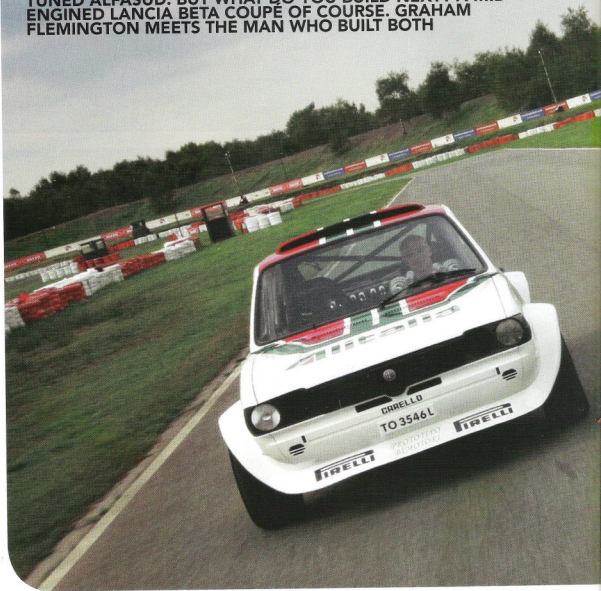


ALL ITALIA

WHAT'S BETTER THAN A TUNED ALFASUD? A TWIN-ENGINE
TUNED ALFASUD. BUT WHAT DO YOU BUILD NEXT? A MID
ENGINE LANCIA BETA COUPE OF COURSE. GRAHAM
FLEMINGTON MEETS THE MAN WHO BUILT BOTH





THE BUILD ALFASUD



Having ground back the Alfased's rust, Mick started to feed sheet changed...



...so he built a tubular space frame to hold the engine and suspension.



→ The days of the supercar are numbered. Before too long, the cars that we all dreamt of owning in our youth, the way that only teenagers can when they should have been paying attention in double physics, will be a thing of the past. Motoring excess isn't socially admired any more, half of Hollywood's right on A-list purr around in Pritis and the super cars that do survive could have the horrid words heavy oil on their V5s. Lamborghini, would you believe, are considering a diesel in their future range.

The other problem with super cars is they are so damn expensive. And if one of the most radical supercar manufacturers is thinking diesel, or heaven forbid hybrid, what would be the point? The alternative could be build your own. Or get your hands on an old competition car then put it on the road, or, what about a replica?

The same thoughts crossed Mick Covill's mind a couple of years ago, as he surveyed the premises

of Fialcia, the Italian car breakers that he then ran. Sitting in his office with his lunch time brew, Mick realised that in the acres of potential frag feed in front of him there was a supercar waiting to happen. And it was as close as he was ever likely to get to his dream.

It suits Mick's approach to engineering too, which is, 'If it can't be built cheaply it's not worth building.' Building something cheaply doesn't necessarily mean poorly, this backyard super car was on a small budget from the start so Mick had to keep things simple. He had big plans though, he wanted at least 400bhp, which was a lot when I was a lad, even for a supercar. He also wanted it to be capable of a respectable quarter mile time so four wheel drive was added to the wish list.

Alfa Romeo 164 3.0 V6s were the most powerful cars in his yard at the time. The earlier 12 valve models were abundant and they are good for 190 bhp so that seemed like a sen-

sible place to start. A light body shell was an obvious requirement as well. 'I had a really straight Fiat Tipo shell that I wasn't likely to sell so I thought I'd use that.' But then Mick had a stroke of luck.

He had just started measuring the old Fiat up for some angle grinder surgery when a punter wheeled in with a late Alfased. A much more interesting proposition than the boxy old Tipo, it was stripped by the evening. Mick's Sud tix was a run out model and it seems by the end of production, Alfa had begun to get a grip with some sort of anti corrosion treatment. Of course the little Alfa needed a touch with the welding torch but not much, besides great swathes of the Alfa's structure were about to get the chop.

Squeezing a big V6 into a comparatively small engine bay and then trying to wring every last drop of Turin testosterone from it would be a complicated and expensive. As Mick says, 'I don't do expensive' so



Mick didn't want to graft a front end into the back of the car as is often done.



Using the original outer panels welded together Mick built a flip front end.



Painted by himself in his workshop, Mick chose the bright Allitalia colour scheme.



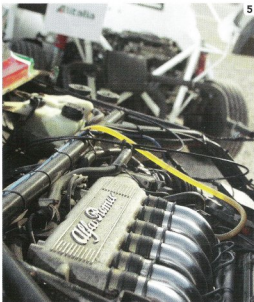
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it would go against the grain. His engineering ethos is keep it simple so he did and decided on a twin engined project. It's possibly not the obvious route but if you take Mick's approach, it's the simplest.

The traditional route to a back yard bimotor is to remove the rear floor, cut the front off a similar donor car and graft it into where the boot of the project used to be. Mick didn't do this for several reasons. It's the sort of thing that Mr Heath and his mate Mr Robinson might do – it's not really the Mick Covell way. Cutting and turning the front bulkhead and inner wings is okay if you intend replicating the original engine, which Mick didn't, and the chances of finding a second virtually rot free Sud weren't just slim, they were positively anorexic.

So Mick got his hands on a load of steel tube and pulled two good Alfa V6s off the scrap heap, complete with subframes and gearboxes. Then he got the tape measure out. First

1. How to make a 4000hp, 12-pot Italian supercar using lateral thinking.

2. Mick banded the steel wheels himself – we reckon they look better than alloys.

3. Now two massive rev counters is just showing off. Interior is pretty spartan.

4. Space-frame extends back through the car supporting the rear engine.

5. Mick had several 2000hp 12-valve Alfa V6s kicking about – free 4000hp!

he cut the front off the Sud from the scuttle panel forward and refabricated the front end with the necessary suspension pick up points.

Working his way back, Mick built the rest of the spaceframe and roll cage, when the shell had all the additional strength that it was likely to need he cut away the rear floor. After which, Mick modestly describes the build as 'just bolting everything together'.

The Alfa 164 subframes with their engines, gearboxes and suspension did bolt in but only because Mick had designed the spaceframe carefully with the necessary mountings. The front was just a case of uniting the steering rack and column but the back was more involved.

Because he'd slotted the complete front mechanicals of an Alfa 164 into the Sud, the back of the pretty coupe now had a steering rack. Four wheel steering is an unnecessary step too far, even for Mick, so he replaced the rack with a solid bar with threaded

ends and then reattached the track rods. It means the front and rear geometry are the same but as it drives true, it's one less thing to worry about.

Both the engines operate separately, each with their own ECU, fuel supply and individual throttle cables. They're started individually as well. From cold, one ticks over fractionally slower than the other so at first they sounds like Andrea Boticelli with bronchitis. But as they gradually warm, all twelve cylinders start singing from the same hymn sheet, the Alfa sounds like a Modena master piece. Nothing sounds like a V12 and nothing else sounds like these twelve Alfa Romeo cylinders barking, unsilenced, through straight pipes. It really is made of the right stuff – more stirring than even a Meteor engined Rover.

Hearing the Alfa echoing off the small hills that surround the Three Sisters race track was made all the more enjoyable every time Mick

THE BUILD LANCIA



Mick bought the Beta off eBay for £325 as an unfinished project.



...but it needed much more than just wiring and painting as advertised.

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1. Mick liked the Alitalia paint-job so much the Lancia got the same look.

2. A cracked block scrapped the original lump so in went a rebuilt twink.

3. For most people building just one of these cars would be a lifetime's achievement.

4. Group 4 inspired interior doesn't stop Mick using the Lancia daily.

changed gear, treating us to another climb through the rev range. A simple enough process in itself but not in a twin-engined car. Usually getting the rear gearbox to work in perfect unison with the front takes a lot of head scratching and complicated linkages, unless you use Alfa 164 gearboxes.

Mick reckons that the 164's box was designed to be used in either front wheel drive or mid engine rear wheel drive models. The gear linkage is attached to a selector that sits in a housing on top of the gearbox. When the gearbox is used in the front of a car, as in the Alfa 164, the linkage is connected to the selector as it protrudes from the back of its housing, so the linkage would then go under the front bulkhead to the gearlever as usual. But remove the bolt that holds the selector rod in place and slide the selector rod through its housing so it pokes out the front and it is facing the other way, per-

fectly placed for mid engine cars.

It was then just a matter of fitting a linking bar to meet the bottom of the gear lever, which is pivoted in the middle rather than at the bottom. So when the lever is pushed forward into first, it pulls the rear linkage, also putting the rear gearbox into first.

It's beautifully simple, as is the clutch solution. Mick replaced the clutch master cylinder with a brake master cylinder, which of course has two hydraulic circuits, so he uses one for each clutch. They're both plumbed in the normal way, activating standard slave cylinders – simple.

In fact most of the mechanical parts are factory standard and there by lies a problem. Alfa 164 clutches were designed to handle sharp suited executive types punting about between sales meetings and the golf club car park, not an all out attack on the quarter mile. But that's what they're dealing with at the moment because it was built to sprint. So far

it's managed a 12 second pass with a slipping clutch – that's pretty good for a car that weighs about a tonne.

Weight loss is cheap, to a point, but the Alfa is well past that point. Everything extraneous has been removed – even the glass so from here on the route to less kilos would be costly. And remember, Mick doesn't do expensive so a more economical quarter mile had to be found.

The engines are virtually standard and as such would produce 190bhp each. The free flowing air filters and open exhausts bring that up to a combined output of 400bhp but to get the Alfa into the 11s, which is Mick's goal, he's going for nitrous oxide. That will be added over the winter ready for next season but it'll be the first time Mick has had to put a spanner near the Sud for a while. In fact, it's spent most of its time tucked away at the back of his garage.

Lancia



It was easier to start the Lancia from scratch even though the cage was fitted.



Mick found a company in Belgium to supply the Group 4 Beta arches.



While the rear section was made up from a scrap Beta shell welded together.

Lancia Beta Coupé

Most petrolheads would have had the Alfa on the track as soon as possible but like most normal blokes Mick got rather side tracked. Idly wondering through the pages of Ebay one evening he found a car he couldn't resist. This isn't the predictable story of; look what I bought when I'd too many beers. It has more to do with being completely committed to Italian engineering, unusual Italian machinery and having more than a passing interest in anything Italian that can get down a rally stage.

Clicking through the website Mick found a Lancia Beta Coupé, advertised with a Safety Devices cage and rear frame. It was advertised with no pictures but as just needing wiring and paint to finish but Mick was more interested in the engine. Rather than the Lancia twin cam you might expect, it had a Fiat 1608cc twin cam, which would have started life in a Fiat 128 Special T instead. They're based on the same design but the smaller Fiat engine is much stronger and a good deal rarer. Mick bought it over the phone for £325, reasoning that 'there was £325 in the engine block alone'.

Inevitably when he collected the car it needed a lot more work than the vendor had indicated. The most obvious part being the back of the bodywork, it was missing. Just the Safety devices space frame was left with the engine in place. Worse still, the engine, the reason for buying the car in the first place, had two bad cracks. The owner had neglected to tell Mick the he'd started the Lancia 18 years previously and the car had been standing for the last 15 years.

So the small twin cam was replaced with a good 2.0 that Mick had in his



'HE USES THE ALFA FOR SPRINTS BUT THE LANCIA IS MICK'S DAILY DRIVER'

garage but not before the car was stripped and repainted. To give the Lancia a nice turn of acceleration Mick raided his pile of parts for a gearbox from a 1.6 Lancia Beta. He's on the look out for a rare 1.3 gearbox though, which has still lower ratios.

Unfortunately by the time the Lancia was coming together Mick had sold his Italian car breakers business but needed to find another Beta for its rear panels. Unsurprisingly, rotten Lancias aren't particularly rare and it wasn't long before one turned up in Oxford. Mick cut the old shell in half, braced it and removed the floors to make one large clamshell rear. Apparently, some purists were less than impressed by this but it put Mick's Lancia a step closer to being back on the road. Glassfibre would have been lighter but it would have cost so much more and as Mick has said before, he doesn't do expensive.

So, the only part of the Lancia that's bought, not built are the wheel

arches, which he bought from a glassfibre company in Belgium for 690 euros. Mick wanted a replica of a Group 4 Beta and the arches were the last part to complete the car. They do the trick because whenever Mick takes the Lancia to shows, people always assume that it's a genuine works car as opposed to one man's passion and ingenuity.

Having built two of the best Italian specials ever to put their tyres on tarmac, and having already built a replica Group 4 Fiat 131 - also in the striking Allitalia colours, simply because he likes them - you'd be forgiven for thinking he'd be happy enjoying the fruits of his labour.

The Alfa is sprinted as often as possible and the Lancia is on the road as Mick's daily, when he's not in his van, so naturally he's now decided to build a Lancia Delta S4 replica. With Mick you just know that it won't be too long before the green and red stripes will be out again.