



MUSSELS & CURVES

This rare right-hand drive Alfa Duetto is a curvaceous 'cuttlefish' classic like no other. We get behind the wheel of a fabulously restored car for a taste of the magic

Story by Peter Nunn
Images by Michael Ward





The owner of this lovely 1967 Alfa Romeo Spider 1600 'Duetto', Gary Plumb, can recall the exact moment he first laid eyes on his car. Responding to a classified advert, he stood watching as the seller's garage door slowly rose up and the curvaceous tail end of the Duetto came into view. Right there, Gary admits he was smitten. With a sheepish smile, he recalls: "Within the first 30

seconds of physically seeing the car, I said to myself, I'm buying this."

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on its books, of which perhaps 20 are in current circulation. Gary then estimates that when it comes to 'white over red' cars, there appear to be just three, with only one of these actually being on the road.

We should remember of course that the Duetto was a highly rarified buy when new, priced at only £150 less than an E-Type Jaguar which had six cylinders and far brawnier performance. Records reveal Alfa Romeo built

April 1967 and date of sale in England of 5 May 1967.

Something strange then happened because the original owner in Christchurch, having bought a highly specialised Italian sports car painted white, then decided to change the colour to blue! Some years passed, then the car was taken off the road in 1981 as a result of a blown head gasket, further compounded by a failed attempt at a repair which resulted in the

“ Which parts went into the car depended on what was around at the time ”

just 380 RHD 1600cc cars between 1966 and 1967, so the chances of seeing another one coming the other way, let's say, are not high.

Everything changed for Gary when he spotted this white Duetto for sale in Swindon. He went to see the car and his spirits soared as the garage door went up, which is where we came in. It turns out the vendor was an aircraft engineer into restoring cars, not just Alfas, and along the way the Duetto had been rebuilt to the last nut and bolt. "Yes, the car was fundamentally there," recalls Gary, "restored to a good standard. He'd done the hard work." So a deal was done and Gary became a Duetto owner.

On the day we meet, Gary turns up with a big ring-bound folder full of correspondence on the car, including one of the new-style 'Certificato di Origine' statements from Alfa Romeo in Arese. This confirms the car's AR 710154 chassis number, build date of 29

timing chain accidentally dropping into the sump.

Two friends (one of whom had a 1300 Junior of his own) then came on the scene to assist. Eventually, the Duetto passed from one friend to another, ending up in Swindon with owner number three, a serial car restorer. Starting in 2012, he undertook a full 'back to bare metal' ground-up restoration. As soon as it was completed, he put the Duetto up for sale to fund his next project, which is where Gary Plumb came in, buying the car in September 2016.

Of his Duetto, Gary confesses with a smile: "I love the design and the complexity of that shape, it's so flowing with not a straight line on it. True to form, it feels just like a 1960s car. For me, the whole system of it, the driving experience is very special. I also like the comments you get. I'm not looking for praise but both guys and girls love it."

Gary, who is an IT engineer, bravely keeps the

White-on-red is a rare colour combo. This example has parts sourced from across the globe





ALFA ROMEO SPIDER 1600 DUETTO



Original Duetto 'cuttlefish' round tail is more highly sought-after than the later Kamm-tail treatment

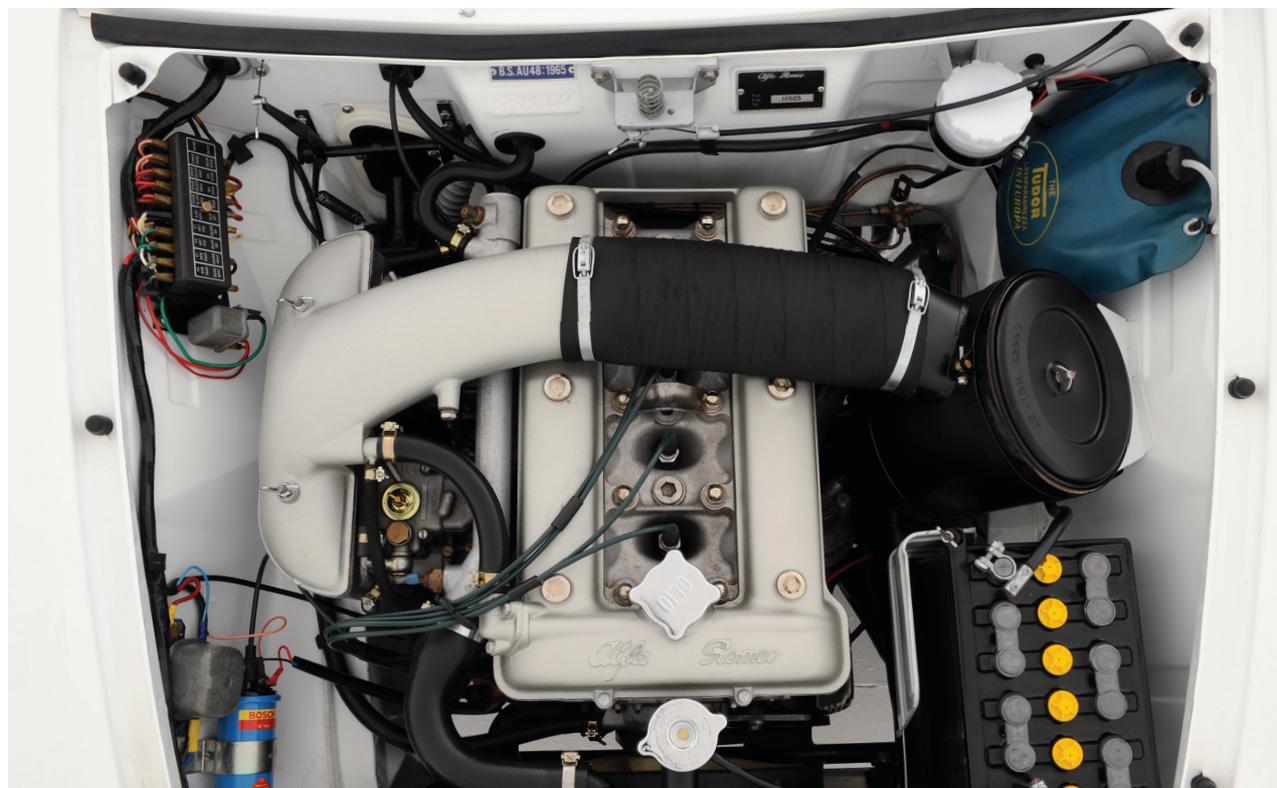
Duetto in an unheated lock-up and says he does about 1000 miles a year in it. He's done Cotswolds Alfa Day and the Goodwood breakfast meeting, as well as the *Auto Italia* Brooklands Italian Car Day. He won Car of the Show at the 2017 MITCAR event, after which the Duetto was displayed at the 2017 NEC Classic Car Show, so its fame is spreading.

For Gary, another fascinating (if perplexing) side to the car is the way it was originally built. That's to say, Pininfarina made the bodies and assembled the model at its Grugliasco plant but which parts went into the car depended on what was around at the time. "The spec was changing all the time when it came to things

like carbs and brakes," notes Gary. "There's no official record of what went on the car."

Gary's 1570cc twin-cam is running Webers but other Alfa 105s of that era could easily have had Solexes or Dell'Ortos. Brakes might be Dunlop or ATE. However, Gary's quest goes deeper than that and it's the finer details he's keen to finesse. Through a global network of Facebook friends, he enjoys the chase of tracking down small detail parts, all of which of course have to be period-correct.

Oil/radiator caps have come from the Netherlands. America has provided a heater control panel and rare rubber tool kit boot strap. Replacement light lenses





TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

ALFA ROMEO SPIDER 1600 DUETTO

ENGINE:	1570cc 4-cyl twin-cam
BORE / STROKE:	78mm x 82mm
COMPRESSION RATIO:	9.0:1
INDUCTION:	2 x Weber 40DCOE carbs
POWER:	109hp @ 6000rpm
TORQUE:	139Nm (103lb ft) @ 2800rpm
TRANSMISSION:	Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
SUSPENSION:	Double wishbones/coil springs (front), live axle/coil springs (rear)
TYRES:	155 x 15
DIMENSIONS:	4250mm (L), 1630mm (W), 1290mm (H)
WEIGHT:	990kg
MAX SPEED:	111mph
0-62MPH:	10.3sec



have been found in Germany. An accelerator stop came from Denmark. Italy, Israel, Canada, Slovenia and of course the UK have provided other myriad parts for this fastidious Duetto project. Even radiator hose clips come under scrutiny.

All of this become understandable when you see the Duetto in the metal because it does look fabulous both inside and out, no question. The styling is, of course, what makes the Alfa such a show-stopper yet the cabin also catches the eye in all the right ways. In particular, the artful simplicity of that original metal dash, those beautifully calibrated Jaeger Italia instruments, that evocative view over the seductively sloping bonnet – features like these haven't aged and some arguably weren't improved in later versions of the 105 Spider.

The Duetto comes over as a genuine Italian exotic – sophisticated and desirable. Just imagine what it was like when new on the Italian Riviera. Gary's car comes over as fundamentally well sorted, very wieldy and easy to place on the road. During an hour's drive over scenic back routes, the Alfa felt reassuringly solid, scuttle shake conspicuous by its absence. As with all 105 series Alfas, roadholding isn't the car's crowning glory and the tail end can become lively over indifferent tarmac. It's only the stiffness of the pedals that's a slight cause for concern here; otherwise, we can imagine it must be pretty darn close to how it was when the artisans at Pininfarina built it.

Ah yes, but we can live with its foibles. It's the accuracy and response of the steering, the precision of that celebrated five-speed gearshift, the eagerness of that rumbly twin-cam – it all comes together to create a wonderfully intuitive drive experience. *Bella macchina* indeed. 🇮🇹

Some say the original 1.6-litre twin-cam engine is the sweetest ever fitted to the Alfa Romeo 105 family

