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ALFA ROMEO

75

EVOLUZIONE

*Something special—
a turbocharged homologation model*

STORY & PHOTOS BY JOHN LAMM

OVER THE YEARS there have been so many international racing classes that it's impossible to keep them straight. There's Group A, Group B, Group N, and on and on, each one superseded by another group with the same title but different homologation rules, which then get thrown out when a new twist in the regulations appears . . . it's a mishmash.

This rule making and rewriting may seem rather sil-

ly, but it has given us some very interesting cars built in small series by automakers trying to fit them into one class or another. We could go back to the original Ferrari 250 GTO for just one example, but more recently there's been everything from the Fiat 131 Abarth Rallye to the group of blown 4-wheel-drive Group B monsters that had to be banned when they became so quick they were downright lethal. Both Ferrari's recent GTO and Porsche's 959 were reactions to Group B. Although the rules may be silly, the cars they produce are fascinating.

No one seems to do these specials better than the Italians. Fiat has produced many over the years. Lancia has it down to an art form with such winners as the 037 coupe and the Delta S4. And Alfa Romeo has tried its hand too, most recently with the Alfa 75 1.8 Turbo Evoluzione.

We know the 75 in America as the Milano. As sold here, it's a sports sedan with either a 154-bhp 2.5-liter engine or a 183-bhp 3.0-liter V-6. In its most powerful form, the 4-door can get to 60 mph in 7.8 seconds, stop quickly with its ABS brakes, and still offer such comforts as electric window lifts and leather-upholstered seats.

In Italy, however, there is a variety of 75s with engines ranging from normally aspirated 4-cylinders to turbodiesels to V-6s. They are quick, highly respected machines that, as one English magazine commented, "fully recapture the Alfa spirit." Alfa owners will argue over which is better, the European 3.0 V-6 version (0-60 mph in 8.0 sec) or the 2.0 4-cylinder two-plug-per-cylinder Twin Spark (9.0 sec to 60).

There's still another 75 with a turbo plumbed into it, giving the 1779-cc gasoline-fired version of Alfa's classic aluminum twincam 4-cylinder a full 155 bhp. In this form, the Turbo 75 gets to 60 in just over 7 sec, with a top speed of 133 mph. Alfa also set aside a special group of these turbos that were assembled with the pieces necessary to homologate the car for racing in Europe's Group A. Their correct name is 75 1.8 Turbo Evoluzione.





TO MAKE a 75 into an Evoluzione, Alfa had to start with the engine, though much of what's in the homologation special is similar to the standard 75 Turbo. The twincam 4-cylinder is almost a classic, the basic powerplant having been around for decades. The aluminum block and head, plus the bearing caps, were reinforced because of the added horsepower. Both the exhaust and intake manifolds were modified, mainly to qualify the parts for the race version. The road-going Evoluzione keeps the regular 75 Turbo's Bosch fuel injection, Garrett T3 turbocharger with air-to-air intercooler, and digital electronic ignition, along with its 155 bhp at 5800 rpm and 166 lb-ft of torque at 2600.

Developed for Group A, the engine goes through another transformation, adding Bosch LEII-Jetronic

injection, increasing the size of the intercooler and moving it from its flat position atop the engine in the production car to just behind the radiator in the race version. Race-tune this combination to put it in the 75 and it will produce 280 bhp.

The suspension remains basically as stock in front, only with new hub supports to the upper and lower A-arm design. At the back is the De Dion suspension that is unique to Alfa and Aston Martin. For the production and race Evoluzioni, Alfa adds a double Watt linkage along with the hub supports.

Much of the Evoluzione's interior is stock 75, which is already among the most well appointed of today's sports sedans. Instrumentation is complete and set deep in a hooded panel. The shifter is typical of this transaxle Alfa



production. In the Alfa's case it meant giving the 75 new front and rear bumpers, the leading one also containing a huge air dam to aid downforce and to duct cooling air where necessary. The rocker panels get aero extensions, and the fenders are flared to contain the larger wheels and tires. Alfa also claims to have fitted the car with a "girdle rear spoiler." Hmm.

Put it all together and you have a very slippery car (the coefficient of drag is 0.33), with real head-turning appearance. Ogling neat cars is a national pastime in Italy, and with all the production Evoluziones painted a very strong red right down to their alloy wheels, this one pops heads around constantly.

And so *Road & Track's* Dennis Simanaitis and I found out one day during summer as we gave the Evoluzione a test run in Northern Italy. We began at the Castello de Pomerio, a wonderful hotel in the town of Erba. We'd laid out a triangular route that cut east to Lecco and up the shoreline of Lago di Como. With the lake on our right, we made our way north, cutting up into the hilly, wooded inland. In every little town, the car drew admiring smiles and nods. We then worked our way back down into Bellagio, which is situated in the top of the inverted vee shape of Como. Thankfully, it was lunch time and we had

chassis, which is a nice way of saying "vague." The specific upgrade for this street racer is the seats, which offer good side support in both the cushions and seatbacks and are finished in a nice tweedy fabric.

You can't have a street racer without spoilers and fender flares, and in the case of the 75 you can't have a real racer unless those pieces are homologated in



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an excuse to sit in the lakeside restaurant at the Hotel Ambassadeur Metropole. It was one of those warm interludes that's almost enough to make you forget automobiles. But not quite; after lunch we were rushing back down along the lake to the city of Como before heading east again to Erba. An exhilarating run, a route to store in your Roads To Drive In Europe file.

IF THERE is any problem with the 75 Turbo Evoluzione, it's the basic boy-racer nature of this homologation special. If you're rushing along driving like you really enjoy it, the car is terrific. The steering is precise, the power is fun once you learn to compensate for the turbo lag, and the handling is the sort of minimal-roll, maximum-stick type that makes these cars so much fun. And if you like being looked at, particularly in Italy, this is the next best thing to a Ferrari.

On the other hand, if you just want to drive along calmly and not have to wrestle the car in city traffic, you might prefer the 3.0-liter V-6 75 or Milano. Just as all those qualities mentioned in the previous paragraph are fun when driving at the limit, they can be a pain when cruising. That steering is still precise, but now it feels heavy. The 155 bhp of turbo power is a drag in traffic





compared with the immediate power of the V-6. That lovely handling translates into a rather stiff ride when you just want to take it easy. And if you don't like being looked at, particularly in Italy, this is the next worst thing to a Ferrari.

Remember, however, that the Evoluziones were to race in Europe's World Touring Car Championship. They were aimed specifically at the series' Class 2, to duke it out with the BMW M3s, Ford Sierra Cosworths and Mercedes-Benz 190s. The Alfa's official introduction was at the Geneva auto show in March 1987, with the first race set at Monza later in the month. Michael Andretti was flown in to help the car's debut, and he outqualified the other Alfa drivers. In the race, however, the BMW M3s proved to be the class of the field, and though disqualified on a rules infraction at Monza, they went on to easily win the series.

Alas, the Alfa 75 Evoluzione now has become one of the redundant "group" cars. On the very day I started writing this story, I read about Alfa giving up on the program. The company explained that the new turbocharger equivalency rules made the car uncompetitive. Instead of racing the 75, Alfa will develop its new 164 sedan (soon headed for the U.S.) for the European Procar series in 1989.

So the 75 is gone from racing, but the production versions remain to be enjoyed. Although they aren't the most accommodating of automobiles, these specials are among the most entertaining.



EUROPEAN SPECIFICATIONS

Price	est \$45,000
Curb weight, lb	2485
Wheelbase, in	98.8
Track, front/rear	55.0/54.6
Length	170.5
Width	64.2
Height	53.1
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal	12.9

ENGINE

Type	turbocharged dohc inline-4
Bore x stroke, in./mm	3.15 x 3.48/80.0 x 88.5
Displacement, cu in./cc	108/1779
Compression ratio	7.5:1
Bhp @ rpm, DIN	155 @ 5800
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft	106 @ 2500
Fuel injection	Bosch

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	5-sp manual
Gear ratios: 5th (0.78)	3.04:1
4th (0.95)	3.71:1
3rd (1.23)	4.80:1
2nd (1.72)	6.73:1
1st (2.87)	11.22:1
Final-drive ratio	3.91:1

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout	front engine/rear drive
Brake system	10.5-in. vented discs front, 9.8-in. discs rear; vacuum assisted
Wheels	cast alloy, 15 x 6
Tires	195/55VR-15
Steering type	rack & pinion, power assisted
Turns, lock-to-lock	3.2
Suspension, front/rear	upper & lower A-arms, torsion bars, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/De Dion tube on trailing arms, double Watt linkage, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar

PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph, sec	7.5
Standing ¼ mile, sec @ mph	na
Top speed, mph	133

na means information is not available