Foreword

by Gabriele Tarquini

Gabriele Tarquini, Brands Hatch 1994.
(Author collection)

Le Mie Alfa

I started racing these cars after achieving the dream of driving F1, and the most emotional and happiest seasons for me have been those when I have driven them in touring car races, and this has been thanks entirely to the excellent cars I had available every season.

The best period of all was with the red Alfa Romeos: I am one of the few lucky people who has been able to drive all versions of both the 155 and 156.

Towards the end of 1992 I started driving the 155 D2 – my first front-wheel drive racing car. The first laps were very frustrating because I thought I would never learn how to drive a front-wheel drive car fast, and at the same time enjoy myself with a vehicle that was totally different to anything I had driven before, and which I thought of as a 'true' racing car: a single-seater.

I never thought that, in the future, this sort of car would come to represent my destiny and that I would pass the next twenty years with front-wheel drive, or see the unimaginable improvements that came about since the beginning. I have become now a specialist of the type of understeer naturally generated by this type of car.

Saying which of them I loved most is very difficult, because each had its own characteristics, and gave me great satisfaction, but I am most closely touched by the 155 D2 (1993) and the Silverstone of 1994 because I created them from birth and contributed in substantial amounts – together with the engineers – from the test-track to the races. These are the cars that I have most adapted to my style of driving, which gave other drivers lots of problems.

The 155 Silverstone was the first Italian car, with an Italian driver, to win the prestigious BTCC, the Supertouring championship of Britain, and I consider it the most important title of my long career. In 1994 there were ten manufacturers taking part officially in the BTCC, and to beat them was not easy, given the continuous changes in the regulations aimed at slowing down the car that was 'too fast' for the other teams.

The end of my first term with Alfa was in 1996 with the ITC championship, where I drove the most sophisticated car of my life. This caused a complete change to my method of developing a car; the advent of electronics somewhat complicated the final solution I sought, after the first natural difficulty of the challenge provided by having to develop them, after which I felt comfortable. My generation of driver was not born with a computer, but understanding the ultimate importance and the infinite potential of their application has given me tremendous help when trying to find the limit of development.

After a long period with Honda I returned to Alfa at the end of 2002 with the 156 S2000 that was already very competitive and beautifully prepared. Perhaps the 155 D2 was less technical, but my success in ETCC was very exciting from a sporting point of view because I duelled with BMW right until the very last race at Monza, where my all-Italian success was spectacularly and emotionally celebrated by a huge crowd.

Many years have passed since victory in the BTCC but the taste of success with Alfa Romeo remains indelible and, with the passing of time, generates Italian pride like no other victories have managed to.

So I would never have abandoned the red Alfa Romeo out of choice, but the economic problems of the group [Fiat] and its increasing disinterest in sporting activities has progressively split up the racing department which, over time, had become a legend of the motorsport world.

Gabriele Tarquini

Inside the '94 car during the build process. Note the support for the long, raked steering column.

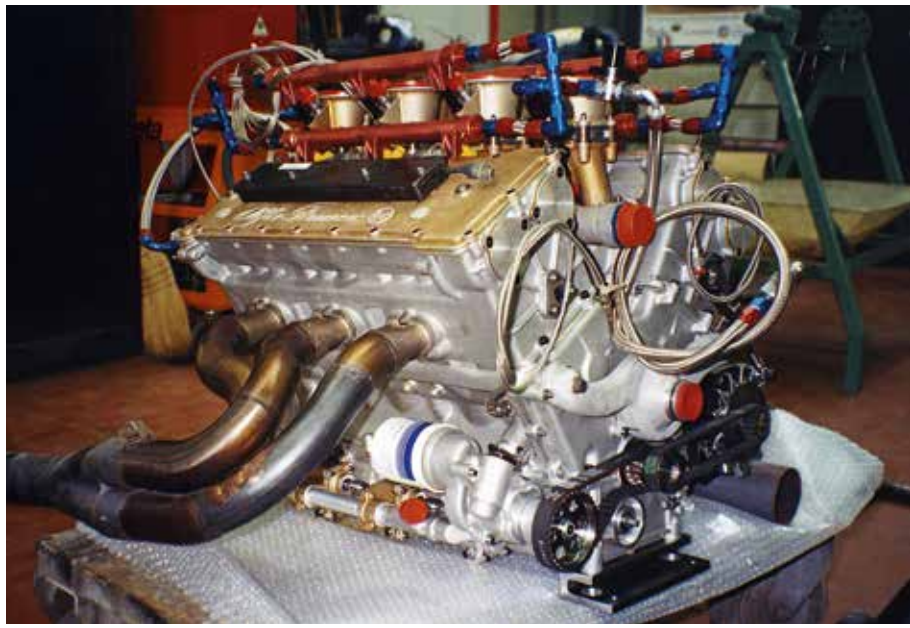
and this meant the cars were almost tailor-made to accept active hardware. It was only a matter of how long it would take us to come up with the software to make it all work.

"Our main concern was whether it would all work properly as Macpherson struts under extreme racing pressure can suffer from stiction, and there was some evidence that they were locking up under high lateral loads. By late spring '94 all the design work was complete and two sets of active suspension equipment were ready for fitting to the test car in Italy."

In late December 1993 *Autosport* magazine reported that: "Alfa will use TAG active suspension, ABS and a completely new engine in its bid to retain the DTM title."

Giorgio Pianta commented on the technical freedom of the series: "It is important to have touring car racing in which a manufacturer can express its technical excellence." Five new '94 specification cars were to be run. Despite Giorgio's comment, reports came through that Larini had suffered a software glitch with the new ABS that led to brake failure at 160mph while testing at Mugello. The ensuing crash destroyed the car and left its driver with mild concussion.

In the final week of January, Giorgio Francia put the 1994-specification new car through its initial test at Mugello.



First of the new normally-aspirated V6 engines for the '94 DTM car.

The new '94 V6 immediately after it was first lowered into the new car's engine bay.

Under the skin of the 155 D2.

Fiat empire was Alberto Pianta, younger brother of Giorgio. That certainly helped solve some production difficulties!"

It was reported that the budget for Alfa's BTCC assault would top £5.25m. Two hundred right-hand drive Silverstones would be allocated for sale in the UK with the adjustable front and rear spoilers. The competition cars would be based on the 1993 racers, according to the reports, with the spoilers, engine and front suspension changes and stiffer rear suspension. No mention was made of the locking differential ...

Alfa's regulation interpreters had done their homework. The FIA had decided that for a car to be eligible for Supertouring, the manufacturer would have to prove that 25,000 had been built, but this had been deferred for one year until 1995. So Alfa had been able to take advantage of the last year of the rule that stated only 2500 needed to be manufactured.

This is an official factory picture of one of the infamous Alfa Romeo 155 Silverstones displaying its full aerodynamic kit.

Andy Rouse, who was boss of Ford's Mondeo team, was later quoted as saying: "Unfortunately, there's not a lot we can do about it. It'll be a one year thing anyway and, to be honest, the difference is not going to be that big. On most modern cars a rear spoiler doesn't work. The front may do something on fast

Tielemans uses the grass bank at the statue, before turning into the long downhill straight back to the station on Pau's superb road circuit in 2007. (Courtesy FIAWTCC).

Lead driver was ex-BTCC Champion Tim Harvey, who did well to last the year. (Author collection)

The 147 was not a complete disaster and showed some promise at times. Here Harvey tries hard at Brands. (Author collection)

Harvey in one of the BTCC 147s ready for qualifying at Silverstone. (Author collection)

"A removable system was formed by adding reinforcing material. The fabrication required the employment of specialised expert welders because of the type of steel used, which was more suitable for press-work (steel stamping) and definitely unsuitable for standard welding techniques.

"The outcome was a wider track that did not create a bigger steering offset, and also enabled the changing of camber very quickly. The floor-mounted pedal box was retained as it allowed the driver's seat to be moved back, resulting in better distribution of axle weights. The gearbox benefited from some improvements made to it during the first racing season with the 156 Super 2000s."

In the 2002 Finnish Touring Car Championship Esa Schroderus experienced an erratic season with a best of a podium third late in the year at Alastaro. In Italy, no doubt encouraged by Francia's first time out series win of 2001, nine 147s came out to play but it was Francia's, once again, that was quickest.