

seems to have too much choke area for what the engine requires and must sacrifice the even pull of the standard carburetors in return for top-end breathing that you don't often need.

Although this car does not suffer the steering-box wear that dogged the 2600, the mechanism still feels heavy and uninspiring. You have to push so hard to counter the prevailing understeer that the softly sprung Alfa – bereft of an anti-roll bar – soon feels as if it's on its door-handles. In fairness, it does hang on pretty well.

The Flaminia comes from another world of cool detachment. Inside, after entering through long, wide-opening doors, its 'natural' driving position instantly puts you at your ease, with a huge, vertically mounted steering wheel and a short, cranked gearlever that emerges from the left of the transmission tunnel. Ultra-tall owner Charles Frodsham says that it is one of the few classics in which he's comfortable.

The V6 is not, perhaps, as smooth as the Alfa straight-six at low speeds, but it is sweet and free-revving – and probably quieter, apart from the fan whine when it's working hard. It is also matched to a thoroughly sensible set of gear ratios that take the car to 38mph in first, 55 in second and 80 in third. Something over 110mph is possible in top, which is geared to 20mph per 1000rpm – exactly the same as the Alfa in fifth.

Some testers complained that the gearchange was awkward on right-hand-drive Flaminias, but this one is delightful, giving little indication that its short, light movements are working a long

linkage back to the transaxle. Others said that the steering was heavy. Again, this one could hardly have been a better combination of lightness with positivity, particularly when you consider that the car needs a full five turns between its 39 and 37ft locks. While you grip the Alfa wheel hard you guide the Flaminia with your fingertips and it just glides through, neither end taking precedence over the other, in a state of serene neutrality with little roll. Plus, where the Alfa Romeo's ride is soft to the point of wallow, the Flaminia is flat and supple.

On almost all counts, the Flaminia is the superior car, more accomplished than the 2600 in all of the important dynamic disciplines because it was constructed around notions of 50:50 balance, combined with a rigorous attention to detail lacking in the Alfa. You feel that the 2600 was conceived with competence but not commitment – big cars were not the focus of Alfa's technicians – and rarely merited much development time. Disc brakes for the back wheels seems to have been the only significant improvement before production ended quietly in 1967.

And yet this flawed glamour car has an appeal that transcends its shortcomings. I adore the shape, I love the sound and I know that, with some minor tweaks, the 2600 can be turned into the driver's car that it should have been all along, without spoiling its essential character.

Thanks to Richard Thorne ([www.tcc.co.uk](http://www.tcc.co.uk)), Charles Frodsham and Patrick Brown

Italy's greatest styling houses went head-to-head with these two graceful coupés: Bertone for the 2600, Pininfarina for the Flaminia. Below, 1961 period Becker in Alfa, Motorola in Lancia

## Extended families

The Alfa 2600 Sprint truly symbolised the art of productionised Italian coachbuilding at its most accomplished. It was a premium two-door luxury car built on a production line from pressed-steel panels, yet still subject to a high degree of hand finishing to give it a character distinct from the saloons that spawned it.

The Sprint was produced by body-maker OSI, including a number for the Carabinieri. It was three times more popular than the saloon. Indeed, even Touring's steel-bodied Spider decisively outsold the saloon – a transparent re-skinning of the four-cylinder 2000, which had a less-powerful engine and a column shift. OSI tried to rescue the fortunes of the four-door with its more modern 'De Luxe', but found only 54 takers. Various one-off show cars were based on the 2600 (106 Series) and Bertone



Three-up in a 2600 Spider at a Silverstone test day



Director Marcello Mastrolanni's Flaminia Convertible

even tried to tempt Alfa with an open four-seater Sprint. Easily the most exotic version was the 2600 SZ by Zagato, which made a run of 105 steel-bodied examples.

As with Bertone's 2600 Sprint, Pininfarina's Coupé version of the Flaminia was decisively the most successful of the series, with 5236 built from 1959-'67. The first examples had an uprated single-carb 2.5 'GT' engine; 1962-'63 versions a 2.5 '3B'; and thereafter a 2.8 '3B' was standard. Legend has it that 2.5 cars were up-engined to 2.8s while still unsold. Saloons were listed from 1957-'70: the early ones had drum brakes, an Aurelia-type transaxle, plus wipers on the inside and the outside of the rear window. Disc brakes, full synchromesh and a bigger 2.8 engine made the car progressively faster and more refined, though popularity dipped rapidly. They were just too expensive.

Touring built three body types in aluminium – Convertible, two-seater fixed-head GT and 2+2 GTL – from 1959 through to 1964/'65. The '3C' spec from '62 signifies triple Webers and 140bhp, or 160bhp from a 2.8. There were also three kinds of alloy-bodied Zagato Flaminia Sports built from 1959 to '67, the last being the most desirable 3C-engined Super Sport.

