



# ALFA ROMEO 33

ALFA'S ORPHAN HOT HATCH OF THE 80S IS ACTUALLY A RIOT TO DRIVE. ED HALL REMINISCES ABOUT THE ALFA 33

That angular, quirky little five-door hatch didn't look anything special with its black plastic bumpers and faded racing pink paintwork, but there was something very special about my 1988 Alfa 33 1.5Ti. Basically a reskinned Alfased, the 33 was unlike most hot hatches that felt like shopping trollies pretending to be sports cars – the 33 felt like a sports car pretending to be a hatch, and on the right B-road it was bloody magic.

Okay, so it was a typical Alfa and not always user friendly. It was a bastard to start in the morning but after a few spits crackles and general histrionics from the two twin-choke down-draught Dellortos it would crackle into life. The consumption was crap too but the payoff was a lightning throttle response and a warbling boxer soundtrack to die for. Then there were the pedals – inoperable to anyone wearing anything but the slimmest of shoes they were so close

together but on the flip-side heel and toeing was obligatory. Of course you needed to heel and toe as the chocolate synchromesh had dissolved years ago but what wonderfully chosen ratios for a blast over the mid-Wales mountains.

When I lent the Alfa to non-motoring types they simply couldn't drive it, nor could the XR3i-wanting moron who came to look at it when it came time to part company, yet that was part of the appeal. Admittedly this wasn't a mass-market appeal, so Alfa struggled to compete with Fords, Vauxhalls and VWs despite a 1992 restyle, adoption of throttle body fuel injection, 16-valves and even a complex four-wheel-drive system for the rare Permanent 4 (P4).

These days you can go for months without seeing a 33; most of the remaining have gone to the racetrack but when they do come up for sale they're still very cheap. So if you see one buy it, if you don't I just might beat you too it.

## 1990 ALFA ROMEO 33 1.5Ti

**Engine**  
1712cc, flat-four, 16-valve

**Transmission**  
five-speed manual, front-wheel-drive

**Power**  
137bhp@6500rpm

**Torque**  
117lb/ft@4600rpm

**Speed**  
129mph

**0-60**  
8.9secs

## PRICES

£50,000

## EXTERIOR

True to form most 33s ended their days with terminal rot problems, particularly early examples – the later cars resisted rust far better – it's possible to find an L or M reg car with little rot. Most left today are the facelifted slant-nosed cars.

On the outside rear arches need checking, as do the door bottoms and lower tailgate (especially the estate Sportwagon). Under the bonnet look at the box sections forward of the windscreen at the top of the bulkhead behind the strut tops. Rot here usually means there's little left of the A-pillars and inner wings. The sills are partially covered with plastic covers but you can just about feel enough to know whether there's anything underneath. The sills dissolve down their length and inboard of the sills so does the seam where the inner sills meet the floor.

At the back of the car the boot floor suffers badly, as does, more unusually, the rear strut tops, so poke thoroughly. Also have a good look at the state of the fuel tank – the cars are at the age where many are rotting at now and they're very difficult to get hold of, impossible for the P4.



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## ENGINE

With its four pots down between the chassis rails the boxer engine keeps the centre of gravity low, aiding that famous handling. First designed for the Alfa Romeo 33, the boxer continued unchanged into the P4, with the top twin-carb'd 1490cc making 95bhp. Into the later 80s it grew to 1712cc and 118bhp. The final evolution of the engine came in 1990 with the Series 3 33, with quad cam heads, 16-valves and fuel injection the little flat four was good for 137bhp.

All are reliable and capable of over 120k miles if serviced every 6k miles and given a cambelt every 36k miles

## INTERIOR

If you're short of leg and long of back you'll find the 33 comfortable, otherwise you might find the seating position a bit weird. Ergonomically the switchgear is a little less haphazardly scattered than in the previous Sud but it's equally liable not to work. Check the heater blower blows and the electric windows, or, window.

Most, save the last models, were thankfully quite sparsely equipped.

Seat trim is at its nicest in the late 16-valves and



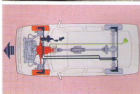
the P4 that come with Recaros, however the alcantara material some are trimmed in can become very tatty and the bolsters are prone to splitting. While you might not be

able to find replacement trim at your local breakers, parts supply isn't too bad within the owners' community owing to the amount of cars that have been broken for spares.

(particularly critical on the 16v together with tensioners). Watch out for cam wear on high mileage engines and missed spark plug changes on 16vs -

they're tricky to change and easily fouled.

A few more horses can be had with decent air filters and OMP make an effective, if loud, Group N exhaust.



## RUNNING GEAR

Weak synchros, particularly in second and third, are the norm but you get used to double-declutching and the gearbox will keep going. If you're looking at a P4 the viscous coupling mounts don't last long and they're unobtainable. Clutch changes on all are

an engine/gearbox out job, however if you have difficulty engaging gears have a look at the clutch slave cylinder.

Moving on to the suspension and steering, look out for split power rack gaiters - this usually means a recon rack is

needed and the rack is a real bugger to get on and off. The MacPherson struts are standard fare and lowering springs can be had for them from a variety of suppliers while Koni and Spax can provide updated dampers for the earlier (up to 92) four-bolt struts.

All UK cars came with discs at the front and drums at the rear bar the P4. Early 8-valve 33s made do with solid discs that are pretty poor. You can upgrade to the later 16-valve vented discs easily and a Euro disc rear beam will bolt on.