

# 1955 Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS Zagato Coupe

## A candidate for restoration sells for strong money

by Donald Osborne



Chassis number: AR1900C01947

The ultra-rare Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS combined the short chassis with a racing-specification engine, gearbox, and revised final-drive ratios — plus air-cooled “Alfin” self-adjusting brakes. The excellent 5-speed manual gearbox featured synchronized second, third and fourth gears, with carefully selected ratios matching the power curve of the twin-cam Tipo 1308 engine. The 1900 series basked in competition success and particularly that of the 1900 C SS, with racing credentials earned at the major races and rallies of the era, including the Targa Florio, Stella Alpina and Mille Miglia.

While over 21,000 1900-series cars were built among many variations, only 854 were the ultimate specification 1900C SS. From introduction, the 1900 received the deft touch of Italy’s finest custom coach builders, including Touring, Ghia and Vignale. Those cars endowed with bodies from Zagato, which utilized ultra-lightweight alloy panel work, yielded even greater performance.

Finished in gray and delivered on May 13, 1955, this Zagato-bodied Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS, chassis AR1900C01947, was sold through the Alfa Romeo dealership at Lucca in Tuscany to Luigi De Paoli, who was known to have owned a succession of fascinating cars. The vehicle returned to Alfa Romeo soon thereafter and was next acquired by Charlie Daniels, a member of the U.S. military in Italy, and Colonel William Kelly. The men campaigned the car jointly until 1957, when Kelly took sole ownership of the car.

Kelly was an officer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, stationed during this time at Camp Darby, an

Italian military base for American and NATO military operations beginning about 1951. He served 28 years in the Army, eventually rising to the rank of brigadier general.

While traveling through Europe, Kelly entered club tours and rallies with 01947, with the majority likely organized by the “Scuderia Aurelia” club at Camp Darby. The cloisonné badge of this exclusive club is still affixed to the front of the 1900’s thin aluminum hood. Following Kelly’s return to the United States and a new posting in North Carolina, the C SS was stored unused, in relative secrecy from 1977 onward. Kelly kept the Alfa Romeo for nearly 60 years in all, until the consignor’s recent discovery and acquisition of the car.

As now offered, 01947 is accompanied by a large cache of exceedingly rare parts, spares, trim pieces, manuals and tools — plus a color image of the Zagato coupe, complete with racing number, taken in period at a club event. While the front bumper and left-front cooling duct — along with various other items — are no longer with the car, 01947 is accompanied by the partially assembled 1900 engine that has been with the car since 1956. In sum, this extremely rare and important Zagato garage find is sure to excite the Alfisti everywhere, with wonderful design cues and patina that can only be fully appreciated upon closer examination and consideration by the true enthusiast.

**SCM Analysis** This car, Lot 59, sold for \$1,012,000, including buyer’s premium, at the Gooding & Company Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance sale on August 16, 2014.

### Details

Years produced: 1954–56  
 Number produced: 28  
 Original list price: \$6,100  
 Current SCM Valuation: \$675,000–\$1,200,000  
 Tune-up cost: \$475  
 Chassis # location: Engine bulkhead, stamped into metal  
 Engine # location: Intake side of block  
 Club: Alfa Romeo 1900 Register  
 Website: [www.ar1900reg.org](http://www.ar1900reg.org)  
 Alternatives: 1953 Lancia B20 GT, 1953 Maserati A6G/2000, 1953 Fiat 8V  
 SCM Investment Grade: A

### Comps



1954 Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS  
 Lot 33, s/n AR1900C01742  
 Condition 2+  
 Sold at \$649,000  
 Gooding & Co., Scottsdale, AZ, 1/17/14  
 SCM# 232105



1955 Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS  
 Lot 246, s/n AR1900C02056  
 Condition 2-  
 Sold at \$557,000  
 Bonhams, Carmel, CA, 8/14/09  
 SCM# 142050



1955 Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS  
 Lot 225, s/n AR1900C10160  
 Condition 2+  
 Sold at \$66,496  
 Bonhams, Gstaad, CHE, 12/19/07  
 SCM# 48113

I loved this car. I loved it for several reasons: First, it was born in the same year I was. Second, I was introduced to the intoxicating world of Italian cars by Alfa Romeo, and this car is a product of one of its brightest periods. Third, one of my passions is custom Italian coachwork of the 1950s, and Zagato creations of the period are especially appealing. Fourth, because it so clearly represents nearly the best of what a barn find could and should be — and now allows me yet again to wax eloquent on one of my favorite topics.

If you were present at the Gooding & Company preview, the SCM Insider's Seminar, the lunch stop of the Pebble Beach Tour d'Elegance, or on the lawn at Pebble Beach on Sunday, you would have had a chance to see two examples of the Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS bodied by Zagato. One was a 1954 sister of this 1955 model, and together they serve as poster children for the difference between a preservation car and restoration candidate.

### The preserved Pebble Beach car

Italian collezionista straordinario Corrado Lopresto is a Milanese architect who has a passion for rare Italian cars. While many of us do, what sets this modern-day Cosimo de Medici apart is that he has focused on prototypes, one-offs, serial number 001 and preserved original examples.

Lopresto brought his 1954 Alfa 1900 C SS Zagato to Pebble Beach this year, and that car provided a fascinating contrast to our profile subject. Lopresto's car was sold new in Italy and enjoyed a very brief, very minor competition career but was soon sold to a series of owners in the mid-1950s who used it only as street transport. It was parked in a dry, secure garage in Rome in 1969, and there it remained for more than 44 years until Lopresto rescued the car.

The car was gently re-commissioned mechanically, and the faded — but largely complete — paint was cleaned as were the well-conserved cloth seats of the interior.

All the surfaces as finished at the Zagato Works were virtually intact, with the exception of the thin, blade-type bumpers, which had been replaced in the 1960s with tubular ones.

The car was started, the later bumpers removed and it instantly began its journey to the leading concours of the world to serve as an exemplar of the production techniques and materials of Carrozzeria Zagato and Alfa Romeo at the mid-century mark. First seen in America at the Amelia Island Concours, it was understandably rewarded with a First in Class, Post-War Preservation this past August at the 2014 Pebble Beach Concours.

### Our subject 1900 C SS

On the other hand, our subject vehicle was also sold early in its life to owners who would lightly campaign it. During the late 1970s, the car was stripped and largely dismantled for a restoration that never really commenced.

At some point after being taken apart, the seats were retrimmed in an imaginative fashion in very dramatic red and black vinyl. Most of the pieces taken off the car were present, and some very important small trim pieces remained on the body. A brief inspection of the body indicates that the original body panels — brittle and somewhat worn — may serve well as patterns for newly made pieces. The bare metal gives full testimony of how many smaller pieces were welded together to make those sensual curves.

The car came with three engines. All were unfortunately not the correct "Tipo 1308" as it would have had from new, but they are instead "Tipo 1306" versions of the Alfa DOHC inline 4-cylinder. The differences between the two types of engine are many, most maturing only to the most hard core of the Alfisti, as the engines are identical in appear-



ance. Nevertheless, there are important variations, and they had a direct effect on performance in the period. The 1308 engine, in addition to having stronger crank bearings, bigger valves and a higher compression ratio, may also have in some C SS models an alloy sump as well. This engine was made in both 1,884-cc and 1,975-cc versions and fitted to the Super and TI Berlinas (sedans) and Super Sprint (SS) coupes.

Our subject car did come with the very important carburetor intake airbox, a beautifully shaped piece of black-crackle-painted sculpture without which the 1900 C SS engine compartment is woefully incomplete. At least the engines are of the old style, complete with the semi-diabolical button-screw valve adjustment and not the later, 1,975-cc unit used in the so called "Cast Iron 2000," which has a traditional valve adjustment mechanism and lacks the wide "buttons" which are found on the cam covers of the earlier engines.

That one of the engines had been fitted to the car since 1956 is also not a bad thing. It's not unlikely that the original engine may have suffered a failure, which is what resulted in the car being "returned to Alfa Romeo shortly thereafter" by the original owner. Alfa may well have fitted a lower-performance unit into the coupe before selling it to an unsuspecting U.S. serviceman.

### An excellent car for restoration

Chassis 01947 will make an excellent restoration project for the new owner. As my friend and esteemed SCM colleague Miles Collier discussed in his presentation "Preservation vs. Restoration: The Tipping Points" at the SCM Insider's Seminar in Gooding's Pebble Beach tent, it's clear that this car had passed the intersection point between vehicles that can tell a story of how they were made by not being touched and one which can only begin to tell that story by being made into a modern but well-considered simulacrum of what left the Zagato workshop in 1955.

That work will be easier because this car has suffered little at the hands of ill-conceived, badly researched renovation or refurbishment during its life — the strident vinyl interior notwithstanding.

When our subject car's restoration is done, it could be wonderful example of a very important car, even without a 1308 engine. If I were the new owner, I would make a great effort to find one, as the car deserves it. Even without it, it still serves its history well. Despite the high price — an auction record for the model — another such opportunity seems unrepeatable. Well sold — but also appropriately bought. ♦

(Introductory description courtesy of Gooding & Company.)

