



# a century of alfa romeo

Words and Photos by Hans Burger

Reporting from the Italian Alfa Romeo 100th Anniversary meeting held recently in Milan

02



**June** 24, 2010 marked the 100th birthday of Alfa Romeo. The FIAT group, into which Alfa Romeo was integrated in 1986, didn't seem to care in the least about the event. That left the organisation of this special occasion to the MAC Group – an Italian event managing company – in collaboration with RIAR, the Italian Alfa Romeo Register. Because the intended activities for the event were shortened month by month it was up to the other European Alfa Romeo Clubs to organise something. And they did – with some 2500 Alfa Romeos spending the weekend in and around Milan.

## The Journey to Milan

Along with my partner, Claudia, we travelled in our 1977 Alfa Romeo Giulia Super Nuova – which has been a family member for 21 years. The Alfa Romeo Club of Germany

had arranged a whole week for us, starting in Hanover, and we picked up more and more cars into the convoy as we approached Varese, north-west of Milan.

In the weeks before, we had permanent rain and temperatures with little more than one digit (we call this early summer), but when we travelled to join the others near Karlsruhe, the sun came out and summer finally found its way to us. The drive over the Alps via Grimsel and Nufenen Pass was fantastic.

Varese is located between Lake Maggiore and Lake Como, certainly one of the most beautiful areas in northern Italy. Two hold-ups due to traffic jams could not spoil our fun and the hotel in Varese was very acceptable. The first day we just drove around a bit at the lakes and met nice Alfa people wherever we stopped. Later we gathered at the bar for a beer and to watch some games from the football World Cup.

01 Car park at the Milano showgrounds, full of Alfas

02 Tipo B P3 – Museo Storico

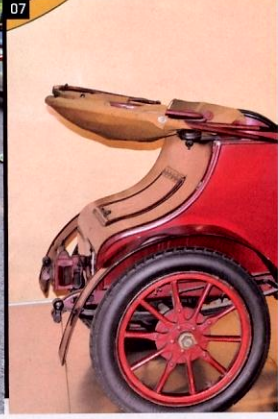
03 Finally entering Arese

04 Giulietta SS and Giulia SN at the Grimsel Pass, Switzerland



04





On June 24 we all went to Arese for the centenary celebration. In Arese, west of Milan, Alfa Romeo cars were produced for a long time until FIAT started to close the factory from 1986 on. Today Arese is vacant; just before the centenary the FIAT Group shut down the last parts of the factory in which once 19,000 people used to work. Only the Museo Storico Alfa Romeo is still there. The clubs from Germany, GB, the Netherlands and Switzerland had done all the negotiations with the Museum, and somehow all the others just came along.

### Museo Storico at Arese

At 8.15 in the morning the cars started to arrive – at the closed gate! The guardian pointed out that the museum opened at 9am and before that no one is allowed in, not even into the car park. Half an hour later the queue was kilometres long and blocking the roads. After various phone calls – and cursing Italian bureaucracy – the gates finally opened. The next queue formed at the entrance (though it was free of charge) because they wanted the visitors to sign the guest book – one book for hundreds of people!

Indeed, the museum is very good; though a few interesting cars were missing because they were at other events, like the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

Later, the official birthday speeches were planned but somehow didn't take place – I don't

think anybody missed them. We would rather have talked to other Alfisti anyway – some of them coming from as far as Australia, Canada, Malaysia, South Africa, Japan and Russia. I saw somebody with a Kiwi cap, but there were no New Zealanders included on the list of entrant nationalities, so he may have been a fake!

When leaving the area we heard that the Italian Labour Union had put on a strike at the gates and closed them for almost one hour – very sensible when no FIAT executive is there (the strike was due to another planned closure of a FIAT factory). I am afraid this protest only annoyed all the Alfisti and won't help the workers very much. Anyway, Arese had many emotional moments, and if you happen to be in the Milan area it's a must to go to there and visit the Museo Storico.

Later on some of the attendees (or Alfisti) went to Monza where RIAR had organised a drive on the race track. We didn't go; with the temperature at 35°C it was much too hot for us. But we heard it was quite good, though not cheap if you wanted to have a go on the race-track. Instead we enjoyed a late lunch at Lago Lugano, and after that we took even greater pleasure in watching the Italian football team lose against Slovakia. There may be a European Community but it's certainly less than friendly when football is involved.





## Cento Alfa per cent'anni

On June 25 we went to Novegro near Milan airport, where the Alfa Blue Team – an exquisite club of Alfa owners – had assembled an exhibition called '100 Alfas for 100 Years.' That exhibition was really the highlight of the trip for us – I never have seen such a good collection (of mainly private cars) with such an excellent presentation. I only can hope that all Alfisti have seen it, because we surely won't see anything like that again.

One of our favourites was a dark blue Carabinieri Giulia. Unfortunately the owners, in their decorative police uniforms, were always in sight otherwise we would have been tempted to take it – the key was still in the ignition!

That day was really perfect until we reached the new hotel in Milan, where we had ordered and paid for our parking places months in advance and then found that all places were taken. The hotel had double-booked us and a symposium, which ended at 7pm. Obviously they didn't expect people to arrive before 7pm though a great dinner was planned at the same hotel for 8pm. And we are not talking about a cheap hotel.

Despite that, the evening dinner was quite good and a little shouting and complaining by the club board finally cleared the parking situation as well. The club board also hinted that everything planned for the next two days was

the sole responsibility of the MAC Group. The final programme for this weekend had been framed only three weeks before and was, once again, revised three days before the centenary. One lady said to me that she expected nothing, or the worst – and everything better than that is good. A very good motto to prepare for what was to come.

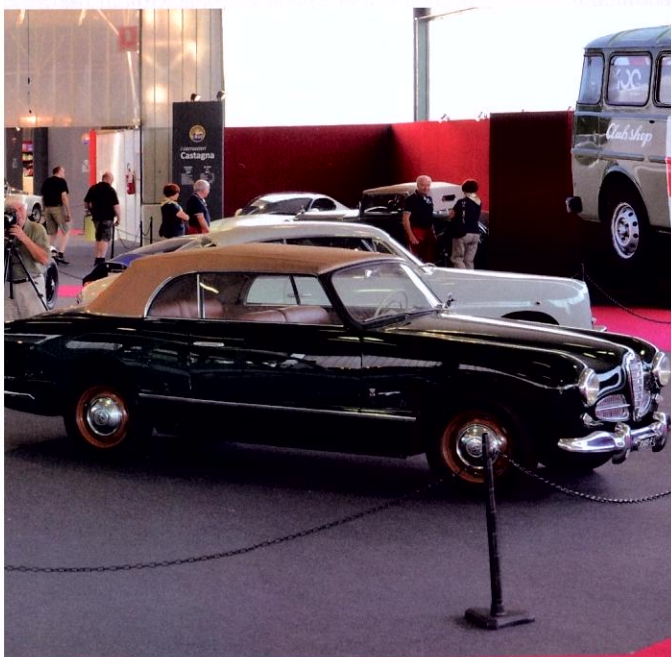
## Percorso Fiera Rho - Milano

The MAC Group also organises the Mille Miglia – so it should know how to handle many cars. Should – but doesn't.

A meeting of all Alfas from all clubs and nationalities was planned at the Milan show grounds for Saturday. We arrived early to join the traffic jam on the access road. Up to 3000 cars were expected – and only two people were handling the entrance. Almost a minute for each car meant some of us needed more than an hour to get in. The idea was to assemble all nationalities separately in designated parking areas. As each car arrived they had to check a long list to hand out the parking sticker – and we found ourselves in between the Swiss contingent, while others who had been travelling together in a group of five were assigned to four different parking areas. You don't have to understand this. It's Italy!

In order to get our centenary kits and car stickers we again stood in line for a long time –

- 05 6C 1750 from the UK at Arese entrance
- 06 8C Competizione spotted in the Arese car park
- 07 Darracq Italiana 8-10HP – the car where it all began
- 08 Leaving Arese for Milano
- 09 Zagatos prepare for the trip to Milano
- 10 The battle at the buffet
- 11 Alfa Romeo 'autocarri'
- 12 Designer's area of the Novegro exhibition
- 13 Tipo 159 – Museo Storico
- 14 Giuliettas with Tipo 103 – Museo Storico
- 15 2600SZ – Museo Storico
- 16 F25 Ambulanza, now used as Alfa Romeo Clubshop car
- 17 Handing out parking stickers for the showgrounds
- 18 TZ 1 (left) and TZ 2 – Museo Storico
- 19 1900 Saloon on the 'tangenziale'





20 Giulia Super Carabinieri with 1900 M (Matta) in the background - Novegro  
 21 Giulia Super Giardinetta  
 22 Aerial view of the formation for the embracement  
 23 Cars entering the Milan showgrounds  
 24 Alfa Romeo 'autocarri'  
 25 Main hall of the Novegro exhibition

although it was nice to get to know all the others in the line. The buffet started half an hour late and was completely empty after an hour – but we had a lot of fun. The waiters carried each tray separately for long distances (don't they have any trolleys in Italy?) and handed out drinks glass by glass. One person, one drink, one glass. We finally shouted at them and frightened them so deeply that in the end they gave us whole bottles of water and wine for our table. For those people late at the gates, only the floor remained for them to sit upon, while only scraps were left from the buffet. Funnily enough, everybody we spoke to (British, Australian, Danish, Swiss, German and so on) said the same; what do you expect – this is Italy!

Nevertheless we had a very interesting day, and the car park was certainly a sight. It held some 2500 to 3000 Alfas of all kinds with some real beauties among them, even a handful of pre-war Alfas had come all the way from Britain. A couple of brand new 8C Competizioni were also on display. Unfortunately, we almost couldn't stand the heat outside (more than 35°C) but I have to admit that the MAC Group cannot be held responsible for this.

Later, a group of 100 selected cars – followed by everyone else – was supposed to drive to Milan City. But somehow the police didn't know anything about having to escort a convoy. In the end, only the top 100 cars were lined up at the entrance of the castle in Milan. All others had to drive around and find a park-

ing place in the city – after they had found out that the designated car park was closed. Surprisingly, only a few local people came to view the display at the castle.

We got the impression that most people in Milan didn't know anything about the event or were not very interested. The promised fireworks at night must have been a disappointment too – we missed it but, after talking to other Alfisti, obviously missed nothing special.

### Percorso Tangenziale

On Sunday 27th and the last day in Milan a world record was planned: the embracement of Milan by Alfa Romeo cars. A good idea, but remember: it's Italy. We met at the show grounds again – not as many as the day before because a few already had given up. More than 1000 cars and all the crews came directly from breakfast. Alas, all the public toilets were closed – not a great idea.

This time the police were leading the convoy – unfortunately, much too fast and so it disassembled after a short while. We didn't know where to go – only that we should follow the 'tangenziale' which is the motorway around Milan. We stopped about half way round in a rest area – so far it was good – but then the whole convoy disintegrated. We drove back to the show grounds to find closed gates and other helpless Alfisti wondering what was happening. We then tried the city with the same

result, so finally went back to our hotel.

Most of our group were already there, as perplexed as we were. This was in fact the ending of a once-in-a-century event. Later, we learned that the stop at the rest area had indeed been the very end of the show. We finally decided to complete the Italian experience with a silent afternoon, a good dinner, and a wonderful tour back over the Alps to Munich.

People who were only there for the weekend may have been disappointed but we had a wonderful week, despite the justifiable critique concerning the MAC Group. We met many nice people and made new friends. We joined with good company and enjoyed the huge international group from 54 countries having fun together with only one thing in common – Alfa Romeo ownership. And, no matter how chaotic the Italians might have been, we were, are and will be Alfisti and nothing can cure that. Even Ferdinand Piëch (head of VW/Porsche and grandson of Ferdinand Porsche) pointed out in an interview that for him Alfa Romeo is surely one of the strongest marques in the world.

Non-Alfa people may call us crazy but I doubt that any other car brand would be able to bring together so many people without the help of the car company itself. We will always remember that week – not only through the hundreds of photos we took – but because we love to be Alfisti under any circumstances. We may be crazy, but we enjoy it! ☺

