



JUST ENOUGH

No more, no less than a Touring-bodied 1956 Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS needed

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROY D. QUERY

It started out innocently enough. Joseph Miranda brought his 1956 Alfa Romeo 1900 C SS to Brian Wentland's shop for a little work in 2002. New paint, maybe the interior was a little tired, the brakes didn't inspire trust. What could go wrong, he thought? It'll be in, it'll be out, and Bob's your uncle. A year-and-a-half and two trips to Italy later, it's possible he was rethinking things.

Alfa Romeo produced 854 1900 C Super Sprints over the model's 1954-'58 run, 248 for 1956. The story of chassis #10081 begins

when one Sr. Ruggero Brogio took delivery in 1956 for 3,420,000 lire—almost \$5,500, putting it in the company of the world's finest. Sr. Brogio soon sold it to Luigi Bonifanti, owner of the famed Bonifanti Museum near Bassano del Grappa. Bonifanti was a noted collector of cars by the renowned Carrozzeria Touring, and his Alfa credentials were solid, too: He later became president of the Alfa Romeo Club of Italy.

During the 1970s, Bonifanti became acquainted with Milwaukee businessman John Julien, and after some negotiation,

Julien took delivery of the car in Venice for 2,000,000 lire, about \$2,350. *Hemmings* classifieds from the time suggest this was a very good deal, even for the time. After driving it in continental Europe, he shipped it to New York on the Queen Elizabeth II in 1978.

Julien drove the car in the Milwaukee area for many years. From the very beginning, however, his friend Joseph Miranda had his eye on it. While the car was mechanically original, at some point in its Italian history, it received a new coat of paint in a sea-



Superleggera

foam green, believed to be very close to the original color.

Joseph was already familiar with Alfas, and when the car became available through Julien's estate, he decided that the car should stay in the hands of someone who knew its history. "I also wanted the car to stay in the area, as there are no others," he said.

"Well, I drove it around a little bit, but there were some issues with it, namely, the brakes," he said. It was complete, and included a few spares, a manual and parts book in Italian, "Although one of the instruction books is in English. And the certification, certifying that the translation [of the sales certificate] is absolutely correct is quite magnificent—it's got seals on it with ribbons." It also included an official file from the Italian Automobile Club dating to Brogio's ownership, an Italian Transit Permit and the correspondence of Bonifanti and Julien.

In 2002, Joseph began discussing some refurbishment with Brian Wentlandt's The Paint Shop in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. "He and I talked about it; I wanted it to be more of a show-quality car, and there were some things that, as we worked on it, came to light

and really needed to be done," he said. One of Joseph's first decisions was to change the color: "I didn't like that aqua color—it was rather innocuous for me. It was ugly, to be quite honest. And I'm very fond of red. I do believe that the color actually transformed the car." Brian and Joseph later decided to change the red and beige interior, with the caveat that, as much as possible, it must follow the original pattern and design. In fact, as Brian took it apart, he discovered that the beige leather had started out dove gray and changed with time and wear, evidence that the car had never been apart. "Overall, it was in really decent shape, considering how old it was," said Brian. "All the trim was there, the car is pretty much mostly original parts, which is unique."

While a new coat of paint was always in the cards, Brian discovered some other bumps and bruises. One, a crease in the rear decklid, they did know about. "When the car arrived here in the States, coming through customs, the trunk was propped up, and the agent was oblivious to the prop and pulled down on it," said Joseph. It was cracked, and looked as though it had folded over and been flattened out. "The front end

was bumped around, over the years, when it was in Italy, I believe," said Brian. "And the left side headlight area was cracked and out of round, and the grille area, which sticks out, was bumped and cracked in a few places.

"Basically, the front end was the worst part. Nothing fit; let's put it that way. The grille didn't fit, and the bumpers didn't fit, and the lower valance, which is quite huge, was all kind of pounded up."

When he first looked at it, Brian thought about sanding and blocking, and painting over the current paint. When the first coat or two came off easily with a razor blade and heat gun, he took it all off. "I don't like using chemical strippers. I used to use them, and they always came back and bit me. When you use a chemical stripper, they tell you to leave it on there, strip it off, and then you have to wash the surface. If you had a rust spot where it was pitted, and the stuff got in there, you couldn't get it all out." On the front end and rear decklid, where bodywork was required, he took it down to bare metal, but on most of the car he stopped at the Touring's hard skim coat of filler.

He found the hood was separated where



it was spot-welded to the inner structure, with a gap close to a foot long. "And both sides are a little different, of course, because you've got Guido on one side and Luigi on the other putting it together, so it's not exactly symmetrical. And there are no adjustments on anything.

"Any time you try and weld anything on it, you run into problems, but everybody has their own technique. I've seen some guys who are real adept at gas welding it; that seems to be the way to do it. I actually wire-welded it, because there were only small cracks. Just like steel, you start welding, and sometimes, you get to a real thin area and

it just blows the metal away. After you grind on it, and pound on it, the stuff I mainly had to deal with was cracks that happened after I pounded it back into the right shape."

To fit the hood, doors and trunklid back into the one-piece body "had to be done with a hammer." An arced hinge with a small pin is the hinge for both trunk- and decklid. "You pound on the sheetmetal—you use a spoon and a dolly, and a hammer, and you pound down to get it flush and level, and grind wherever the gaps are wrong, or add," he said. "The doors are the same way, they just bolt on," with no adjustments.

Amazingly, the thin steel tubing which

supports the aluminum bodywork wasn't damaged; nor did Brian find any dielectric corrosion between the two metals. He sandblasted them clean, though, applied epoxy and urethane sealer to prevent future damage.

Underneath, he found "no holes in the floors, nice and greasy, and that's how I left them. Joe asked me, and I said, '50-some years down the road, again, if it's still greasy, you'll be able to take a part off of it.'" Only 19,000 kilometers show on the car's odometer, and while no one knows if that's accurate, it seems plausible. The suspension and running gear were in fine shape, as was the



Careful removal, evaluation and storage of exterior trim is a vital first step. Everything was there, aluminum and chrome refinished



Next was to remove the glass, upholstery and interior. Restorer decided not to remove the complicated dash, loosened it enough for cleaning



What looks like rust is adhesive from weatherstripping added later. Diagonal wire holds door square, in tension. New glass was cut locally



Owner and restorer originally planned to leave the interior intact, but closer examination revealed problems



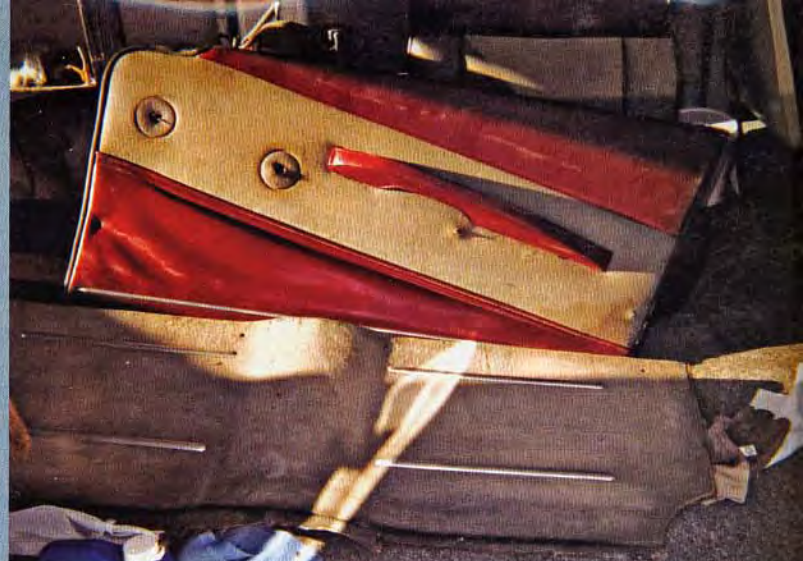
Looking toward the back window with the headliner fabric removed reveals Touring's unmistakable *superleggera* construction



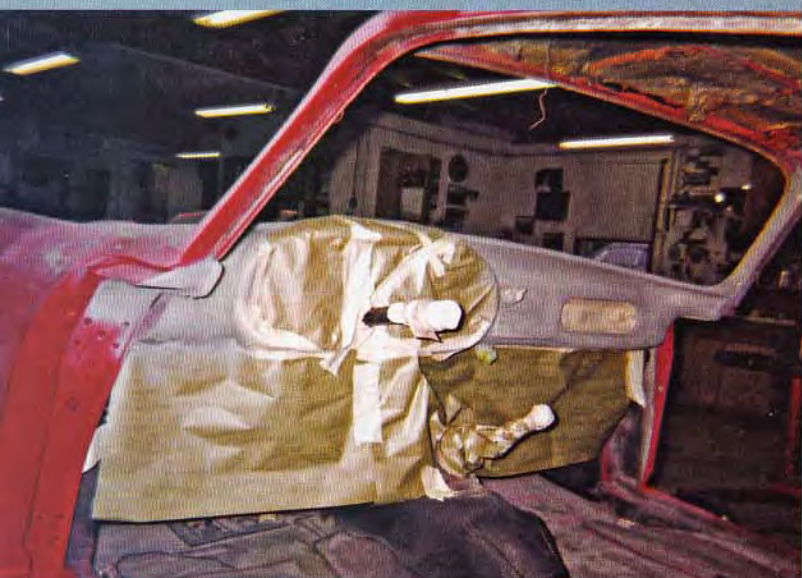
Three sleeves or darts at the front of the headliner are sewn around the roof support pipe. Edges are glued in, windows have to come out



Number applied under the hood at Touring. A handbuilt car, doors and rear decklid are also marked, and don't interchange with any other car



Upholsterer was given the original fabrics with the instruction to create a new leather and cloth interior on the same pattern in the new color



With irreplaceable dash pieces left in the car, immaculate masking was vital for this body-on refurbishment

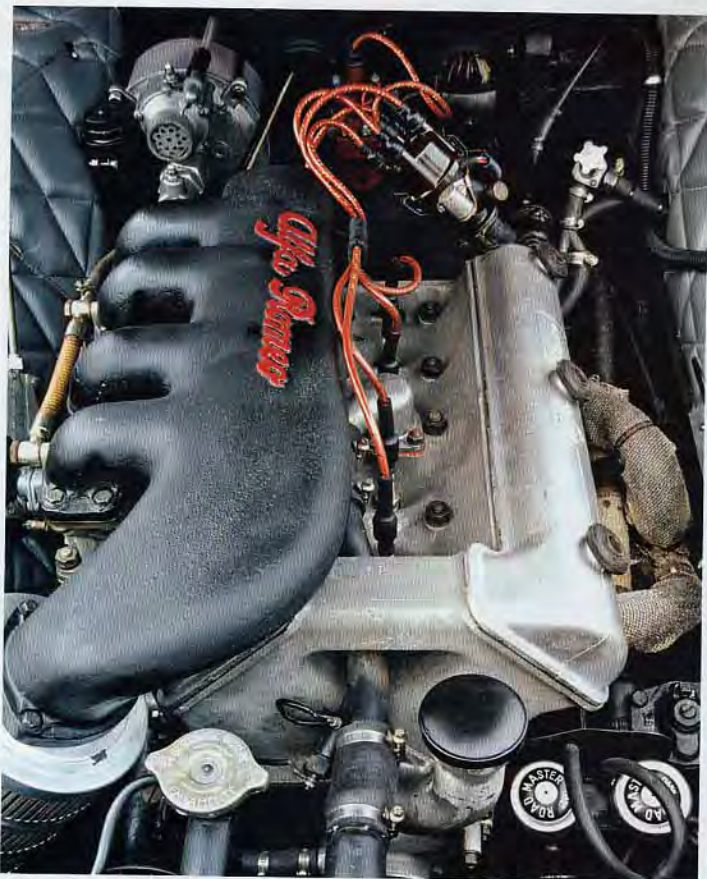


Paint was razor-stripped off and Touring's primer left on in most places; Chromalite body filler used on the uneven aluminum body shell



Inner fenders are now covered with quilting, so overspray wasn't an issue. Small panel in the wheel well gives access to belts and hoses





beautifully running engine. "We wanted to keep as much of the suspension and engine original, without messing with any of that, other than maintenance stuff," he said. "Part of the reason we did this was it was so good. Had it been really bad, he probably wouldn't have had the car."

Once the interior was out of the car and on its way to upholsterer Mike Yittri, who created a new one from the original, Brian started smoothing out the hand-hammered bodywork with Sherwin-Williams automotive urethane primer, block sanded down to 400 grade. He stuck with Sherwin-Williams for the five or six color and four or five clear coats, finishing with wet sanding to 1500 grade. He says that his intensive surface preparation resulted in a finish as good as any premium paint.

The engine needed only tune-up items—belts, hoses and the like. The "Super" designation means it sports 1954's 1,975cc version of Alfa's trademark cast-iron DOHC inline-four. Nearly square, it makes 115hp at 5,000 rpm, ample for its scant 2,200 pounds. It's one of the most beautiful engine bays in autodom, dominated by a fearsome black intake, feeding twin Solex 40 PII carburetors, and exhaling into an ANSA dual stainless two-inch exhaust.

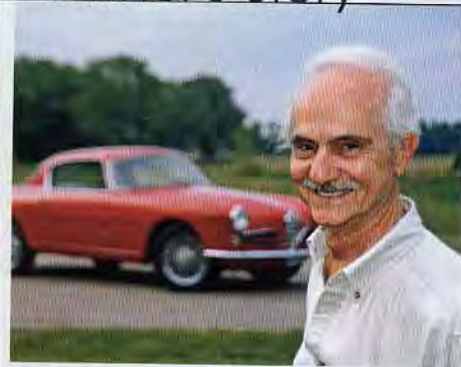
Actually reassembling the car ended up taking an inordinate amount of time, as

many small items that couldn't be obtained at Re-Originals in Texas had to come from AFRA in Milan. "At AFRA they have one person, an older gent, who does nothing but take care of requests for old parts. He only comes in once a week..." said Joseph. With a factory manual in hand, he made two trips to Italy to translate factory parts numbers into the bits and pieces he needed in Wisconsin. "The windshield, for example, we ordered from Italy late fall, and they didn't have any, but they were going to go into production, and then in Italy there was a holiday, so months and months went by." Brian added, "Everything takes more time than you expect with something like that, especially if you have to research and you want the right part."

Joseph debuted the finished car at The Paint Shop in June 2004. While neither Joseph nor Brian considers this a "restoration," its back-to-back Best of Class awards in 2005 and 2006 at Milwaukee's Masterpiece Style and Speed Showcase—and the 2006 Best Finish award—validate Brian's painting philosophy.

Joseph Mirenda wanted a show car, and he got one. It also happens to be one he drives, about 1,500 miles a year. "I love being behind the wood Nardi wheel, and the feel is of a vintage vehicle," he said. "The 1900 is a delight." 🌐

1956 Alfa Romeo Owner's Story



Joseph Mirenda of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is the owner of a 1964 Alfa Romeo Giulia Sprint Speciale, and had known about the 1900 C 55 since it came to the U.S. Confident of its provenance and quality, he purchased it as a driver when it came up in the sale of a friend's estate.

"I drive it every opportunity I get. It's beautiful; it's got a very nice vintage feel to it. And it's not a race car, never was intended to be, but once on the freeway or highway, it moves out. It's very light—that's why it's called Superleggera. And it's got a nice note to it. Carrozzeria Touring designed beautiful cars, and I consider this to be one of their finest."