

BUDGET

Badges

Lucky Numbers

Whoever said a used Alfa Romeo was a bad idea? Robert Davies rolls the dice and discovers that there are solid and charismatic secondhand bargains out there



Whoever said you can't have your cake and eat it obviously never bought a secondhand Alfa Romeo.

Rorty, raucous and entertaining, Alfas have always been the enthusiast's choice. Yet because used Alfa prices — particularly during the last decade — used to nose-dive faster than a free-fall parachutist, they've also been great value for money.

Of course, there was a reason for this — eighties Alfas were poorly designed and shoddily built. You had to be an Alfa enthusiast to run an Alfa, simply because no-one else would put up

with their faults. Clonky gearchanges, driving positions seemingly designed to line osteopath's pockets, self-detaching trim and inadequate rust-proofing all turned buyers away in droves.

After years of seemingly ignoring these problems the company got its act together in the late eighties with a vengeance. Alfa began putting a lot more care into the way its models were designed and built. Most importantly, the spectre of rust was stamped out and six-year anti-rust warranties were introduced and in 1988 Alfa introduced a car it could be proud of — the world-class 164.

Since then the 155 has arrived, and while it hasn't received altogether rave reviews, at least it's solidly bolted together, smartly styled and well-equipped — things that count in the second-hand market. And replacements for the 33 and Spider are due to arrive shortly, completing the rejuvenation of Alfa's range and boosting its image further.

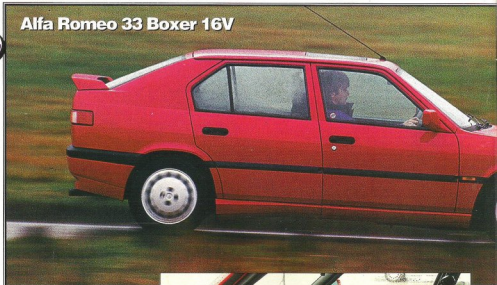
The result is that there's never been a better time to buy a used Alfa Romeo. A prospective buyer of a recent Alfa is





Lucky Numbers

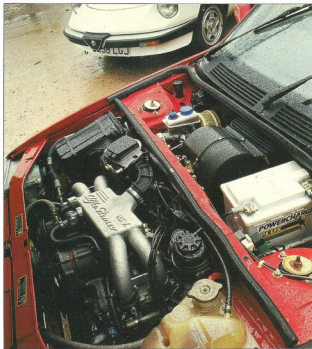
Alfa Romeo 33 Boxer 16V



● **It lacks the character of the much-loved 'Sud, but the 33 is still a stimulating used purchase**



● **Interior on 33 can get scuffed but car otherwise quite durable**



● **The 1.7-litre 16-valve unit is a peaky performer; needs revved**

looking at a solid, reliable and well-produced car. But because a bad reputation takes a very long time to live down, prices tend to be lower than comparable cars from other marques.

Sometimes much lower: used 33s and 75s are ridiculously cheap. Our £8000 budget will buy you a two-year-old 33 Permanent 4, or a 1991 75 V6 Cloverleaf — the top-range model that sold new for nearly £19,000.

Later Alfa models — the 164 and 155 — don't depreciate nearly so severely. The 155 is still out of our price range, but £8700 buys a 1990 164 2.0-litre Twin Spark, or a 1989 3.0-litre V6. This still represents very good value.

And for die-hard sports fans, there's always the Spider. Alfa's two-seater sports car, first seen more than 25 years ago, steadfastly refused to be pensioned off. As an instant classic, its used values hold up strongly.

Successor to the much-loved AlfaSud, the 33 five-door sports hatch was launched way back in 1983, and getting on for 20 variations on its theme have been offered. Early ones are immediately identifiable by a measles-like rash of rust spots, but are fine for someone looking for fun motoring for a minimal outlay.

On our £8000 budget, we're looking at post-mid-1990 33s. This date marks a minor but significant revamp of the model. A 16v quad-camshaft version of the characterful flat-four engine was introduced, producing 137bhp.

Meanwhile the 8v models received fuel injection and were rebadged 1.5ie and 1.7a.

Changes were made to the suspension to combat torque steer — an enduring 33 bugbear — power steering became standard, and both interior and exterior received a much-needed restyle.

The 16v Cloverleaf comes well-equipped with alloy wheels, front electric windows, central locking, a rear spoiler and tailgate wash/wipe. But watch out for the short-lived 91 16v kitted out to lowly 8v trim levels; best avoided unless it's a bargain.

Most insurance companies rate all post-1990 33s in group 13, so there's no advantage to be had in going for a 1.5ie instead of the 1.7. The 16-valve unit is a

peaky performer; if you prefer a car that doesn't have to be revved hard to make progress, you might actually prefer the 8-valve 1.7ie. Most Alfa fans don't — that flat-four cries out to be driven hard, and responds with a lovely rasping exhaust note.

Despite the 1990 suspension mods torque-steer is still a problem — a bout of throttle at low speed sends the 33's steering wheel writhing in your grasp as the front wheels struggle for grip.

It's a problem solved by the most satisfying 33 of all — the four-wheel drive Permanent 4. With a central differential set up to feed the power to the rear wheels when the front tyres start to lose grip, it's more than capable of keeping 137bhp under control. It's an entertaining system too, giving responsive, adjustable handling. Hip-hugging Recaro seats distinguish the P4 inside, but otherwise it shares the front-drive 16v's high equipment levels.

Permanent 4's are understandably sought-after, and command an extra £5,000 over the 16v Cloverleaf.

Also popular is the Sportwagon. Despite its clumpy sounding title, this is a smartly styled semi-sporty estate along the lines of BMW's 3 Series Touring, offering plenty of room for a couple of pairs of green wellies and a



33



damage, so a full service history backing this up is a good idea. A low-oil pressure reading isn't necessarily a problem — the oil pressure sensors fitted are notoriously unreliable. Tyres scrubbed on the inside suggests tracking out of adjustment, which seems to occur frequently with the Alfa 33.

33 1.5ie: Not much cheaper to run but a lot slower; forget it

33 1.7ie: Torquier 8-valve motor and subtle styling have their appeal

33 16v Cloverleaf: 137bhp makes this a real flyer; shame about the torque-steer

33 16v Sportwagon: Not the most practical estate but it's smart and trendy

33 16v Permanent: Our choice — 4WD makes the 33 a joy to drive

75

The 75 came straight from the traditional Alfa mould, with rear-wheel drive, a gearbox mounted on the back axle and a choice of two classic engines — the evergreen twin-cam, in 1.8 or 2-litre

Twin Spark guises, and the glorious V6, as a 2.5 or 3-litre. All sound fantastic and the 75 has more than enough charisma for you to forgive its boy styling, back-cracking driving position, wacky switchgear, clonky gearshift and suspect build quality.



brador, if not the kitchen sink. The big difference is that an early-nineties 318i Touring would set you back four or five grand more than a 33 Sportwagon — which makes the Alfa a real bargain.

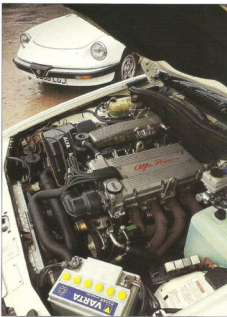
Whichever you fancy, take it for a decent test drive first. Despite an adjustable steering wheel, the typically Italianate driving position is not to everyone's taste. But if you love driving, you'll love the 33. The rubbery but quick gearchange can be shifted quickly to get the best out of that rory flat-four motor, and the small Alfa is nimble enough to make a quick cross-country blast a real pleasure to drive.

Post-1990 33s shouldn't rust, but standards of finish and interior trim do reflect the model's age. Look out for scuffed trim inside, and for crazing on the boot spoiler of 16-valve models. Red is of course the colour to go for; black is also popular and white best avoided.

Changing the cambelts religiously at 36,000 miles is vital to avoid expensive

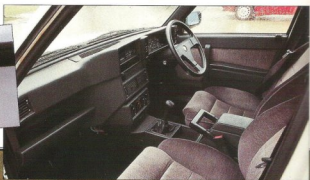
gearbox, it's a real clunker. Choosing between a 2-litre Twin Spark and a 3-litre V6 isn't as easy as it seems. Sure, with some 190bhp the V6 is significantly quicker, but it's also significantly more expensive to insure and maintain. The 2-litre dohc engine, whose origins are lost in the mists of time has a

With eight grand to spend you can forget the dirt cheap early twin-carb 1.8-litre. If you want an auto, then your choice is limited to a 2.5-litre V6. The 75 is a real driver's car, so an automatic misses the point somewhat, but at least it saves you from the manual gearchange — with its long linkage to the rear-mounted



● **The 2-litre Twin Spark is lighter and more flexible than the bigger V6s — it's the most balanced 75 of all**

● **Interior features numerous Alfa idiosyncracies but don't be put off**



Alfa Romeo 75 Twin Spark



● **Styling lacks grace, but Alfa 75 is an intoxicating, charismatic sporting saloon**

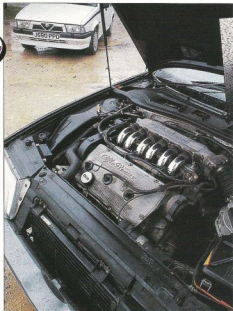
lot going for it even if it can't match the V6's blood-curdling snarl.

The adoption of twin spark plugs per cylinder plus Alfa's own variable valve timing system brought the engine up to date in the late eighties; it's flexible and powerful enough to take the 75TS to 125mph. More importantly, it's lighter than the V6, which means the Twin Spark is a better balanced car. The V6 version understeers noticeably more through tight bends.

Ultimately, though, it's hard to resist the lusty character of the V6. Sheer value for money makes the V6-powered 75s sought-after, and they carry up to a £1000 price premium over the Twin Spark. The V6 to go for is the Cloverleaf, which had slightly more power (to offset its catalyst) and an upgraded suspension.

Veloce versions of both Twin Spark and V6 are popular. The Veloce tag means a bodykit is fitted — which looks either sharply aggressive or cheap and tacky, according to personal taste. If you are considering a Veloce, go for one fitted with the larger-sized Revolution alloy wheels and lower profile tyres — it looks a lot better.

Alloy wheels are an important option to look for on any used 75. An electric



● **Higher-mileage 164s are actually better — 3-litre V6 is sensitive to too much town driving**

sunroof is also a good selling point. As with the 33, red and black are both popular colours, but as our '91 Twin Spark, on sale for £6995 shows, this is one Alfa that looks surprisingly good in white.

The Lusso was a special edition featuring a leather interior and air con.

There aren't many around, but they're worth looking out for.

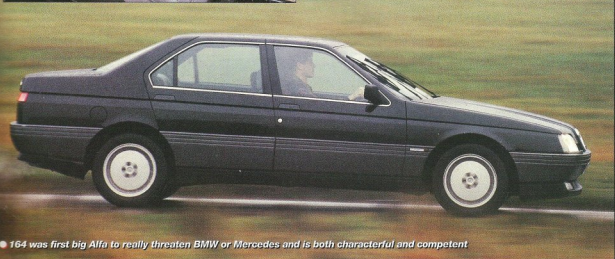
Oozing character from every pore, the undeniably flawed 75 takes a little getting used to — its square handbrake and roof-mounted electric window switches have been the target of much criticism — but it's certainly worth getting to know. Handling is in the best rear-wheel drive tradition, performance — especially in V6 guise — is thrilling and the action takes place to a soundtrack unmatched this side of a Ferrari. With prices as low as they are, a good 75 ranks as one of the top bargains for the enthusiast.

● **Look for well-equipped cars; 164s are well built but prone to electrical gremlins**

- 75 1.8:** Early ('86-'89) twin-carb version, now worth peanuts
- 75 2.0:** Twin Spark best-handling 75 and cheaper to run too
- 75 2.5i auto:** Three-speed auto box mutes the V6; don't bother
- 75 3.0i V6:** Glorious growling V6 dominates the 75; superb



Alfa Romeo 164 3.0 V6



● **164 was first big Alfa to really threaten BMW or Mercedes and is both characterful and competent**



164

Proof that Alfa could build an executive car to rival BMW, the 164 boasts practically, sensible engineering and decent build quality, as well as a hefty dose of red-blooded Italian excitement.

As with the 75 a choice of Twin Spark or V6 engines was offered, in 2-litre and 3-litre form respectively. Both are fitted transversely, driving the front wheels.

Slipping under the old 2-litre tax break, the Twin Spark has been popular with the company buyers who make up a good chunk of the market for 164s.

Second-hand, its lack of performance compared with the V6 counts against it, but the Twin Spark does offer an attractive means of enjoying the luxury of this executive car without going overboard on insurance and running costs.

Automatics are popular in this market sector; however as Alfa buyers generally prefer a manual shift there are fewer autos around than you might expect. It's a decent four-speeder, available on the V6 only.

What is vital in this sector is equipment. The 164 is attractively equipped with electric windows, mirrors and seat adjustment, central locking, rear sun-blinds and reading lights. The V6 has ABS as standard. Extra-desirable Lusso models add alloy wheels, an electric sunroof, air conditioning and a

Specification makes a big difference to pricing, so don't think you're getting a bargain if you see a car with few extras at an apparently attractive price.

Although 164 build quality is impressive, electrical faults can be frequent. Italian electronics seem to have a mind of their own, and electrical fault finding and repair can turn into a horribly expensive business. Check that all the electrical goodies fitted — seat adjustment, windows front and rear, sunroof — are working before you sign the dotted line. Where fitted, check that the air-conditioning is functioning properly too. It's also vital that carburetors on the V6 have been replaced at each 36,000 mile service, don't buy a car anyway without a service history which will confirm this.

Both Twin Spark and V6 are tough engines, but the V6 can be sensitive to too much town driving, coking up and becoming hard to keep in tune. A high-mileage car that's clocked up most of its miles on the motorway is invariably a better bet than a car that's covered a smaller distance mainly in town.

The 164 is a more complicated car than the other Alfas you might consider. Prices vary considerably but buying a very cheap car could lead to a lot more expense in the long term. It's well worth getting the car you're thinking of buying checked over first. Independent Alfa specialists often do this inexpensively. Affilman of London NW10 (tel: 081 961 6566), for example, offer such a check for under £40.

The joy of the 164 is that it offers all the



PRICES

(for a car in excellent condition; dealer/private prices)

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
33 16V Cleverleaf	—	—	5500/ 4800	6600/ 5500	8000/ 7200
33 16V Permanent 4	—	—	—	7000/ 6200	8500/ 7700
75 2.0i Twin Spark	3500/ 2500	4800/ 3600	6000/ 5400	6800/ 6100	8700/ 8000
75 3.0i V6	3800/ 3000	5300/ 4500	6400/ 5800	7600/ 6800	9200/ 8400
164 2.0 Twin Spark Lusso	—	—	8400/ 7000	9500/ 8400	12000/ 10800
164 3.0 Lusso	6000/ 5000	8500/ 7500	9800/ 8200	12000/ 10500	14000/ 12500
Spider 2.0	7800/ 7000	9000/ 8000	10500/ 9500	12000/ 10500	14500/ 12000

SPECIFICATIONS

	ENGINE	POWER	SPEED	0-60MPH	MPG
33 16V Cleverleaf	1712cc 4-valve dohc flat four	137bhp	130mph	8.4sec	32.0
33 16V Permanent 4	1712cc 4-valve dohc flat four	137bhp	124mph	9.3secs	30.0
75 2.0i Twin Spark	1962cc 2-valve dohc in-line four	148bhp	125mph	8.8secs	28.5
75 3.0i V6	2959cc 2-valve sohc V6	192bhp	138mph	7.4sec	26.0
164 2.0 Twin Spark Lusso	1962 2-valve dohc in-line four	148bhp	129mph	9.0sec	27.0
164 3.0 Lusso	2959cc 2-valve sohc V6	192bhp	138mph	7.9sec	25.0
Spider 2.0	1962cc 2-valve dohc in-line four	130bhp	122mph	9.9sec	27.0

PARTS PRICES

	33 16V	33P4i	75TS	75V6	164TS	164V6	Spider
Brake pads (front)	62.25	62.25	75.49	75.49	105.75	96.40	45.45
Brake discs (front)	118.66	118.66	150.98	150.98	127.54	256.80	107.28
Damper (front)	124.74	124.74	53.64	53.64	87.98	87.50	45.45
Clutch kit	154.19	154.19	242.38	307.91	155.63	191.76	158.45
Front wing	108.81	108.81	123.52	123.52	155.10	155.10	212.80
Windscreen	130.47	138.47	139.74	139.74	170.12	170.12	163.53
Rear bumper	215.71	209.36	203.97	324.75	429.85	429.85	464.47
Exhaust system	277.29	300.53	257.34	494.75	360.58	511.84	253.75
Total	1192.12	1209.01	1247.06	1670.78	1592.07	1899.37	1450.74

SERVICING COSTS

	33 16V	33P4i	75TS	75V6	164TS	164V6	Spider
12,000mile	62.00	62.00	138.00	182.00	151.00	218.00	119.00
24,000mile	191.00	188.00	172.00	223.00	192.00	259.00	125.00
48,000mile	286.00	283.00	209.00	265.00	177.00	296.00	125.00
TOTAL							
2yr/30,000m	539.00	533.00	519.00	671.00	520.00	773.00	369.00

INSURANCE

	33 16V	33P4i	75TS	75V6	164TS	164V6	Spider
Driver A	£1409	£1409	£1553	£1611	£1553	£1669	£1632*
Driver B	£378	£378	£432	£474	£432	£509	£432

All quotes are fully cover. Source: *CarQuote 0891 515515*

Driver A: 24-year-old male marketing manager, lives in Croydon, car garaged, three years no-claims bonus, three points for speeding Feb '83.

Driver B: 31-year-old male solicitor, lives in Peterborough, car garaged, Full no-claims bonus, clean record. *TCS if immobiliser fitted

comforts and luxury you'd expect of a car of this type, but unlike many of its rivals it's also a sheer pleasure to drive. The 164 handles with a sharpness that will be familiar to hot hatch drivers (many GTO owners trade up to a 164), marred only by a touch too much torque steer in more powerful versions. The manual gearshift is quick and precise, and although both engines are torquey enough not to demand excessive cog-swapping, few Alfa drivers will resist doing so in order to savour the wonderful sounds that are so much a part of this car's character.

164 2.0 Twin Spark:
Economic way to savour
luxury Alfa motoring
164 3.0 V6: Great engine,
great chassis, great car;

get a Lusso
164 3.0 V6 auto: Popular
auto can offer the best of
both worlds

SPIDER

Launched way back in 1987, Alfa's engaging little two-seater was by the end of the eighties well past its sell-by date. The fact that the Spider refused to lie down and die speaks volumes for the essential rightness of its design.

BADGET Badges

engine, without the twin sparks per cylinder. In twin carburettor form it pushes out around 130bhp.

Very few 1.6-litre cars have also come over here; the 1.6-litre is a pleasant, revvier version of the twin-cam, but this doesn't make up for the extra grunt of the popular 2-litre.

By the late eighties the Spider was showing its age and it's hard on rational grounds to recommend one instead of a modern sports car like Mazda's MX-5. The late eighties Spider didn't look its best — add-on skirts and spoiler hardly complement its classic Pininfarina lines — and it feels like an older car to drive.

But to Spider enthusiasts, this is all part of the car's appeal — and even the briefest of drives gives you a taste of the

Spider's infectious charm.

Those who find the eighties Spider a little too spartan would be well advised to wait until the final version, post-1990 facelift, falls within our £8000 budget. Styling updates worked wonders for the looks of this car; while with power assisted steering, electric windows and a sumptuous interior, Alfa made it softer and more refined. This Spider swapped its predecessor's backroads agility for the ability to cruise in comfort.

All post-'77 Spiders came to this country in left-hand drive form. Most have since been professionally converted to right-hand drive. Longer linkages can impair the responses of the pedals, and you're usually still left with a speedo that reads in kilometres.

Left-hand drive cars are up to £100 cheaper than converted cars, and if you're happy with sitting on the wrong side (and some people actually enjoy it) they're a useful way to save money.

Spiders are sought-after and don't come cheap, but with classic status assured they should hold their value extremely well. It's hard to find a Spider

of any age for under £5000.

With such a well-tested design and little electrical trickery to go wrong, Spiders usually prove very reliable, and are cheap to service if not to insure. Synchros can wear if a car has been driven ineptly. Bear in mind too that a badly laded or torn hood will cost some £6-700 to replace, and beware of cheap refits that fit poorly.

Spider 1.6: Lovely twin-cam, but you'll miss the power of the 2-litre

Spider 2.0 (Mk 3): Traditional sports car with enduring appeal

Spider 2.0 (Mk 4): Sports car for softies; still beyond our budget

Verdict

On an £8000 budget the Alfa Romeo range offers a wide choice: hot hatch 33, the sports saloon 75, executive 164 or the two-seater Spider sports car.

The 33 and 75 offer stupendous value for money. In particular, the 33 Permanent 4 offers all the best features of the 33 with a few of the flaws, while the 75 V6 Cloverleaf is a tremendous driver's car brimming over with character.

Spiders and 164s hold their value better. This means your £8000 buys you an older car, but one that is past the worst of its depreciation and should be worth more in a couple of years than a 33 or 75. Against this, be aware that running an older 164 may not come nearly as cheap.

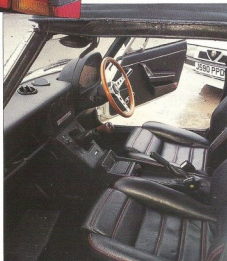
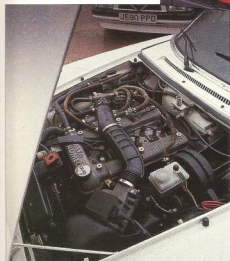
A Spider is a car to cherish; keep one for a few years, look after it, and you could start looking at a car that's increasing in value, not losing it. Then again, after a few years owning your Spider you may never want to sell it.

Selling an Alfa can be a heart-rending occasion; at a time when it's getting harder to tell one car from another, this is one marque that still makes cars so full of personality they almost talk. Owning a good Alfa is an endless pleasure and that, after all the sums have been added up, is the real argument in favour of buying a used Alfa Romeo.

Thanks to: Charles Iney, 410 Upper Richmond Road West, London. Tel:081 876 7636

Nimble handling, a characterful and decently punchy 2-litre engine, and pretty open-top bodywork: it added up to just what sports car enthusiasts always wanted. Even though Alfa ceased importing the Spider in 1977, a small but stubborn demand among UK sports car fans kept a steady trickle of cars coming in as personal or dealer imports.

Power outputs vary depending where the car came from. Those imported from the US had fuel injection and a catalyst; these are less powerful and sound a lot less appealing than the twin carb version from the continent. All post-1988 Spiders have fuel injection. The engine is the 'classic' version of Alfa's twin-cam



● **Trusty 2-litre gained fuel injection in 1988 and has classic feel and reasonable grunt**

● **Later Spiders more comfortable, softer and more refined. Still feels old-fashioned though**

Alfa Romeo Spider 2.0



● **Spider's timeless shape only slightly ruined by plastic addenda**