

# Preview Test: ALFA ROMEO 1750 DUETTO

Thanks to its being shown at Brussels, all the world knows that Alfa Romeo has a new version of the Duetto on tap—our man in Milan's problem: get one, and test it.



Whoever said it first said it right; there's no measuring a man's life in time. The past is topographical. Look back on your years and you will see a foreshortened landscape filled with peaks and valleys. My friend Consalvo Sanesi knows it instinctively.

He was on the road for the test track at Balocco for a day's work of the kind that he's been doing for Alfa Romeo for the last 40 years, and he was talking about diving over into the passenger seat of the burning TZ at Sebring in 1964 and pushing against the windshield with his feet until his strength was used up and then thinking it had come to an end; the whole landscape roll of his life in this last dreadful valley.

It hadn't of course, but the instant was in stark relief and its telling brought a dryness to the mouth.

Sanesi is an old friend, but even Sanesi couldn't be of much help in this small valley of my own; find, somewhere, somehow, a new Alfa 1750 and do a Preview Test—and there are no Alfas to be had. The last place to start is Alfa's public relations department—for all the obvious reasons.

On the other hand, there's Fiat, and the idea of asking Fiat for an Alfa is appeal-

ing. Turin is just a couple of hours away, after all. No, cancel that—even on a nice day in Turin, visibility is about .30 feet, and today isn't a nice day.

No, it's going to be a friend, and who better than Sanesi? He's Alfa's chief road tester and operator of a giant filling station/service garage in his spare time and going by way of Sanesi is a shortcut which will relieve me of the agonies of coping with the official and semi-official sources who will surely say no.

Sanesi it is. Sanesi isn't happy. The new car has been shown at Brussels, and the world knows about it, but only a small part of the world, and that, seemingly, is the way Alfa would like to have it.

Sanesi offers an impossible suggestion: "Maybe we could use one of my customer's cars. There was a new Duetto in the shop last night for 500-mile servicing. But, on second thought, if the owner sees his license plate glaring out of the pages of *Car and Driver*, even in English, there might be a scene."

That is exquisite Latin prudence; there is no penalty for indiscretion but discovery—it is a maxim that has ruled Italy for

years. Sanesi has a mind that is not to be changed in a day. How about going out to a restaurant near the Arese factory at noontime and bribing one of the production test drivers? No, that's no good, *those* cars are all phonies. I'm not reproved so much for the outrageous nature of my suggestion as for the fact that it won't work.

So, Sanesi will give me an idea about how to get a car, some several ideas in fact, and if I follow them I can have a test, if one or more of the ideas works that is; if they don't, I will not have a test. That is the balance of life, is it not?

The next morning, on a fog-bound Milan sidestreet, I am risking my neck finding out how fast one of Alfa's development cars will go. And, of necessity, how fast it will stop.

One of Sanesi's ideas has worked. Even in the fog I can see enough to suspect someone has been putting me on about an all-new Alfa; well, almost all new. With the exception of the 14-inch wheels (as opposed to the old 15 inchers) and fatter tires there is no external difference between the 1750 and the older 1600. But Alfa had set the car up on the stand in Belgium next to the old 1932 1750, and had spent some time saying how new it was, and so had Sanesi; so what am I to do but believe them, seize the wheel, and set off? The wheel, a woodrim wheel, a new interior, there is a difference after all.

Gradually things began to sift through, sort themselves out, make themselves known as the red car and I probe some of Milan's lesser-known back alleys. One thing's for sure: the larger tires and smaller wheels make the ride smoother. Later, while pressing on at a sustained rate over some peripheral backroad, comes the discovery that those tires, the modified front suspension (with higher roll centers), the addition of a rear anti-sway bar and lower frequency rear springs make the new model more sure-footed. The understeer that was so abundant in the previous Duetto, has been reduced to more reasonable levels.

There's also a new recirculating ball steering system which is most appreciated when parking and at very high speeds. At intermediate speeds, the combination of king pin inclination and caster still add up to a car with spongy steering.

The reworked disc brake system, now supplied by ATE, incorporates a limiting valve in the rear to help directional stability, and all the stops I make are as straight as a pointer's tail—although distances aren't impressive. A power-assist reduces effort, but not dangerously so for a high-performance car. In addition, the parking brake is now incorporated into the hat section of the rear discs—Porsche-like. All is not perfect however; Alfa has not yet discovered the advantages of anti-dive front and anti-lift/squat rear suspension, so the car heaves like a Brahma when you get on the brakes. Likewise, it rolls its eyes skyward under hard acceleration.

When it comes time to look under the hood, Sanesi's vows as to the engine's authenticity have to be mentally reinvoked. From the outside it looks absolutely, completely, authentically like the same old engine. In a post-test conversation, Sanesi, with the chagrin of a father admitting his teenage daughter is pregnant, allowed that, in effect, it *was* the same old engine—bored a bit, stroked a lot and with an alternator replacing the generator. Thanks to some new mountings, however, the heavier pistons and longer stroke can't be felt—ah! the marvels of modern technology.

The hydraulically-actuated clutch handles the 1750's (which is actually 1779cc) increased torque without fuss. The 5-speed transmission, on the other hand, still has that up-and-down shift lever movement and is a balkily synchronized device.

The new interior is handsome and reasonably laid out with tachometer, speedometer, water temperature, oil pressure and fuel level gauge as standard equipment. Some styling wit has also installed an array of no less than seven indicator lights, the lenses of some resembling the plastic jewels found on children's cowboy belts. Some air leaks are still present in the roadster version, but, even at cruising speed, the loudest noise you hear is the very efficient heater fan.

I return *C/D's* bootleg Duetto just in time to meet Sanesi who is on his way to an appointment at the test track. By the way, I don't know what I'll do for test Alfas in a couple of years when Sanesi retires—maybe Lancia will supply them.

—D. O. Cozzi

ALFA ROMEO 1750 DUETTO		CHECK LIST	
<b>VEHICLE TYPE</b>	Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger sports car	<b>ENGINE</b>	
<b>ENGINE</b>	Type: Water-cooled, 4 in-line, aluminum block, and head Bore x stroke: 3.15 x 3.49 in, 80 x 88.5 mm Displacement: 108 cu in, 1779 cc Compression ratio: 9.0 to one Carburetion: 2 x 2-bbl Weber 40 DCOE 32 Valve gear: chain driven dohc, inverted bucket followers Power: 132 bhp @ 5500 rpm Torque: 138 lbs/ft @ 3000 rpm Max. recommended engine speed: 6000 rpm	Starting..... Good Response..... Good Noise..... Fair Service accessibility..... Fair	
<b>DRIVE TRAIN</b>	Transmission: 5-speed, all-synchro Final drive ratio: 4.30 to one	<b>DRIVE TRAIN</b>	Shift linkage..... Good Synchro action..... Fair
<b>SUSPENSION</b>	F: Ind., unequal length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar R: Rigid axle, trailing arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar	<b>STEERING</b>	Effort..... Good Response..... Good
<b>BRAKES</b>	F: ATE solid disc R: ATE solid disc Swept area: 394 sq in	<b>SUSPENSION</b>	Ride comfort..... Good Roll resistance..... Good Cornering ability..... Good Predictability..... Fair
<b>WHEELS AND TIRES</b>	Wheel size and type: 14 x 5.5-in steel Tire make, size and type: Pirelli 165 x 14 radial ply tube type	<b>BRAKES</b>	Fade resistance..... Good Directional stability..... Good
<b>STEERING</b>	Type: recirculating ball Turns lock-to-lock: 3.7 Turning circle: 36.5 ft	<b>INTERIOR</b>	Ease of entry/exit..... Good Front seating comfort..... Good Rear seating comfort..... — Driver controls..... Fair Instrument comprehensiveness..... Very Good Instrument legibility..... Fair Heater/defroster..... Very Good Ventilation..... Fair
<b>DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES</b>	Wheelbase: 89.0 in Track: F: 52.5 in, R: 50.3 in Length: 168.0 in Width: 65.0 in Height: 51.0 in Curb weight: N.A. Fuel capacity: 12.4 gal Oil capacity: 7.0 qt Water capacity: 10.0 qt	<b>CONVENIENCE AND PROTECTION</b>	Trunk space..... Fair Interior storage space..... Good Bumper protection..... Poor Visibility..... Fair Wiper effectiveness..... Good
<b>PERFORMANCE*</b>	Zero to 40 mph..... 5.0 seconds 60 mph..... 10.2 80 mph..... 17.3 Standing ¼-mile..... 17.5 seconds at 81 mph	<b>CONSTRUCTION QUALITY</b>	Sheet metal..... Good Paint..... Good Upholstery..... Good
*Performance figures for cars sold in the United States may vary due to installation of mandatory anti-smog equipment			

