

alfa romeo giulietta

spider



**9**  
DUAL-PURPOSE  
SPORTS CARS  
FOR 1959

IT WAS William Shakespeare who had Romeo say of Giulietta that "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Indeed, these sweet little cars from Milano are known by a myriad of names; Spyder, Sprint, Berlinetta, Spyder Veloce, Sprint Veloce and now Super Spyder. Perhaps it would clarify things a bit to straighten out this semantic spaghetti.



super spider

Upper car is normal-engined Spider, lower one is more powerful Spider Veloce (now called Super Spider). Power available drastically alters handling and roll.

The first three cover the basic body styles available; roadster, coupe and sedan. The next two were originally reserved for lightened, aluminum-panelled versions of the first two, complete with Weber-carbureted editions of the husky twin-cam mill. We ran tests on each of them in SCI, in December '56 and February '57 respectively. Subsequently the Alfa factory quit exporting the lightened jobs to the States (seems they weren't considered stock) but continued to use the same names for the all steel jobs when they were fitted with the high output engine. This served to confuse just about everybody. The latest step may help sort things out, though it's a mite late. The Spyder Veloce (steel) is now sold as the Super Spyder and, as mentioned in our October road test, it experienced a paper power increase from 90 to 103 hp by changing from CUNA to SAE rating. Clever, these Italians.

Clever indeed, for the two Giuliettas loaned to us by the brothers O'Brien of Paterson, N. J. are remarkable cars indeed. Both are fairly early examples, Tom's red Spyder Veloce being slightly senior to Jim's white Spyder. Both therefore enjoy slightly stiffer suspension than is now offered. Both too, have been brought up to "SCCA stock" specifications which interestingly enough entails more changes to the Spyder than to the SV. The factory obligingly issued a list of suggested steps to enliven the Spyder's cooking engine and not surprisingly, Jim has followed every one of them.

Accordingly, he milled the head .040 inch, matched the ports to correct misalignment—enlarging to the size of the gasket hole is in this case not a drastic step at all—and polished the ports to a "glass-like finish." He replaced the 22 and 24 mm venturis with 25 and 27 mm ones (as on the 190SL, the twin-chokes are opened progressively and therefore have unequal venturis), raised the float level and fitted larger main jets. The secondary throttle is opened by manifold vacuum working against a weight on a little lever; this weight was reduced by half.

The shims under the valve springs were brought up to Veloce specs to allow higher revs. For structural reasons, no machining should be done on the flywheel to lighten it as the clutch pressure plate attaches at the rearmost surface of its outer rim.

One thing that was unchanged is the ring and pinion set. Both cars have 41 tooth ring gears, but the normal Giulietta has a nine tooth pinion giving a 4.55 final drive ratio. The Veloce, or Super Spyder, comes with a ten tooth pinion. For the short twisty circuits so prevalent in this country, the 4.55 really seems to be the best for either car.

But Tom's red Veloce still has the 4.10, and it was interesting to note the difference in power plants and gear ratios such that we were reaching the same revs in each car at different landmarks on the Lime Rock circuit. Since some of these were just after sharp corners, this bears some looking into. Can it be that two cars with identical suspensions corner at different speeds?

Yes, it can. In actual fact, the red car was running "sticky" retreads on Pirelli racing carcasses. Its shock absorbers had been recalibrated to make them damp a little more fiercely, but this does not even begin to indicate the vast difference in these two cars when cornering them near the limit.

Both of them sit somewhat high and therefore roll considerably. Both need lots of steering lock, and at full bore the front end begins to slide out. Let's face it, these Alfas understeer in a big way but coming off the gas pedal controls it easily and safely.

The principle difference between these sister cars is this: despite the float level in the normal Giulietta having been raised just as high as can be, its engine just plain runs out of gas on hard corners. When this happens, it is just as if the throttle had been suddenly and completely closed; the nose drops slightly and dives for the inside of the corner. As I said, it happens suddenly. You find yourself frantically unwinding the wheel while hopefully jabbing at the throttle to get the accelerator pump to squirt a little gas into the venturis.

On the other hand, with the Veloce there is no interruption in the power flow. In fact, the extra power enables the rear end to be worked out despite the stickier treads. Though the car still rolls extravagantly, the whole process of cornering seems to be spruced up. The tires scream still, the engine roars even more loudly, and cornering technique is now a happy blend of balancing throttle position with steering wheel movements.

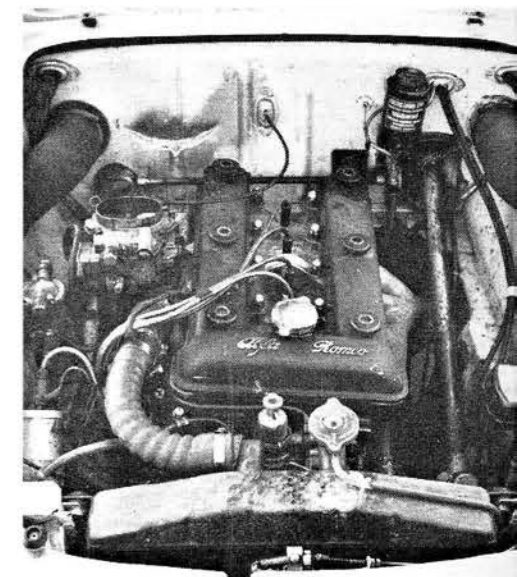
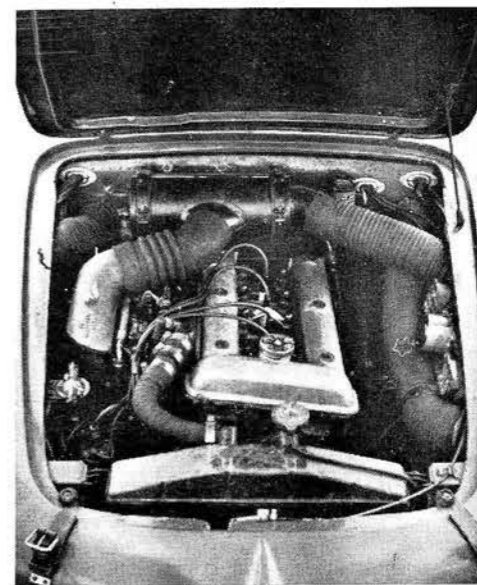
While economy may dictate the purchase of a Spyder, those who want to really get something out of racing this handsome breed are well advised to save up for the Super Spyder. For those who are not interested in such strenuous competition—G production seems to be the competitive class these days—the extra \$388 for a power pack seems a bit heavy. But those who are going to race will find it hard to be satisfied with an engine that cuts out in the corners. It's cheaper to buy what you want in the first place than to modify later. The two Weber carbs are \$212 each, the manifold is \$81. Parts for converting completely to Veloce specs run over \$1600 while an assembled Veloce engine is only \$1400. Apparently everything but the crankshaft is slightly different!

Either way, these 1300 cc machines are delightful cars to drive on the road and are easily the most attractive looking small sports car available. But a word of caution: when tuned for racing they lose their ladylike docility. They can be driven on the road; but when there's traffic it's closer to a chore than a pleasure.

Upon reflection it does seem odd that the rules of most sports car clubs prohibit all but the most minor changes to the suspension. Less stringent rules here could make the cars safer on both highway and race track. Today's rules allow unlimited alterations to jets and venturis which make some "stock" sports cars undrivable at low and medium speeds. A strange situation for organizations dedicated to dual-purpose cars and improving the breed.

sfw

Veloce engine is tilted slightly more to make room for two dual choke Weber carbs.



Double-barreled single Solex tends to "lean" out in long, hard turns.

Super Spider (Veloce) will always have lead over its kid sister.



Photos by Don Typond