



# **ALFA ROMEO**

*A History by*

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*and*

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*A BOKER VINTAGE BOOK*



three laps behind Etancelin and ahead of three Delahayes. Nobody else finished, and Lang's winning average speed was 56.09 mph.

The Mille Miglia was not held in Italy in 1939 due to accidents involving spectators the previous year, but a race of about equivalent length was held in Libya between Tobruk and Tripoli. Here Alfa Corse entered a team of the new 6C 2500 Super Sport Cars, which were derived from the 6C 2300 B models, with the same suspension but larger and more powerful engines. Opposing them was a works team of streamlined saloon Type 328 2-litre B.M.Ws.

Farina's Alfa Romeo blew up during the race and the winner was the least known of the Alfa Corse drivers, Ercole Boratto, who was also Mussolini's chauffeur. He drove an open two-seater with an all enveloping body with Sanesi as co-driver, and averaged 87.86 mph, for 932 miles. 21 seconds behind was a similar Alfa, but with separate mudguards, driven by Biondetti and Monzani, and another of the Alfa Corse team cars was third driven by Pintacuda and Mambelli. The first B.M.W., that of Briem, finished 6 minutes behind the winner.

Alfa Corse entered for the Eifel Races, but never appeared, perhaps because in 1939 it was decided that all the major Italian races would be for 1½-litre racing cars only, and it was assumed that Italian victories by 158 Alfa Romeos or the new 4 CL sixteen valve Maseratis, would thus be a foregone conclusion. At Tripoli the Italians were in for a shock, for Mercedes suddenly produced two new 1½-litre V8 racing cars, which were like scaled-down versions of their 3-litre G.P. machines. To oppose them were the Type 158 Alfas of Farina, Biondetti, Emilio Villoresi, Severi, Pintacuda and Aldrighetti, three works 4 CL Maseratis for Trossi, Luigi Villoresi and Cortese, plus twenty-two other Maseratis. No sooner had the race started than Lang and Caracciola on the new Mercedes were out in front, and every single one of the works Maseratis retired on the first lap. Farina passed Caracciola to take second place half a minute behind Lang after five laps of a race held in appalling heat, with Biondetti, Emilio Villoresi, Pintacuda and Severi following behind. By ten laps Farina had retired, leaving the two German cars out in front. The silver cars made no attempt to slacken their pace, Lang putting in a fastest lap at 130 mph, and the Alfa Romeos dropped out one by one in attempting to stay with them. In the end Lang was the winner of the 244 mile

race at 122.90 mph, with Caracciola second 3½ minutes behind, whilst another 4 min 10 sec were to pass before the third man crossed the line, Emilio Villoresi on the sole remaining Type 158 Alfa Romeo who averaged 115.3 mph. The 1½-litre Mercedes were never raced again.

At Brooklands Kenneth Evans came fourth in the International Trophy Race in his 2.9B Monoposto, which had the same Lockheed brake conversion that Frank Ashby had designed for his own car. Also at Brooklands, on Whit Monday, two races were held to find out which was the most potent road equipped sports car in the country. In the three and a half lap race on the road circuit Hugh Hunter's 2.9B Alfa Romeo just won from Arthur Dobson's unblown 3½-litre Delahaye with Ian Connell's 4-litre Darracq third. In the five lap race on the Mountain Circuit Hunter retired with gearbox trouble leaving Dobson to win the race and the title. In this Mountain race Connell was second, Aitken's 3-litre Delage was third and Guy Templer's over-bored 2.3 Alfa Romeo was fourth in front of Cowell's 2-litre Alta and Dorndorf's 2-litre Peugeot.

Babe Stapp made Alfa Romeo history at Indianapolis at the end of May by finishing in the highest place ever achieved by the marque in the 500 Mile Race to date. He drove Bill White's 8C-35, with which Rex Mays had previously been associated, still equipped with the Miller solid rear axle which had replaced the original Alfa Romeo swing axle the previous year. Stapp qualified at 125 mph and finished fifth at 111.230 mph. Wilbur Shaw's winning 3-litre 8C TF Maserati averaged 115.035 mph after qualifying at 128.977 mph.

At Le Mans Raymond Sommer invited Bira to share the wheel of a lone red streamlined saloon 2½-litre Alfa Romeo, which was looked after by works mechanics under Ugolini, then secretary of the Alfa Corse organization who became Ferrari's team manager after the War. Bira was disappointed the car was not a blown 2.9 but it was explained that the unblown 2½-litre was considered more reliable, although slower. Just to be on the safe side, another engine was brought along with the car to replace the one used in practice. This stratagem proved of little avail, for after twenty-four laps Sommer was in at his pit with a blown cylinder head gasket. Assisted by an Italian mechanic and using his own box of shining tools, Sommer then proceeded to lift the head and change the



gasket in 1 hr 3 min and 21 sec. Although the car ran all through the night it retired at 11.30 a.m. on the Sunday when lying tenth, and the Wimille/Veyron 3.3 Bugatti won the race.

The 1939 Belgian G.P. run over a wet and tricky circuit at Spa on 26th June will always be remembered for the sad death of Richard Seaman whilst he was leading the race for Mercedes. It also was the last appearance of the 3-litre Alfa Corse Grand Prix cars, two of which were entered to be driven by Farina and Biondetti. Farina finally finished fourth on his sixteen cylinder behind Lang's winning Mercedes, Hasse's Auto Union and von Brauchitsch's Mercedes, but his team-mate retired half-way through the race. It was about this time that Clifton Penn-Hughes was killed in an aircraft accident.

Two interesting special Alfa Romeo two-seater open sports cars entered by Alfa Corse took part in the Antwerp Grand Prix sports car race driven by Farina and Sommer. These had 4½-litre V12 engines of the old Grand Prix type but unsupercharged, and fitted with three dual downdraught Weber carburettors in a modified 2.9B sports car chassis. They were very fast, and completely dominated the Delage, Darracq and Delahaye opposition. The Swiss Willy Daetwyler drove one of these V12 sports Alfa Romeos in post-war continental events.

At the beginning of May, 1939, Raymond Sommer had come second to Wimille's 4.9-litre G.P. Bugatti in his 8C Type 308 G.P. Alfa Romeo in the minor Coupé de Paris Race at Monthléry, which lasted for a mere three-quarters of an hour. Later in the day, however, he took his Alfa out again to attack the lap record for the banked track held by Gwenda Stewart's 1.6-litre Derby Special at 147.79 mph. Sommer achieved 148.4 mph, and although William Boddy in his book *Monthléry* (Cassell) says there was some doubt about Sommer's record as it was hand-timed, it still stands to this day.

In the French Grand Prix at Rheims Sommer entered his hard-working 8C 308, and two similar Alfa Romeos with the Swiss cross painted on the scuttle were entered by Christian Kautz for Chinetti and another driver variously reported as Martin or Matra to drive. All the Mercedes retired in this race, and at the finish two Auto Unions won from two Darracqs, with Sommer fifth, followed by an Auto Union, a Delahaye and Chinetti's Alfa Romeo. The other Alfa retired.

Sommer's was the only Alfa Romeo in the German G.P. and retired after only two laps, but he had no opposition in the novel Circuit of the Ramparts race at Angoulême which he won from two 1½-litre cars, the Maserati of Horvilleur and Durand's Bugatti. The ¾-mile circuit was over the road running round the top of the ramparts of the magnificent old walled city.

Since the surprise win by Mercedes in the 1½-litre race at Tripoli much development work had gone into the Type 158 Alfa Romeos, and whilst testing one of these new cars in July at Monza the popular Emilio Villorosi, the most successful Alfetta driver, was unfortunately killed.

The next two races for the 1½-litre cars were both in Italy the Coppa Ciano on 30th July and the Coppa Acerbo a fortnight later. In appearance the new 158 Alfas resembled the cars that were to run in the post-war races, and were noticeably different from the 1938 models which had opposed the Mercedes at Tripoli earlier in the year.

In the Coppa Ciano the Alfa Romeo drivers were Farina, Biondetti and Pintacuda, with Severi as reserve. The opposition was in the form of seven Maseratis, two of them new sixteen valve 4 CL works cars driven by Cortese and Taruffi. The Alfas were not trouble free, for whilst Farina led all the way, Biondetti who had not been going well left his car at the pits for repairs, and took over Pintacuda's car. When the car at the pits was mobile again Severi took it over. At the finish Farina was the winner of the 206 mile race at 86.32 mph, Cortese's Maserati was second a lap behind, and Biondetti came third a further two laps astern. Taruffi's Maserati was fourth, a lap behind Biondetti, and Severi was fifth a further four laps in arrears, the fast course being hard on engines. In the 144 mile 1938 G.P. race over the same circuit at Lehigh, Lang had averaged 85.94 mph on the 3-litre Mercedes.

In the Coppa Acerbo at Pescara the Maseratis came nowhere against the Alfettas, for, although Luigi Villorosi's 4 CL Maserati did the fastest timed kilometre on the Montesilvano straight at 147 mph, his car was a non-finisher. This time Biondetti was the winner of the 223 mile race at 81.41 mph, two minutes ahead of Pintacuda, with Farina third, 19 seconds behind, and Severi fourth. Con Pollock was fifth, nearly nine minutes behind the winner, on his E.R.A. R2A with Tecnauto independent front suspension. Farina made fastest lap at 86.5 mph. A tragedy



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

*The War and the Aftermath—1940-1946*

The Italians managed to organize three motor races in 1940, before the War put a temporary end to the sport. These were a 922 mile sports car race to replace the Mille Miglia on 28th April, the Tripoli Grand Prix on 12th May, and the Targa Florio in the Favorita Park, Palermo, on 23rd May. This last event proved to be a Maserati benefit.

The sports car race, a sort of utility Mille Miglia without the trimmings, was held over nine laps of a 100 mile circuit with turning points at Brescia, Cremona and Mantova, and was referred to either as the Brescia Grand Prix or the Mille Miglia. This race proved that the B.M.Ws of 2-litres capacity were more than a match for the 6C 2.5-litre Alfa Romeos, which were some 5 cwt heavier. The winner was a 1939 Le Mans type coupé B.M.W. with enclosed wheels which averaged 103.59 mph with a fastest lap at 108.18 mph driven by von Hanstein and Baumer. Farina and Mambelli's Alfa Romeos finished second at 100.68 mph with Brudes and Roese's open B.M.W. third at 100 mph. After that came Biondetti and Stefani's Alfa, two B.M.Ws and the Alfas of Pintacuda and Sanesi and Trossi and Lucchi. Trossi and Lucchi's saloon car put up the fastest Alfa Romeo lap at 102.43 mph, and the Alfa rev limit of 4,600 rpm was increased to 5,000 rpm in an effort to keep up with the German cars. Nevertheless the Alfa Romeos were said to hold the road better than the B.M.Ws, and some people thought the result would have been different on a wet or windy day. B.M.W. won the Team Prize, and this race saw the first appearance of the new 815 1½-litre Ferrari cars, one of which Minozzi shared with young Alberto Ascari, Antonio's son.

The Tripoli G.P. was for 1½-litre cars, and, as the rumoured Mercedes entry did not materialize, Villoresi and Cortese with the

works Maseratis plus sixteen other independent Maseratis, faced the Type 158 Alfa Romeos of Farina, Trossi, Biondetti and Pintacuda. Gigi Villoresi led away from the start in his sixteen valve 4 CL Maserati, but Farina overtook him on the second lap. On the seventh lap Villoresi led again, but Farina passed him a lap later and did his ninth lap at 132.55 mph. The defeat of Villoresi's Maserati was due in some measure to superior Alfa Romeo pit-work, for Farina refuelled in 24 seconds whereas Villoresi took nearly a minute. The result was that he was passed by both Biondetti and Trossi, the final finishing order being Farina, Biondetti, Trossi, Villoresi and Pintacuda. Farina averaged 128.14 mph for the 244 miles, though 126.1 mph has also been quoted. In any case his average speed was around 5 mph faster than Lang's in the 1½-litre Mercedes in the 1939 race, and his fastest lap was 1.02 mph quicker. Alberto Ascari on the 6C Maserati finished eighth.

During the War the Alfa Romeo factory at Portello suffered badly in air attacks by Allied bombers, and many historical records were lost. At this time the works had gone over entirely to war production, and the first bombardment was on 14th February 1943, when 8,500 people were working there. The factory was hit for the second time on 13th August 1943 and badly damaged, whilst the third heavy bombing of 20th October 1944 practically brought the entire plant to a standstill. By the end of the War three-fifths of the factory space was a mass of débris.

In England, a tiny part of London which had been the cradle of Alfa Romeo successes in British races ten years before was destroyed by Axis bombing—the old Lorne Gardens Service Station of Alfa Romeo British Sales Ltd. This was originally a horse-bus depot in a turning off Park Road, N.W.1, which runs between Baker Street Station and Lord's Cricket Ground. Correspondence with men such as Harold Pratley and B. A. Arlidge who worked for F. W. Stiles in their youth as mechanics at Lorne Gardens over thirty years ago, shows that the tremendous enthusiasm they felt then for Alfa Romeos has never left them. The 22/90s that came in to be serviced they looked upon as being rather old and out of date, and their big thrill was to be allowed to work upon the red 1750 team cars that were being prepared for such races as the Double Twelve, the T.T. or the Irish Grand Prix. Often these cars arrived from Milan in chassis form and had