



Far From the Madding Crowd

Andrew Brown takes a look at Mike Spenceley's 116 Giulietta Turbo and steps away from the teeming hordes.

There aren't many 116 Giuliettas around anymore. There weren't that many when it was in its heyday. My dog can count higher than the amount of turbocharged versions in existence and this one, owned by Mike Spenceley, is unique.

My visit to MGS Coachworks in Purley came after I had seen Mike's Giulietta at the Spring Italian Car Day at Brooklands. My first sight was of a raised bonnet and a huddle of onlookers investigating the engine compartment. It was indeed a sight to behold with every available space packed with pipes, wires, gauges and mysterious boxes. With the bonnet closed the Giulietta looked almost like new, and also deceptively standard. The only clues to its special nature were body coloured plastic bumpers, BBS alloy wheels and a badge that read 'Turbo' on the boot lid – a bit of a give-away that one. Having taken up Mike's invitation to drive the car I was now in deepest South London with the dark red Giulietta ready and waiting. But first a bit of history.

Blowing in the wind

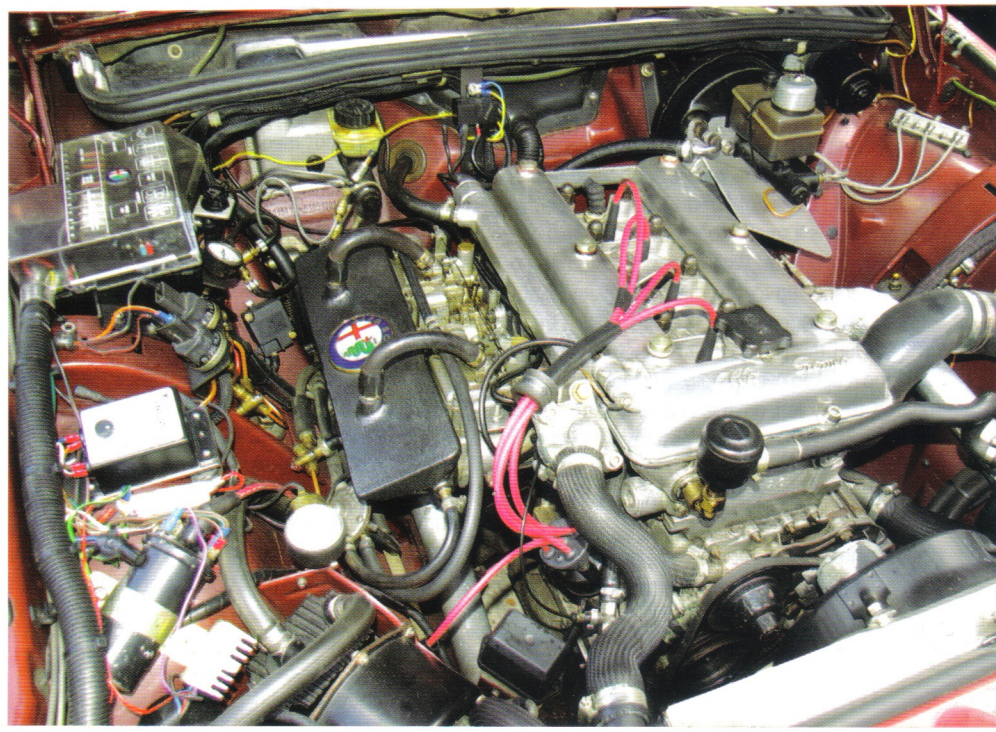
When Alfa Romeo decided to add a turbo charged version of the series two 116 Giulietta to the range, they tasked Autodelta with the project. The result was a 2-litre special with 170 bhp at 5000 rpm. With a kerb weight of 1,140 kgs and a time from zero to 120 kph of 12.2 seconds, it had a worthwhile performance increase over the standard car. It lacked an intercooler though.

But in England Bell & Colvill had already done it. The company was known for its turbocharged versions of cars such as the Lotus Esprit, Alfa GTV and even a couple of Alfasuds. So, when the Giulietta appeared they thought, why not?

The work was carried out by Mathwall Engineering who used a Garrett T3 turbocharger at the heart of the installation. This was fitted upstream of the carburettors which are kept near to the inlet ports for good throttle response. Also, as the compressed, and thus heated air is fed from the turbocharger to the inlet of the carburettors, fuel vapourisation naturally cools the mixture. Turbocharged engines need a lower compression

ratio and the 2-litre unit was stripped down and rebuilt using Cosworth pistons to give 7.2 to one. Larger valves and suitable cams were also fitted. Claimed power output was 175 bhp at 5500 rpm with 190 lb/ft of torque at 4000 rpm. Intercooler technology was in its infancy for cars and perhaps only the last few Giuliettas modified by Bell & Colvill were intercooled. It is this final version, with a power output approaching 200 bhp, that Mike Spenceley now owns.

To improve handling and stopping Bell & Colvill fitted Koni shock absorbers, grooved brake disks, uprated callipers and braided brake pipes. Apart from wide alloy wheels and Pirelli P6 tyres the car



was not over-dressed. In 1981, buyers paid an extra £1,750 for the car which was around £6,000 in standard form. Not many of these conversions were made and it is thought that only two now exist: Mike's and another in New Zealand.

Almost a barn find

Two years ago Mike Spenceley had a Giulietta 2.0 Turbo Autodelta which was on the waiting list to be restored when, one day, the telephone rang. It was Stuart Taylor who had been contacted by someone wishing to sell a Giulietta Turbo. Intrigued, Mike went to have a look. The owner had given up driving due to old age and his wife showed Mike the car which was covered in dust buried deep inside a garage. It was a sad sight with wires pulled off the engine and seized brakes. The road tax had run out in 1992.

Closer inspection revealed that underneath the dust and dirt was potentially a very nice Giulietta and the rarest of all Turbo models; the intercooled Bell & Colvill version. The mileage read 27,000. Mike compared it with his Autodelta Turbo and there was no contest. This was the one to restore.

A deal was done and Mike set about spending time and money. The engine bay required new plumbing with modern silicone pipes and electronic ignition was installed. The head came off the engine and the valves and cam followers were replaced. The Micro Dynamics control system needed overhaul and the whole setup tuned and balanced. The bodywork and interior were just cleaned and tidied to restore the car to its present state. The only additions have been colour matched plastic bumpers and new door mirrors. The BBS wheels and Bridgestone RE71 205-60-15 tyres are original. Due to the lack of space under the bonnet the coolant header tank and windscreen washer bottle are in the boot. Topping-up can be done through the speaker hole in the rear parcel shelf – an interesting challenge for a rear seat passenger.

Mike admits that there is some setup work still to do. A session on a rolling road would allow the precise setting up of the turbo and its related systems to be done. Also, more modern tyres would bring some handling benefits.

Mike has brought this most rare of Giuliettas back to immaculate condition and it has only covered 30,400 miles.

Driving impressions

I took the Giulietta for a short drive around the roads of South London. Sitting in the car was a familiar experience having owned a 1.8 version some years ago. The steering wheel and other controls are standard Alfa and the only obvious addition is a boost gauge to the right of the instrument binnacle. Less obvious is a small knob above the gauge which is to adjust the boost whilst driving. Presumably you can turn things up to maximum if challenged at the lights. Mike suggested that I did not touch it though.

I started the engine in the usual Alfa twin-cam way and it ticked over happily. The blobby gear knob floated to my left on the end of a long chrome-plated wand. Remembering past tussles with Alfetta transaxles I sought first gear by momentarily pulling back to second and then forward to first – it worked a treat and off we went.

Turning right into a stream of traffic I immediately noticed the extra steering effort

required. We are all now used to power steering and a return to the 'old days' requires a change of attitude. The steering is not actually that heavy but it does need a good pull to get the wheels turning. Once into the turn everything is fine and the wheels castor back to a straight ahead position quickly. In traffic this Giulietta drove just like a well sorted standard version. The gear-change was light and smooth if treated with respect and I only noticed the presence of a notch between fourth and fifth. This was easily avoided once I knew where it was. Treating the gearbox with respect meant using it with feeling. The best changes are not slow, just measured.

As we headed south along the A22 the traffic thinned and a clear road ahead presented itself. Time to plant the right foot. In third gear the revs quickly rose past 2500 and, with a push in the back, the car was propelled forward in no uncertain terms. Being aware of the speed limit I changed through fourth and into fifth in quick succession. Mike told me that we would soon be in 70 mph territory and to be patient.

Sure enough one roundabout later the road became a dual carriageway and I could launch into the fast lane. Progressive throttle application in fourth gear produced another push in the back and the car was off, but not for long. Mike's suggestion that some careful tuning would benefit the performance was supported by a rather stuttering power loss around the 4,000 rpm mark. Beyond this all was well again and the engine happily went up to the red line, and seemed willing to go further if held.

At speed, steering turn-in remained on the heavy side which was surprising. Once into a corner or bend things were light and responsive again so perhaps some suspension tweaking might be in order. Maybe a castor angle change or even narrower section tyres might improve things, unstylish though they may be. I found this with my Bertone when Jamie Porter put some spindly 165-14s on it.

Having found the Giulietta's little foibles I settled down to enjoy the drive – and I did. This car really is satisfying to drive and can pull away from most modern cars under normal traffic conditions. The brakes are good too. I only needed one hard application during the drive when rounding a bend at speed and finding the tail of a traffic-light queue looming up fast. The Giulietta pulled up strongly without drama or undue comment from Mike in the passenger seat.

To get some photographs we headed off the main road and tried some bendy byways. The Giulietta is a car to relish when kept in the 3,000 rpm range. The handling is precise and throttle response entertaining. For a car that is some twenty six years old it feels taught and rattle free.

On the drive back to Purley I was thinking about ownership of this car. It could certainly be used for regular day-to-day motoring but I don't think I would use it in that way. Much better to keep it for those special week-end trips when the driving experience that it offers can be appreciated fully. It is very practical as a four seat touring car with lots of room in the boot, yet can provide fun driving with surprising performance - particularly to other motorists who don't know what it is (or maybe think they do). Also, there is no doubt that it attracts great

interest at AROC and other motoring events because it is unique – in this country at least. Better to savour ownership in this way that just run the mileage up during the everyday driving trudge.

After all his care and attention Mike is considering parting with the Giulietta. Not because he doesn't like it anymore, but it because he can't find time to use it as it should be used. Anyone interested can have a chat with Mike on 0208 645 0555.

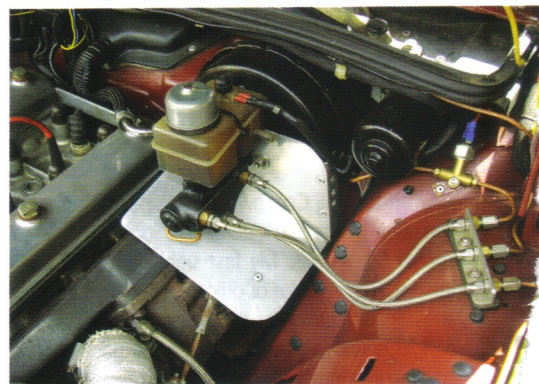
And that flat spot at 4000 rpm? Mike subsequently reported that after a bit of fiddling with the boost setup it has now gone. I think I'll have to go back for another drive.

Andrew Brown

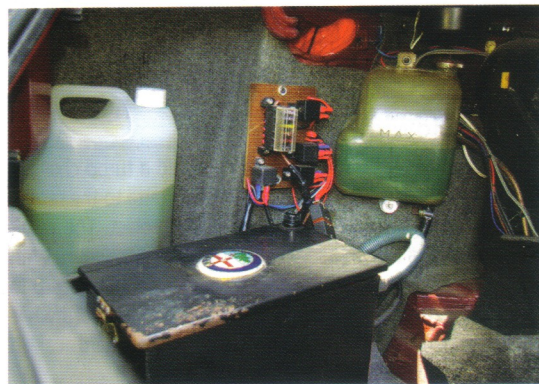
Rebuilt 2 litre engine with Cosworth pistons, larger valves and suitable cams. Garrett T3 turbocharger. Power output near 200bhp.



Engine bay with neat installation work. Braided brake pipes and modern silicone plumbing have been added by Mike Spenceley.



Screen wash bottle and coolant header tank in the boot - this can be topped up via the speaker hole in the rear parcel shelf.

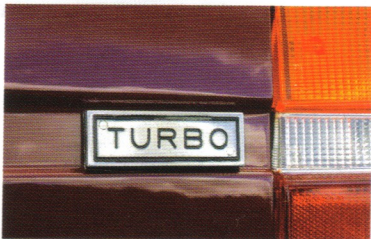
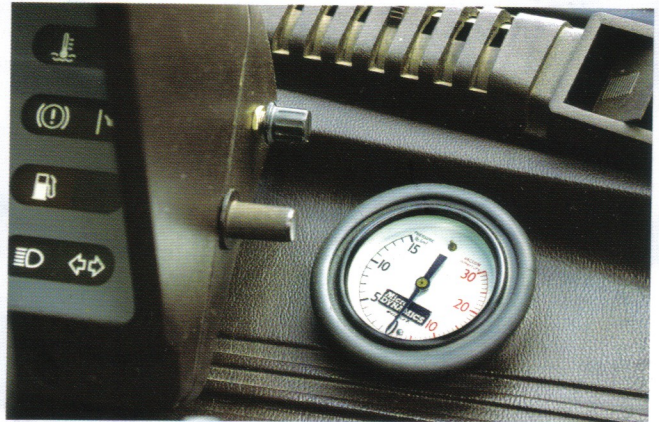
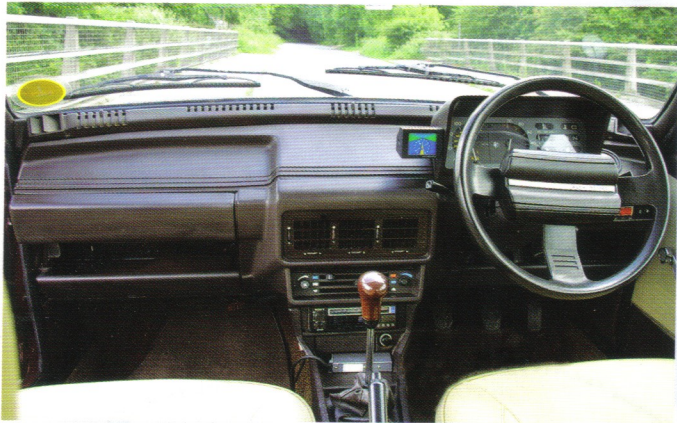




Interior in excellent original condition - all Mike had to do was clean it up.

External additions are colour matched plastic bumpers and new door mirrors.

Boost gauge is mounted to the right of the instrument binnacle. The upper knob is for adjusting the boost whilst driving.



Dashboard, instruments and steering wheel are all standard 116 Giulietta. Turbo badge on the boot lid and BBS alloy wheels are clues to the special nature of this car. Photography: Andrew Brown

