

## ESCAPE ROADS

1954 ALFA ROMEO 1900 SS GHIA

# ELEGANT ENTRY

BY LEIGH DORRINGTON



Construction of coupes and spiders on the 1900's unibody platform was left to coachbuilders, including Touring, Pinin Farina, Zagato and Bertone, whose B.A.T. series is built on the 1900. One of the most outstanding coach-built Alfa Romeo 1900s is this example, built by Ghia.

The subject car was originally sold through an Alfa Romeo dealer in Paris to a Swiss client. This Ghia coupe appeared extensively in automotive publications during 1954. But it was the second owner, a captain in the French air force, who owned this 1900 until 1990, when it changed hands to a Belgian owner before eventually making its way to the United States.

The one-of-a-kind 1900 SS Ghia is an aluminum-bodied coupe built on the *corto*, or short chassis. Sporting ambitions are reflected in the engine prepared by Autotecnica

Conrero, a top Alfa tuner of the era, with two Weber carburetors and tuned intakes.

What is above question is the elegance of the Ghia design and details. The body is finished in its original Linen White color, with restrained accents in a striking contrasting dark orange. The lines atop the front fenders are crisp. Yards of smooth black leather are fitted with exquisite silver hardware. A small Ghia emblem adorns each door panel, while armrests and the wide, flat but uncommonly comfortable seats are finished with ivory piping.

A complete set of instruments marked in Italian faces the driver in the body-colored dash, along with an AM/short-wave radio. The engine starts with a pleasing *blat!* from the two-inch polished exhaust.

The Alfa moves out easily, and the steering lightens as the car gains speed. But the overwhelming driving impression is the eagerness of this delightful

automobile.

The 1900 Super Sprint remained in production until 1958. By that time, the transition to the 1.3-liter Giulietta was complete. That car outsold the 1900 two-to-one and introduced most Americans to Alfa Romeo. 🍷

## DOLLARS & SENSE

ORIGINAL LIST PRICE: \$5,136  
(plus coachbuilding cost)  
CURRENT MARKET VALUE: \$550,000

THE COACHBUILT ALFA Romeo 8C 2900B built in 1937-39 set a standard of sophistication seldom equaled. The less costly 6C 2300 and 1500 constructed in the prewar and postwar years also included examples of extraordinary coachwork. But the Alfa Romeo 1900 introduced in 1950 was developed for a new postwar middle-class market.

The 1900 was powered by a 1.9-liter DOHC four-cylinder engine. Alfa Romeo concentrated on production of the 1900 Berlina, a four-door that was one of the first sport sedans but considerably removed from the prewar Alfas. Nevertheless, 1900s won the Mille Miglia every year from 1952 to 1955.

## MARKET

1967 Renault Caravelle S Cabriolet  
Worldwide Auctioneers, Auburn, Ind.  
Sept. 3, 2011

Red with red hardtop and black vinyl interior. Inline-four, 1,108 cc, 51 hp; four-speed manual transmission. This one quite literally has a series of dents on every horizontal surface. Either this Caravelle was in a hailstorm, or someone's six-year-old got a ball-peen hammer for Christmas. OK paint quality underneath the dings. Tired chrome; upper door gaskets hanging loose. Redone interior good but not correct.

### SOLD AT \$2,750

The title might read 1967, but this car could date from one if not two years earlier. How does this happen? Many postwar "foreign" cars were titled in the year they were sold as new and not the year they were built or imported. This happened even though 1960s import dealers tended to be small operations, sometimes selling no more than a few dozen cars a year. Equipped with both a soft top and an optional hardtop, the Caravelle originally was



known in its home market as the Floride. Introduced at the Paris Salon of October 1958, by 1964, the convertible was priced without options at \$2,295. At \$2,750, this was definitely

an entry-level price for a collector car, even more so for an interesting example with a top that goes down. Even though the multiple dents are not an easy fix, this is just the ticket for someone wanting an attention-grabbing ride for a minimum number of francs.

—DAVE KINNEY