

CLASSIC DRIVER

This Alpine road trip satisfied our appetite for epic curves

Lead
Shortly before the famous Swiss Passes fall into hibernation, we joined our friends from the Flitzer Club for a last showdown drive through the Alps. Our reporter Błażej Żuławski rode shotgun in the most interesting cars.



As any car geek between the age of thirty and forty who devotedly watched Top Gear in the in the early noughties will tell you: Jeremy Clarkson's all-time favorite car, apart from the all-car-trumping Lamborghini tractor, is a red Alfa Romeo GTV6. It is an automobile that is neither particularly well built nor reliable - as I quickly learned as the vibrations from the unbalanced prop shaft got worse with every kilometer of Swiss tarmac we covered.



It is a car that, despite its looks, isn't very fast. But thanks to its excellent steering, fantastic balance – it is a transaxle DeDion rear suspension set up after all – and the epic, sonorous-sounding 2.5 litre Busso V6 that sings all the way up to the red line in a mash-up of Pavarotti screaming after having stomped barefootedly on a Lego block and the roar of the MGM Lion – the Alfa is the definition of a driver's car. No wonder it won Road & Track's 'GT sportscar of the year' award for three years in a row back when it was new.



An Alfa Romeo GTV6 is a car for romantics, people who think that pieces of tin and rubber can have a soul and therefore don't mind it being far from perfect. Like Eugenio Amos once said about some bit on his Lancia Futurista: "It doesn't work, because if it would've worked it would've been an Audi". Which means that there are cars which are great for your daily commute or when you actually need to get to places. And those you want to use when you're looking for an experience.



It's that somewhat romantic ideal of traveling for the sake of the journey itself. Sebastian "Zeb" Gottschalk and his red GTV6 are a prime example for this philosophy - and so

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are his fellows and friends, this eclectic group of hopeless grand-touring romantics that is the Flitzer Club. Once a year they hit the road from Berlin and other European capitals towards their promised land for a Grand Tour of the Alps in Switzerland. Or “Flitzerland”, as club founder and Maserati enthusiast Dirk Rumpff refers to it. “where the turns are tight and the fines are high.”



This year’s road book includes famous passes like the Gotthard and the Tremola (twice), Albula, Julier, Furka, Grimsel, Simplon, Nufenen, Susten and even the small Oberaar Panoramastrasse that opens for ten minutes every hour leading from the top of the Grimsel to Oberaar with its spectacular dam. Starting at the fantastic Bauhaus hotel of Fondazione Monte Verita, which was a famous nudist and vegan community in the 1910s and 1920s, we will stop over at the very Wes-Andersonesque Paxmontana hotel, explore the eclectic Furkablick, marvel at double rainbows, wave at local cows and enjoy countless of beautifully bent Alpine curves.



I spend a lot of time in the Alfa as it provides a lot of aural pleasure and is the perfect camera car – thanks to windows that open all the way down into the doors. Zeb, having raced historic cars in the past, is also not afraid of the odd risky overtake, which helps a lot with getting the right kind of picture – especially when chasing Stefano Regattieri’s race prepared Porsche 911 ST, the only machine on the tour that is actually louder than the GTV6. As we swiftly climb one of the passes, I reflect on the other cars I had the chance to be in and drive on this trip.



First there was Fabio Don's Ferrari Testarossa. A glorious, red kitchen-countertop shape, which always transports me to my childhood when I was trying to watch Miami Vice episodes through a crack in my bedroom door (my parents wouldn't allow it because of the violence). If you're thinking of buying one just make sure you realize that it's not a supercar as we know them today, but rather a soft-sprung, comfortable, mid-engined (and that itself makes it quite unique) Gran Turismo. Yes, it is wide, but not as wide as many modern SUVs. And even though it is capable of high speeds and an acceleration that makes you merge with the leather of the seat, it really isn't a car that encourages any type of hooliganism. With its heavy clutch, steering and gear changes it has to be manhandled in order to perform. Its 180° V12 sings a wonderful song, but the car has the character of a lazy grizzly bear, not a cheetah.





Speaking of animals – the most surprising cars on the trip are the big Jaguars. I considered them to be unsuited to spirited alpine driving. But somehow, maybe thanks to their sophisticated suspensions and disc brakes, they behave like Subaru Imprezas in these tight mountain bends. The V12 E-type seems less agile than his four-doored brothers, but a ‘carry on regardless’ attitude from its driver Kai ‘Reynolds’ Generlich makes it a formidable weapon, even if it’s an automatic. The result of the abuse? A collapsed damper, fortunately just when the tour was about finished.



Whenever I want to be comfortable during this Grand Tour of the Swiss Alps I either chose Dirk Rumpff’s Maserati Khamsin, who envelops me in its comfy seats and soft V8 bellow, or Christof Dame’s Peugeot 504 in which the preservation of momentum is key to keeping up. Still, the biggest surprise of the Flitzerland 2022 tour has to be the Maserati Mistral: Owner Stéphane Drieux lets me jump behind the wheel for a sprint I won’t forget anytime soon - and not only because the pedals are so close together that I confuse the throttle and the brake at one point while going downhill!!



The directness of the steering, the surprisingly precise gear changes and the stellar chassis composure, combined with a – yet again – fantastic six-cylinder soundtrack make for a memorable drive and... some serious hours now spent on the Classic Driver Market in a bid to find the perfect Mistral for myself. Someday Błażej, maybe someday.

Photos: Błażej Żuławski for Classic Driver © 2022

Gallery

