

At a time when it seems to be the ambition of every Italian auto manufacturer to produce some sort of Ferrari (witness Maserati, Iso-Rivolta, ATS and Lamborghini), it's stimulating that an old-established firm such as Alfa Romeo sets its aims at the broader market which exists for a car that sells at less than half the price without falling too far short of Ferrari standards in performance, road-holding, ride comfort, appearance and sound effects.

The 2600 Spyder also undersells the 230-SL and the XK-E; which it should, lacking the 150-mph top speed of the Jaguar and the supremely tenacious road grip of the Mercedes-Benz. The Alfa Romeo makes do with a relatively inexpensive rigid-axle rear suspension, while its British and German rivals both have independent rear ends.

All three are two-seaters, and the 230-SL offers a transverse third seat as optional equipment, while Alfa Romeo has shaped the luggage space behind the front bucket seats as a rear bench seat without leg-room (and when the top is up, without headroom, too). Perhaps by coincidence these three cars are powered by in-line sixes of remarkable smoothness, the British and Italian ones using twin overhead camshafts while the German engine has a single overhead camshaft. The Alfa Romeo has the least stressed and least powerful engine; 165 bhp or 64 bhp per liter compared with 170 bhp or 74 bhp per liter for the 230 SL and 265 bhp or 70 bhp per liter for the E-type. It is interesting to note that the Stuttgart vehicle uses fuel injection as standard equipment while the Coventry car comes with three SU carburetors and the Milan product has three Solex instruments (a triple Weber installation is available as optional equipment). But Alfa Romeo is the only one of the three rivals to use an all-aluminum engine, with block, head and finned sump—as well as the transmission casing—cast in light alloy.

Continuing the comparison, we find that the Alfa Romeo has an excellent five-speed transmission with Porsche-type synchromesh on all gears and a very precise and smooth ball-mounted lever. Daimler-Benz's all-synchro four-speed is also pure delight to use, although without the same superbly defined gate as on the Alfa. The Jaguar transmission, of course, remains one of the road-tester's perennial gripes, so the less said about that the better.

The fifth (overdrive) of the 2600 Spyder is just as versatile as a separate overdrive with its own switch and many drivers derive greater satisfaction from toying with an integral fifth than they do playing with an overdrive switch. It just isn't true that the electric overdrive enables the driver to dispense with his use of the clutch, as clutchless down-changes are invariably rough although up-changes usually can be made with complete smoothness. And with a transmission like the Alfa's there can be little or nothing between the two as far as shifting time goes. The lever, springloaded in the third-and-fourth plane, moves almost instinctively and lightning-fast into the desired position, and even the seemingly tricky change from fifth to fourth becomes as simple as pulling a switch. On upshifts, it's possible to overshoot third and get fifth by being ham-fisted—a little delicacy with the controls seems to pay off in this car.

Except with the steering wheel on hard cornering.

It's such a firm understeerer that considerable muscular effort must be exerted on the wheel on tight turns



ALFA ROMEO 2600 SPYDER

The big Alfa isn't a roaring V-12, but a refined, comfortable high-performance sports car



at speed. But don't misunderstand; on fast bends the car only needs guidance, it's on a long turn with a reducing radius that it becomes necessary to use force to put on more lock. Of course, the same feeling is experienced when going into a turn way too fast, but the only problem about that situation is having the physical strength to keep turning the wheel. A front-heavy car and firmly understeering throughout the speed range, it's still the rear end that breaks away first, mainly due to the limitations of the rear suspension. After putting almost 1000 miles on this car, we found it to be extremely safe in its firmly predictable behavior, and on highway driving the almost inflexible directional stability is a very real help. The steering response is not abnormally quick, but quick enough for correction of incipient slides, with a steering gear ratio that rarely calls for changing hands on the wheel rim. The wheel is conveniently placed at about 22° from vertical, and the driving position is close to ideal for persons of highly different stature. The well-padded seats have long fore-and-aft travel and reclining backrests, and are so comfortable that we would like to furnish our apartment with Alfa Romeo chairs if we could. They give excellent support for the back and offer instant relief to people with any of the spinal troubles resulting from less physiologically correct seating in other vehicles. The wide and well-spaced pedals are also just right, and the brake and clutch, pivoting on an underfloor shaft, seem more orthopedically correct than any type of pendant pedal we have come across. There is also a ledge for resting the clutch foot just where it's needed for bracing the left leg and without interfering with the dimmer switch.

You must have guessed by now that this car offers a pretty high standard of ride comfort. Actually the suspension is a remarkable combination of firm springing and excellent harshness control. It rides smoothly and fairly quietly over rough roads where sports cars of less perfected design are juggled about and give their passengers a good facsimile of what life is like inside an automatic potato-peeler. Yet we cannot really say that the 2600 Spyder benefits from advanced chassis design. It's a superior example of established practice rather than an application of novel principles, and it gives us a feeling that it's more akin to a good American chassis with heavy-duty suspension than to the best of modern sports cars.

The charm of the 2600 is different from the Giulia, in that the larger car lacks the vivacious personality of the 1600 although its performance is far superior and its high-speed silence and general behavior is worthy of a \$10,000 car. In the 2600 Spyder, a steady 110 mph feels like 50 or so, even on less than well-maintained roads. And the top stays firmly on, doesn't flap at any speed, but we have some suspicions about its not being draftproof and leakproof. Its framework is a robust, expensive construction, but nobody in Europe seems to have understood the need for power-operated tops yet.

Finally, let's make it clear that the 2600 is very easy to drive. The enormous flexibility of the engine will let a novice handle the car with apparent expertise, and very few women we can think of are ever likely to get into a situation where they'll need great amounts of muscle to turn the steering wheel. Parking and maneuvering presented no problems to our wives, in fact, they fell in love with the car. **cd**

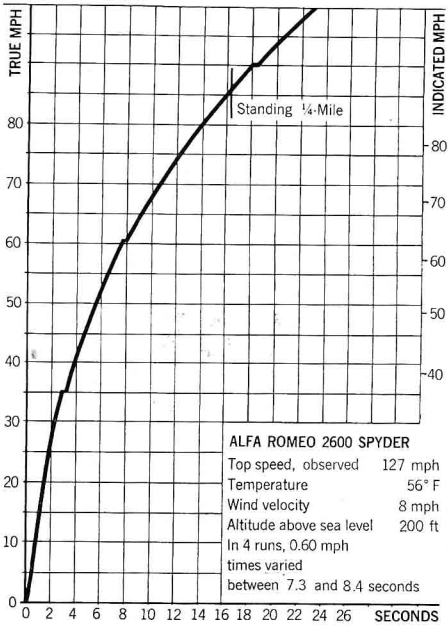
Alfa Romeo 2600 Spyder

Importer: Alfa Romeo, Inc.
231 Johnson Avenue,
Newark 8, New Jersey

Price as tested: \$4995.00

ACCELERATION

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	2.2
40 mph	3.7
50 mph	5.5
60 mph	7.5
70 mph	10.6
80 mph	14.0
90 mph	18.1
100 mph	23.2
Standing 1/4 mile	86 mph in 16.2



ENGINE

Water-cooled in-line six, aluminum block, 7 main bearings
Bore x stroke 3.26 x 3.14 in, 83. x 79.6 mm
Displacement 158 cu in, 2584 cc
Compression ratio 9.0 to one
Carburetion 3 Solex sidedraft dual-throat 44 PH-H
Valve gear Dual chain-driven overhead camshafts.
Power (SAE) 165 bhp @ 5900 rpm
Torque 205 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm
Specific power output 1.04 bhp per cu in, 64 bhp per liter
Usable range of engine speeds 1000-8000 rpm
Electrical system 12-volt, 50 amp-hr battery, 300W generator.
Fuel recommended Premium
Mileage 16-22 mpg
Range on 15.8-gallon tank 205-350 miles

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch 8-inch single dry plate
Transmission 5-speed all-synchromesh
mph/1000 Max

Gear	Ratio	Over-all rpm	mph
Rev	3.01	14.381	-5.0
1st	3.304	15.787	4.5
2nd	1.987	9.496	7.6
3rd	1.354	6.471	11.4
4th	1.00	4.778	15.0
5th	0.79	3.777	19.0
Final drive ratio			4.78 to one

CHASSIS

Platform frame with welded-on steel framework for clamped-on all-steel body.
Wheelbase 98.5 in
Track F 55.25 R 54.0 in
Length 178 in
Width 66.5 in
Height 52.5 in
Ground clearance 6.0 in
Dry weight 2530 lbs
Curb weight 2720 lbs
Test weight 2980 lbs
Weight distribution front/rear % 53.5/46.5
Pounds per bhp (test weight) 18.0
Suspension F Ind., unequal-length wishbones and coil springs, anti-roll bar.
R Rigid axle, A-bracket and parallel radius arms, coil springs.
Brakes Girling 11-in discs, 12-in drums rear, 494 sq in swept area
Steering Worm and roller
Turns lock to lock 3 1/4
Turning circle 31 ft
Tires 165 x 400
Revs per mile 766

CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting Very good
Response Good
Noise Very good
Vibration Excellent

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch action Excellent
Transmission linkage Excellent
Synchromesh action Excellent
Power-to-ground transmission Very good

BRAKES

Response Excellent
Pedal pressure Very good
Fade resistance Excellent
Smoothness Very good
Directional stability Excellent

STEERING

Response Very good
Accuracy Excellent
Feedback Very good
Road Feel Very good

SUSPENSION

Harshness control Excellent
Roll stiffness Very good
Tracking Excellent
Pitch control Very good
Shock damping Excellent

CONTROLS

Location Very good
Relationship Fair
Small controls Fair

INTERIOR

Visibility Good
Instrumentation Very good
Lighting Fair
Entry/exit Good
Front seating comfort Excellent
Front seating room Very good
Rear seating comfort Poor
Rear seating room Poor
Storage space Good
Wind noise Very good
Road noise Very good

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater Very good
Defroster Good
Ventilation Fair
Weather sealing Poor
Windshield wiper action Good

QUALITY CONTROL

Materials, exterior Good
Materials, interior Good
Exterior finish Good
Interior finish Good
Hardware and trim Fair

GENERAL

Service accessibility Good
Luggage space Very good
Bumper protection Fair
Exterior lighting Very good
Resistance to crosswinds Very good

