



Alfa's alpha car

After a decade-long absence, the company is returning to the U.S. market with its \$200,000 supercar, the 8C

RIDES | BY KRISTEN HALL-GEISLER

In August, Alfa Romeo brought its sexy 8C supercar to the prestigious Meadow Brook Concours d'Elegance in Michigan. This, the Fiat-owned company announced, would be the first new Alfa available in the North American market in more than a decade.

Not everyone will be able to snag one of the 90 8Cs that will hit our shores next year — word is that the \$200,000 cars are already sold out. But they herald

one of the most anticipated returns in automotive circles: Alfa Romeo will begin to import cars to U.S. dealerships in 2009, according to Fiat Group's head of worldwide communications, Richard Gadeselli.

Alfa Romeo, which has never enjoyed a strong presence in the U.S. market, retreated from North America in the mid-1990s. Automotive experts cite quality issues and spotty parts availability.

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Contrary to rumor, the new North American lineup will not consist of the cars currently available globally. "Alfa will sell heavily revised versions of these cars," says Gadeselli, "with a completely new range of engines and gearboxes." Expect Alfa's official plans to be made public in fall 2008.

The rumors, though, have given car buffs and dealers something to get excited about. Ron Tonkin Gran Turismo, for example, would love to be one of Alfa Romeo's dealerships in 2009. Tonkin sold Alfas from 1966 to

1995, when the last 164 Quadrifoglio went from the Portland showroom to a doctor on Long Island, N.Y.

Although he's now Ferrari sales manager, Greg Theis sold Alfas at Ron Tonkin Gran Turismo in the 1990s. "It was a niche market for sure," he says. "People who want to be different buy an Alfa. I have a list on file of people who are dying for those cars to get here."

It's likely that several of the people on that list belong to Alfa Romeo Owners of Oregon, one of the most active Alfa clubs in the nation. The club celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2008 — and, coincidentally, it will host the Alfa Romeo national meet at Portland

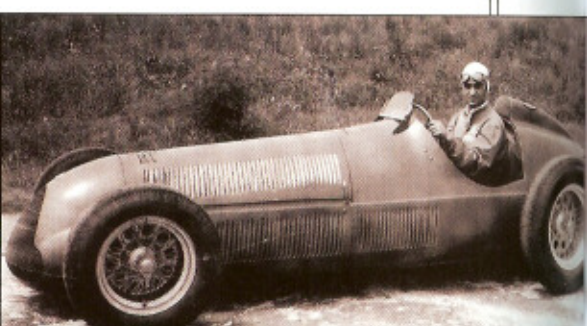
International Raceway in 2009.

Marty Schneiderman, club president, expects the potential new generation of Alfa owners to be a "win-win" for the club, with new cars and ideas mixing with the older cars and owners.

"It takes a certain person with a real desire to own an Alfa Romeo," Schneiderman says. "People have to get turned on by a car."

Schneiderman acknowledges that Alfas were not as reliable as they should have been in the '90s. "This time around, the cars that come into this country will have standards to meet, like emissions, etc. They're building these specifically for the American

ALFA ROMEO TIMELINE



24 HP 1910-1920

1910
A.L.F.A. founded (Anonima Lombarda Fabbrica Automobili); 24 HP is the company's first car

1916
Nicola Romeo takes over as company head; the factory is converted to produce military hardware for World War I

1919
Auto production resumes

8C 2300 1931-1934

1920
Name changes to Alfa Romeo

1923
The quadrifoglio, or clover, appears for the first time on Alfa's race cars

158 Alfetta 1938-1940

1929
The racing division Scuderia Ferrari, headed by driver Enzo Ferrari, is created

1931
The first 8C is produced, the 8C 2300

1932
The Italian government takes control of the company due to its financial problems

1938
The racing division is changed to Scuderia Alfa; Ferrari leaves for Modena, Italy

market. I think they'll prove the doubters wrong."

Real estate agent Doug Hartman is a serial Alfa owner. His first was a 1969 GTV that he still owns, and his last was a 1993 164, the last model imported to the United States. He says he had nothing to complain about with his cars, with one caveat: The 164 ate water pumps every 30,000 miles. It didn't stop him, however, from racking up 150,000 miles on his 164 before selling it a few months ago.

Hartman says there are two illusions about Alfas: that maintenance is expensive and parts are hard to get. Neither of these is true in his experience, though

parts have become more scarce since Alfa pulled out of the country in 1994.

Hartman says he could be tempted to buy the new V6-powered GTV, if Alfa saw fit to bring it over. "A sports sedan would be of particular interest to me, especially in the city. I think America is ready for mid-range or smaller cars, especially in Portland. And I hear that Alfa's diesel engine will just scream."

"They're building these specifically for the American market. I think they'll prove the doubters wrong," says Marty Schneiderman.



Spider Duetto 1966-1967

Arna 1983-1986

(I series) 1987-1992 (II series) 1992-1998

1940

Factory is bombed

1943

Factory is bombed

1944

Factory is bombed

1950

158 Alfetta wins the first Formula One World Championship

1952

Alfa releases the "space-age" Disco Volante

1954

Mass-produced Alfas hit the market

1963

The factory in Arese, Italy, opens

1967

Dustin Hoffman makes the Alfa Spider famous in "The Graduate"

1983

Alfa joins with Nissan to produce the Arna, a resounding failure

1986

Alfa Romeo becomes part of the Fiat Group

1994

Alfa Romeo pulls out of the North American market

2009

Alfa Romeo will begin to import North American-spec vehicles to the United States