



A GLORIOUS FUTURE

The launch of the twin-spark twin-cam and 3-litre V6 75s is designed to revive Alfa's flagging fortunes. Ian Adcock tries the newcomers



There is no doubt that Alfa Romeo is heading for a glorious future — we no longer have to hark back to the glorious past. These are not our words but those of Maurice Rourke, managing director of Alfa Romeo (GB) at the launch of British-specification 75 2.0i Twin Spark and 3.0i V6.

Revamping the 75 range forms the second phase of Alfa's British revival, following the improved 33 range and its Sportwagon variant. The momentum will be maintained next summer with the UK debut of the long-awaited 164 front-wheel-drive saloon, top model in Alfa's 1988 British line-up.

The Alfa 75 range now comprises six models, starting at £9989 for the basic 1.8 through to £11,799 for the basic 2.0i Twin Spark and £15,299 for the 3.0i V6 Veloce. Each of the three models is available with the 'Veloce' bodykit of deep side skirts and front and rear spoilers integrated into the bumpers. These add-ons are produced specifically for Alfa Romeo and fitted at the company's Sheerness, Kent import centre. Although the bodykits may not suit everyone's tastes, around 70 per cent of 33s sold have the kit fitted.

By the end of this year the 75 range will be completed when the 2.5i Automatic appears in the UK. This is powered by the old 2.5-litre V6 engine mated to a three-speed ZF gearbox.

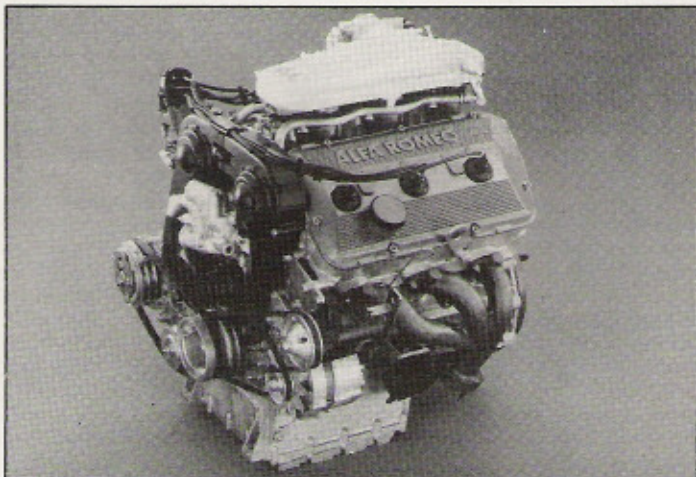
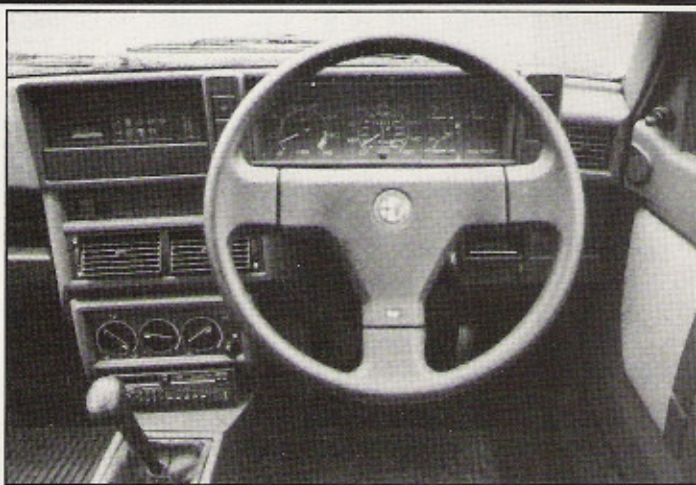
Interiors have been revised with improved heating and ventilation; but the day we drove the cars was

quite warm and muggy requiring the fan to be on all the time to promote adequate airflow through the cabin. All models are well equipped, with central door locking, power steering, electric windows, electric nearside door mirror, adjustable steering wheel, stereo radio/cassette with six loudspeakers, electric aerials, tinted glass, headlamp washers and more. The 3.0i V6 also has light alloy wheels, considerably more tasteful than the plastic add-ons on the Twin Spark, and a leather-covered steering wheel.

The new 3-litre V6 is a development of the 156bhp 2.5-litre V6 which powered the GTV coupé and the original Alfa 75. Bore has been increased to 93mm and stroke to 72.6mm, giving a displacement of 2959cc and increasing the power to 188bhp. There has been an equally impressive jump in torque from 155lb ft to 184lb ft at 4000rpm. Top speed is claimed to be 137mph with 0 to 60mph taking less than 7.3secs, yet it will still return 38.2mph at 56mph.

The 2-litre Twin Spark engine is fully described in the road test in this issue (page 38).

The 3.0i's suspension differs slightly from the smaller-engined model in that the dampers are slightly softer and the diameter of the anti-roll bars has been increased, to 22mm at the front and 21mm at the rear. Power steering is standard. The new 75s retain the system pioneered on the Alfetta of a five speed gearbox in unit with the clutch, mounted at the rear for virtual 50/50 weight distribution.



DRIVING IMPRESSIONS

The first thing that struck me about the 3.0i was the driving position. It feels no better than its predecessors despite the claims made by Alfa Romeo's management that all the criticism levelled at the early 75s had been attended to. While the seats are relatively comfortable there is still insufficient back support, especially at the top. Being rather long in the leg, there was virtually no thigh support, a criticism also made by my co-driver who was a good six inches shorter. Despite the steering wheel being adjustable both vertically and horizontally, I found it practically impossible to arrive at a truly comfortable driving position. An adjustable squab would go a long way toward alleviating the problem. As for the much-vaunted change in the pedal positions, I still found my right ankle aching after only a few miles driving. In a car of this type and price such basic problems shouldn't exist. Back to the drawing board (again) Alfa.

Far more impressive, however, is the engine. If there is one thing that Alfa engineers know how to design, it's engines and the 3-litre V6 is magnificent. It pulls like a train from low down and sounds wonderful when revved hard. It is sufficiently flexible to potter around in top gear and pull right through to its maximum speed.

The gearchange is much slicker than the old transaxle without any baulking. The power steering, while a

3.0i V6 can be distinguished from the Twin Spark by the flared front wheel arches (far left)

The first 75s were criticised for their poor driving position; Alfa's attempts to improve it have not been totally successful V6 engine (above) is superb, powerful and flexible

boon at parking speeds, felt rather vague and woolly in the straight ahead and wasn't sharp enough really to hustle the car through twisting bends.

Suspension on the 3.0i has been softened and that, combined with the heavier engine, shows in the handling. The V6 model isn't as taut or nimble as the smaller-engined Twin Spark model; the trade-off is its extra performance.

Other faults? Brakes are very over-servoed and make smooth braking a practised art, as they tend to grab. It might just have been our test car as a Twin Spark, supposedly the same basic car, didn't have the same vice.

The wind deflectors on the front doors were another annoyance; although made of clear plastic, they are right in the line of vision for a tall driver and prove particularly distracting when pulling out of junctions.

Alfa does seem to have done a good job of quality control, the car having very few rattles and well fitting trim and bodywork. That Alfa Romeo has improved its cars there is no doubt, but still there is some way to go before that 'glorious future' is realised. ■