this meteorological element was on the suspect list as the possible culprit for spluttering at part-throttle.

Alfa Corsa literally built this 75 around the roll cage. I remember seeing the car years ago when it first came into the UK

and was most impressed by its strength, standard of preparation and state-of-the-art race suspension. Looking battle-scarred after years of UK club racing, the car is now more modified and much quicker. Alfa Corsa/Rare Motorsport are responsible for the significant power increase and numerous other in-house alterations. The front track has been increased to improve turn-in and kill the understeer. A front splitter and boot spoiler have been added but Enzo reckons they don't do much as the 185mph car suffered some nervousness at its Bruntingthorpe top speed. It is amazing how those unfamiliar with motorsport think that a racing car reaches its top speed on a typical UK race circuit. They think 'motorway'. I always tell them, "Don't think 'motorway', think 'motorway service area'". The road layout in the 'services' has far more in common with a race circuit than horizon-stretching three-laner.

Still running with the Alfa Corsa straight cut race gearbox, the 75 also has an lsd. It is a delight to use and very confidence-inspiring to know that the 'weak link' in the Alfetta transmission chain is gone.

LEFT Where it all happens

TOP RIGHT The view most Le Mans-Auto Italia competitors are seeing this season. Our thanks to Michael Lindsay of the AROC for his help with the test

Still with its original high gearing, the 75 was built to tackle a long straight should the case arise. The two straights at Mallory Park are about a quarter of a mile in length. The Stack system data logging would show about 130 to 140mph. To put things in perspective, an expertly driven new 150mph Mercedes, or similarly high-powered saloon, would struggle to show 90mph.

The 75's monster brakes have Brembo calipers with drilled and grooved discs. There are centre-lock wheels and onboard air jacks, fully adjustable coil-overs by Koni and all the usual safety equipment. Up front, there is a lightweight water radiator and two more coolers – one for the engine oil and another for the transmission. With fibreglass wings, steel doors and various lightweight panels, race weight is 1,075 kilos.

Time to do the 'business'. Strapped into the 'wrap-around' Corbeau Revolution seat, I find the sitting position perfect. All round visibility – perfect. Press the button and off we go. A couple of laps to warm up the Dunlop slicks and a run round Mallory goes something like this.

The track edge approach to Gerrards is very fast and bumpy but the 75 is better than most at coping. Turn-in is razor-sharp and power can be applied way before the apex – if not for acceleration, for balance. Such is the forgiving nature of the





ABOVE Enzo Buscaglia talks 'racing' with Roberto Giordanelli

THE CAR

by Julian Birley

The car was originally brought over from Italy in 1989 as a rolling shell minus the engine by Gus Lambrou of Alfatone in St Helens, Merseyside. Gus had planned to use the car in the UK Touring Car series and fitted a 12-valve three-litre V6 motor, rated 290bhp at 7700rpm with 265Nm of torque. Unfortunately the regulations changed to a two-litre limit in 1991.

Gus found himself with a three-litre V6 Touring Car and nowhere to race so he decided to enter the car in the Alfa Romeo Owners' Club Championship for '91 and '92. The car went into semi-retirement and was eventually sold to Alan Marshall in 1998.

With Enzo Buscaglia on board at Rare Motorsport for the 2000 season, 'old 69' seemed to be a good basis to build a race-winning car. The car came over from Alan Marshall minus its power unit so plans were laid down to fit a 24v 3.5-litre engine under the bonnet. After some trial and error earlier this year, a basic engine was in place on to which was bolted a special set of heads and cams topped with an induction system and tuned exhaust to get every ounce of power achievable out of the unit. Dyno readings indicate power just in excess of 400bhp which is managed by a bespoke, programmable ECU and diagnostic unit developed for this unique engine by Rare Motorsport's electronics supremo, Domingoes de Carvalho.

The rest of the car, apart from the colour, is as was planned by Alfa Corsa, still using the original racing gearbox with AP clutch, fully adjustable transaxle, Brembo brakes and Koni shocks. ■

neutral set-up that the throttle can be used to steer the car. When I asked Enzo what he liked best about the car, he said, "It's rear-wheel drive" – say no more, (watch out for a horse's head in your bed Enzo, Fiat/Alfa bosses won't like that comment).

Mid-corner spluttering gives way to raw grunt as fourth gear 'never-ending' Gerrards catapults you on to the Stebbe straight. It's June in England and it's typhoon season. The assisting tail wind means high speed and a brief flirtation

with fifth gear before stamping on the middle pedal for the 'no-prisoners' fourth gear Lake Eses. The brake pedal is solid enough but there is a 'wooden' feeling – probably the endurance pads. There is also some gentle tail wagging on the high retardation approach. "Too much rear brake", but Enzo says he likes it that way, "it helps with turn-in".

More middle pedal and tail-up wagging for Shaws Hairpin. An easy action AP twin-plate clutch and down into second gear a millisecond before applying an armful of lock. Superb traction and a crowd pleasing power-slide if desired, the 75 takes Devil's Elbow 'flat' and rockets down the Kirby Straight to complete the lap. No one thing makes this car so quick, it is the whole package that works. Thank you Julian, thank you Enzo. It is reassuring to know that the 'GTA' I am preparing to compete against this well-sorted 75 doesn't stand a chance.

This test started with an 'equality' quote and so shall it finish – "What makes equality such a difficult business, is that we only want it with our superiors." Henry Becque (1837-99) – a French bloke.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL WARD