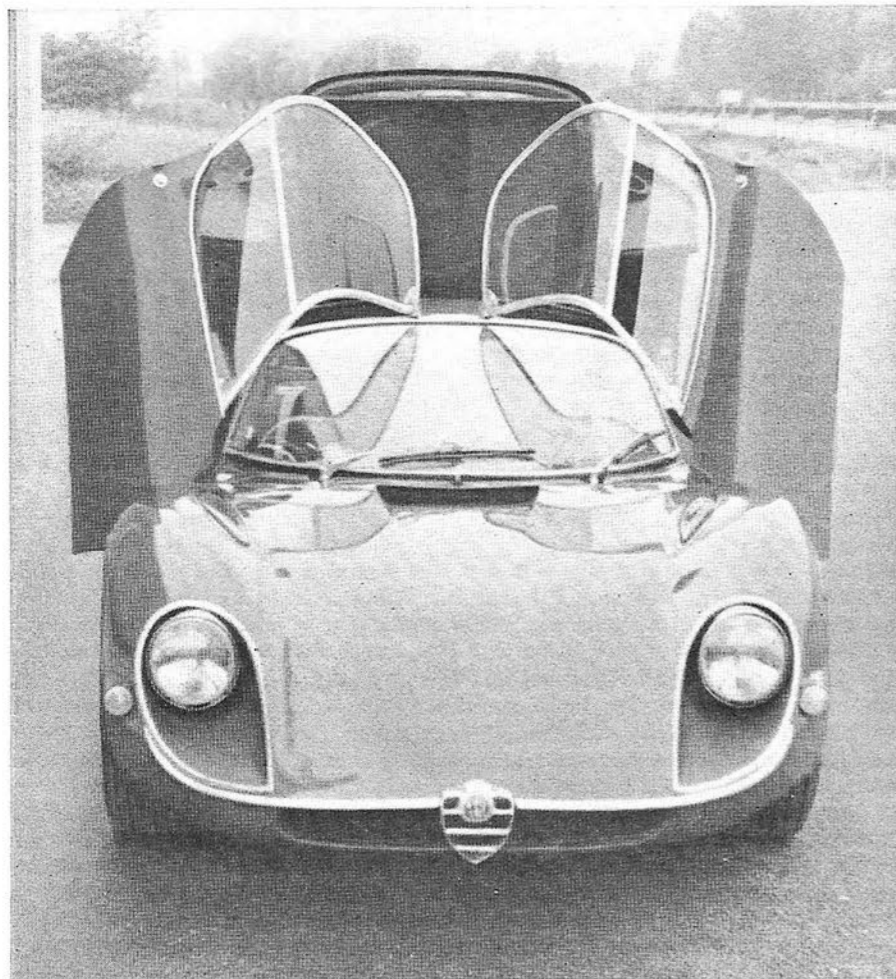


# Preview Test: Alfa Romeo 33 Coupe

Two-liter coupes that have a top speed of 154 mph aren't in the Department of Transportation's plans



Governments sure do funny things. In the U.S. there are not-so-dull rumblings about limiting the top speed on all cars to 80 mph while the Italian government, via semi-nationalized Alfa Romeo, is now offering a 2-liter coupe with a top speed of 154 mph—and that's with the standard 4.55 to one rear, there's an optional 3.54 which will give a theoretical top speed of over 190 mph.

Neither one of those speeds plots on any of the Department of Transportation's bell curves, and that's the whole idea. The Alfa 33 Coupe is one of the few current examples of a real race car, in this case the T 33 Prototype, modified for road use. The engine and chassis and suspension are virtually the same as the Prototype (major difference is that the tubular chassis is fabricated from steel

tubes while the racer uses tubes rolled from titanium sheet stock), and while the aluminum body work and interior have been redesigned to give a sexier, more luxurious look and feel, the 33 Coupe's heritage is clearly evident—with all the advantages and disadvantages that implies.

Primary among the latter is the fact that, aside from racing, it is highly doubtful that any examples of this car will ever be sold in the U.S. Two-liter engines developed to produce 245 hp are not well known for their ability to embrace anti-smog regulations and it's doubtful that Alfa is going to make the slightest attempt to equip or change the car so that it can comply. It just wouldn't make sense, the Coupe's selling price is over \$12,000 (or 7.5 million lira) and not even

the Italians are going to completely change a car simply to sell 20 or 30 more models in the American market.

Our test car was chassis number 101, the first built, the "mule," and had logged about 10,000 miles of evaluation and demonstration use by a number of prospective buyers. It had its shortcomings, like the absence of a speedometer, but the lasting impression is one of a fast and flexible vehicle that, surprisingly, can be brutally mistreated without eliciting even a whimper (at the behest of the manufacturer's representative we twice accelerated from 2000 rpm to 9000 rpm in sixth without hesitation in the engine or drivetrain). In fact, the only time we got worried was during a sudden rain shower—hitting puddles at 80-100 mph with 8-inch wide rear tires is an experience never to be forgotten.

Of course, the most impressive thing about this car has got to be the engine. Two-liter "street" engines just aren't supposed to pump out 245 hp—even in Italy where every street becomes a race course. The basic design of the fuel-injected, double overhead camshaft V-8 is identical to that used in the Prototypes: aluminum and magnesium castings for the heads and block, a 5-main bearing single-plane crankshaft, paired connecting rods, forged slipper pistons, two valves and two spark-plugs for every cylinder, slide-throttled indirect injection, and a pair of four-in-one exhaust systems. It's not a particularly quiet power unit, what with whines and whistles from the timing train and resonances in the intake trumpets at certain speeds, but the noises all seem to have a place—after all, to convert gasoline and air into 120 hp per liter is intrinsically a noisy process. The remarkable flexibility we mentioned earlier is due in a large part to the indirect fuel injection system, which, with its mechanical atomization, keeps right on juicing the cylinders even when there is almost no intake vacuum available. The imperturbable V-8 car even idles well in traffic.

Almost as impressive are the Alfa's brakes. The sexy looks, the nice noises, the little patches of rubber you leave in your wake as you flail the shift lever through all six gears are lovely but not exactly unexpected. It's the brakes that really grab you, literally and figuratively.

The big ventilated discs with their rigid ATE aluminum calipers, pulled our test car, which had a test weight of 2100 lbs., down from 80 mph in 208 feet (1.03G). Other manufacturers could learn from the way this car stops, as the entire system is made up of proprietary components.

Perhaps the least attractive of all the mechanical features of the 33 Coupe are the chassis and suspension system. The tubular chassis is of singular conception in this day and age of sheet metal monocoques and is perhaps the cause of some of the rude behavior of this car on the road. The suspension is independent front and rear, with the usual upper and lower control arms, and, in the case of the rears, longitudinal links to control drive and braking thrusts. In an effort to get the car to handle reasonably, resort was made to very stiff springs and shock settings and gigantic anti-sway bars. True, the car goes around corners like a go-kart, there is no perceptible roll, and—with the power available—cornering at near racing speeds is easy and sure. But all this stiffness has brought with it some negative features like a hard short-travel suspension with unpleasantly high frequencies, and a noticeable lack of independence in the front suspension. This lack of independence, due primarily to the girder-like sway bar, can be felt both at low speeds on rough roads, where it manifests itself in a shaking motion, and at high speeds on slight ripples, where the car takes on a staggering motion.

The mechanicals of the car might all be spartan real-racer gear, but Alfa is serious about this car as a luxury GT as well, and it turned out to be an exceptionally comfortable car. The average-size driver will find the seats to be among the best in the world—fully contoured and padded to hold one firmly, yet comfortably, in position. The seat back goes up past the shoulders and there is a head rest that works, believe it or not. The seat cushion doesn't stop at mid-thigh, but extends forward to just under the knee and there is a soft hump in the back to give much needed lumbar support.

Like the seats, the interior is trimmed in an imitation leather with an abundance of padding in all the critical places. The dashboard recalls the great days of Alfa's

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## ALFA ROMEO 33 COUPE

### VEHICLE TYPE

Rear-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger GT

### ENGINE

Type: water-cooled, V-8, aluminum block, and heads  
Bore x stroke, 3.07 x 2.06 in., 78.0 x 52.2 mm  
Displacement, 121.7 cu. in., 1995 cc  
Compression ratio, 10.5 to one  
Carburetion, Timed, port fuel injection  
Valve gear, Chain-driven double overhead camshafts  
Power, 245 bhp @ 8800 rpm  
Torque, 162 lbs/ft @ 7000 rpm  
Max. recommended engine speed, 9500 rpm

### DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission, 6-speed, all-synchro  
Final drive ratio, 4.56 to one

### SUSPENSION

F, Ind., upper and lower control arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar  
R, Ind., upper and lower control arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar

### BRAKES

F, 11.0-in. ventilated cast iron discs  
R, 9.8-in. inboard-mounted ventilated cast iron discs  
Swept area, 444 sq. in.

### WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size and type, F: 7 x 13-in., R: 8 x 13-in.  
Tire make, size and type, F: Dunlop R7 5.25 x 13, R: Dunlop R7 6.00 x 13

### STEERING

Type, Rack and pinion  
Turns lock-to-lock, 3  
Turning circle, 42.5

### DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase, 92.2 in.  
Track, F: 53.0, R: 56.5 in.  
Length, 156.0 in.  
Width, 67.0 in.  
Height, 39.0 in.  
Curb weight, 1660 lbs.  
Weight distribution, 44/66%  
Fuel capacity, 26.4 gal  
Oil capacity, 15.0 qts  
Water capacity, 13.0 qts

### PERFORMANCE\*

Zero to	Seconds
40 mph	3.6
60 mph	6.0
80 mph	9.5
Standing 1/4-mile	15 sec. @ 95 mph

\*Performance figures for cars sold in the United States may vary due to installation of mandatory anti-smog equipment.

## CHECK LIST

### ENGINE

Starting, Good  
Response, Excellent  
Noise, Poor  
Service accessibility, Fair

### DRIVE TRAIN

Shift linkage, Fair  
Clutch smoothness, Fair

### STEERING

Effort, Good  
Response, Very Good

### SUSPENSION

Ride comfort, Fair  
Roll resistance, Excellent  
Cornering ability, Excellent  
Predictability, Good

### BRAKES

Fade resistance, Excellent  
Directional stability, Excellent

### INTERIOR

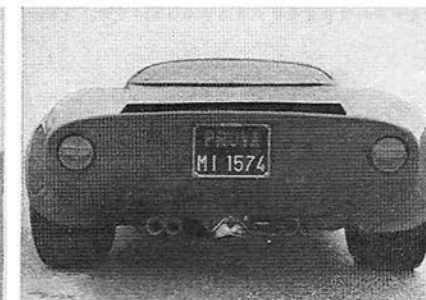
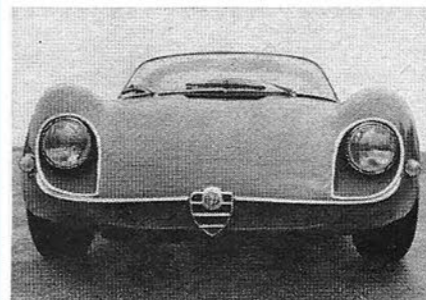
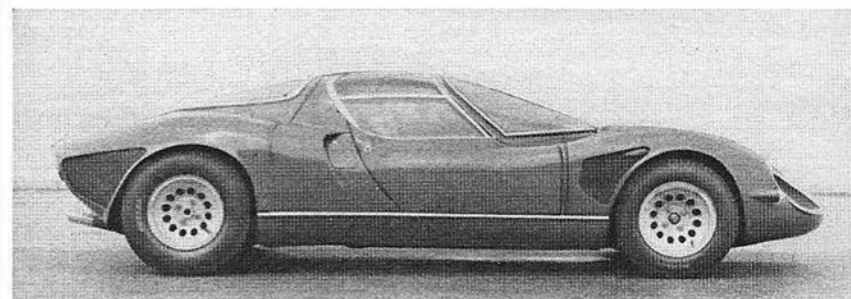
Ease of entry/exit, Good  
Front seating comfort, Very Good  
Rear seating comfort, —  
Driver's controls, Very Good  
Instrument comprehensiveness, Fair  
Instrument legibility, Good  
Heater/Defroster, Fair  
Ventilation, Poor

### CONVENIENCE AND PROTECTION

Trunk space, Poor  
Interior storage space, Poor  
Bumper protection, Poor  
Visibility, Fair  
Wiper effectiveness, Poor

### CONSTRUCTION QUALITY

Sheet metal, Fair  
Paint, Fair  
Upholstery, Very Good



## ALFA ROMEO 33 COUPE

(Continued from page 97)

racing triumphs with all the instruments being mounted in engine-turned panel.

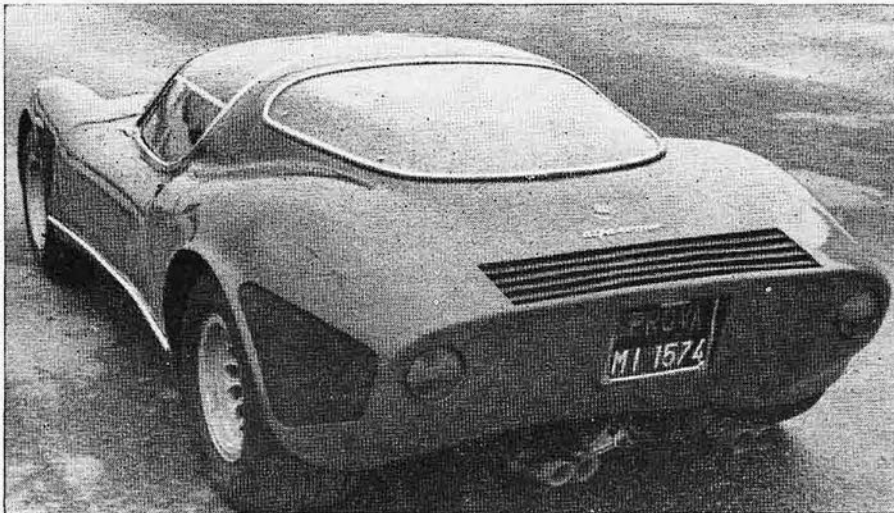
Clamboring in and out of the Coupe isn't quite like getting into a Checker Marathon, but considering the car's mini dimensions (39 inches high) it's amazingly simple. The doors are cut deeply into the roof, so in essence the whole side of the passenger compartment—from rocker panel to the mid-line of the roof—swings aside to let you step inside where you then collapse into the grip of the seat. Once settled, you discover that visibility to the front and sides is excellent thanks to the tremendous amount of glass employed—there's even great overhead visibility—almost a necessity for spotting traffic signals and, equally important, police helicopters. Behind you is the twilight zone.

All of this transparency does not come without its drawbacks, however. On a sunny day the occupants are cooked like sour dough rolls in a Dutch Oven and the aerodynamics of the bodywork don't

allow much fresh air to creep in even when the windows are down. An air conditioner would be a good idea but you'd probably have to rent a u-drag-it trailer to accommodate it. Unused space is at a premium and there simply is no room for anything as bulky as an air conditioner. Or for that matter a suitcase. The only provision which has been made is a small shelf in the engine compartment (over the carrying case for tools), and if it becomes necessary to use this shelf, the luggage will effectively block an air exit grille. Practicality, obviously, is not the Alfa Romeo 33 Coupe's long suit.

Winning races hasn't been Alfa's long suit these days either, which might explain the decision to make the 33 Coupe. While the Prototype has had its troubles in the big league, there's lots of potential for a car like this in the under-two-liter Sports 50 class and Alfa would like nothing better than to recapture the glory days with a class win at Le Mans or Nürburgring or the Targa Florio.

—H. H. Hathaway



## RENAULT 16

(Continued from page 83)

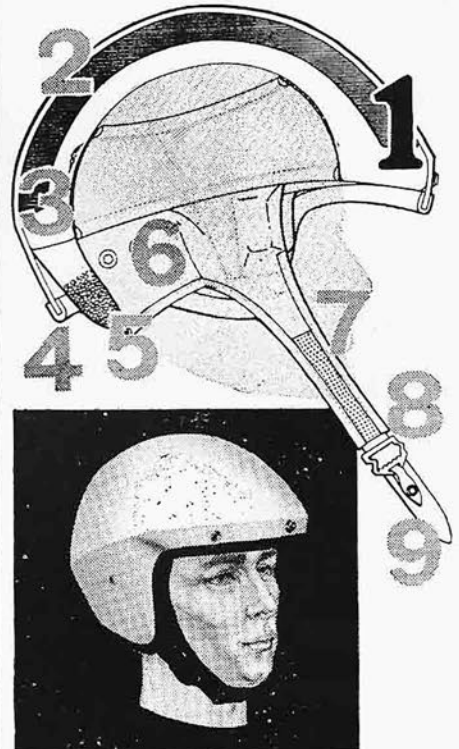
room to perform whatever tasks that may be infrequently necessary. But you're not about to see the innards that easily. Before you can even get in to look at the distinctive drive train arrangement you need the key. The hood is secured by a lock, a catch and a back-up catch—take that National Traffic Safety Agency. After prying open the lid, you see what we've been talking about. With the engine turned around backwards and mounted in back of a 4-speed transaxle that motivates the fwd, this most certainly is no ordinary Renault—but that, after all, is the idea.

The Renault 16 kept right on fooling us. On the expressway it came into its own. If we had had any thought that the R16 was going to be like those Dauphines that made us swear off French cars for life, we were promptly disabused. In the old days, 55 mph was the outside limit (on a cool day).

After that it was the old head gasket on the turnpike trick, with lots of smoke and a wheeze or two included to emphasize that you had, indeed, done it again. Current Renaults passed up all that drama long ago and now take in stride hours of cruising at about any speed that seems reasonable. That's not to say the R16 rocketed away from the line and stormed right up to its theoretical maximum, for the 1565cc engine had its work cut out pulling the 2370-lb. Sedan-Wagon along, but it was anything but fussy and never missed a beat the entire time we had it.

The newest Renault may not be a 426 Hemi or a GTB/4, not even a 396 Chevy II, but it is after all a no-maintenance, trouble-free, no-involvement car, remember? And after years of cranky European second cars which ran on alternate Tuesdays only, that may not be such a bad thing.

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