



MICK WALSH

Judging at Amelia Island with Alfa nuts; Triumphant Alfa saloon saved; rare MG special and Duesenberg owner who loves to drive

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Alfa 8C Judges – de Cad, Moore and Duly

Florida Freeways

Florida is not one of my favourite American destinations. The endless flat landscape that a local chum dismissively calls 'The Swamp' is not the most rewarding route for a road trip but the sunshine state does host one of the most enjoyable shows, the Amelia Island concours (C&SC, May). Organiser Bill Warner chose to honour Alfa this year so I had to go, particularly because he invited me to co-judge the 8C class.

As the office will vouch, I'm pretty obsessive about these pre-war greats but a morning judging with marque gurus Simon Moore, Alain de Cadenet and Keith Duly was a real education. As with all his specialist subjects – be it Penny Blacks or Vincent motorcycles, 'de Cad' really knows his stuff, pointing out super-rare *Olio* and *Dynamini*-stamped filler caps, incorrect carbs and replica parts. The revelations by Moore that the '31 Le Mans winner was once powered by a Ferguson tractor unit in New Zealand, and the dramatic Viotti-bodied 8C2300 coupé was nearly destroyed by a stampede of elephants in Kenya were just a couple of amazing anecdotes. And ever wondered what that little trumpet duct is on the bonnet of an 8C? It allows clutch dust to escape during endurance events.

Herald the Alfa

Maybe it's a sign of age, but I find myself continually fascinated by quirky, often ugly Italian cars, particularly Ferraris and Alfas. When I heard remarks such as 'what's that Triumph Herald doing in the Alfa class?' I was immediately intrigued. There among the exotic group of bespoke 1900 coupés was a strange little 2000 saloon, the type of intriguing sedan you'd never see at



Delmas Greene with Alfa 2000 'Herald,' a one-off prototype saved from the swamp

'The dramatic Viotti-bodied 8C2300 coupé was nearly destroyed by a stampede of elephants in Kenya'

Pebble Beach. It was a proposal designed by Giovanni Michelotti in 1960, and not even the bold Latin tricolour finish – ivy green with white roof and red interior – could disguise its similarity to his work for Triumph. Arese management wasn't impressed but it did make the Vignale stand at the Turin Auto Show before it vanished.

The car's survival is a tribute to Florida owner Delmas Greene's passion for Alfas. "I found it in a Florida swamp and the alloy body was in a really bad state. It's taken 15 years to restore but, as it was a one-off, I felt it was worth it," said Greene who did much of the work himself. His daily driver is a Montreal: "Like many unusual Italian cars it came here with a US Air Force officer after service in Italy. I remember riding in it in 1974 when it turned up at a local Alfa meet, but then it disappeared. It took 15 years to track down as it had gone into storage after the owner relocated to Saudi. When he came home it was parked outside on swampy ground in Tampa. It was pewter when we found it, but when we scraped off the paint we found the green and white."

MG Speciale

Another outstanding car making its restoration debut in the British sports car class at Amelia was a dazzling sherbert yellow MG TD special owned by 'etceterini' collector Howard Banaszak. Designed to compete against OSCA MT4s and Porsche 550s, the British-powered barchetta was developed by Dave Ash, a prominent MG racer in the early '50s with INSKIP Motors, a successful east coast MG importer.



Motto-bodied MG TD special not seen for 45 years

One of three built by Rocco Motto in Italy, this was the most advanced with a spaceframe chassis by Gilberto Columbo at Gilco. Syd Enever supplied a hot engine from the factory and it was extensively raced by Fred Allen and Martin Block in the mid-west and east coast, including an impressive 11th in the 1954 Sebring 12 Hours.

"Not seen for 45 years, it was finished just days before Amelia after a challenging rebuild," said Tom Ritter who discovered it. "We found it on Long Island where it had been stored for 35 years. The front end was bad and all the instruments had gone. At one point it had been supercharged."

By coincidence the car was reunited with one of its old drivers at the event – Amelia judge Gus Ehrman, a former vice-president of British Leyland whose impressive CV includes record work at Bonneville in an Austin-Healey.

Duesie to drive

One of the most inspiring sights at the concours was on Monday morning – Jack Miller's 1930 Duesenberg burbling up to the forecourt of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel where the event is held and watching the valet parking attendants, normally ever eager to take a guest's car keys, unsure how to react. Miller hauled his luggage into the back of the grand Model J Convertible Berline and motored home to Fayetteville, Georgia. Unlike Vintage Bentleys, you rarely see these American classics on the open road but Miller has covered 20,000 miles since he acquired the Duesie in 1998, including an epic 3000-mile European trip through



Dapper Jack Miller with Duesie driver

Sweden and Norway.

"I bought it to wear it out," said Miller. "I reckon it must be the most driven Duesenberg in the world and this trip to Amelia will be another 800 miles by the time I get home. I also regularly drive up to the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Festival at Auburn, Indiana.

"At 70mph the fuel consumption goes up to 10mpg and the weakest point is the wheels. With a weight of around 6000lb the rims split and the spokes break. It's not much fun on twisty mountain roads but she'll do 80mph in second."

"The steering isn't as bad as people think," added the retired homebuilder. "My wife, who's a short girl, also loves driving it. Second only to being at the wheel is lounging in the back with the top down on a good run. There's no heater but the aluminium firewall lets plenty of engine heat through, so in the summer you really cook. Those outside exhausts aren't just for show."

The Duesenberg followed a supercharged Cord 812 which Miller acquired in 1966 and chalked up 35,000 miles with. Proving that not all Duesenbergs are now trailer queens, Miller was a worthy winner of *Automobile* magazine's 'I drove it here myself' award.