

CLASSIC DRIVER

[The forgotten Abarth Classiche 1000 SP was the perfect homage to its racing ancestor](#)

Lead

In 2009, Fiat paid homage to the iconic Abarth 1000 SP race car with a concept car that never went into production, but inspired the Alfa 4C. Recently, the tribute concept was finally granted a limited edition of five cars - one is now for sale with Classic Driver, right next to the 1960s original.



It's a formula as old as the automobile: win on Sunday, sell on Monday. In the mid-1960s, this was the recipe that helped Abarth secure success both on-track and in shareholder meetings, with the help of their dominant 1000 SP racing prototype. Not only did it look the part, but the 1000 SP's pace on track made it a favourite among privateer racers, cementing it as one of the most significant cars in Abarth's history. Some 55 years later, this incredible racing machine would receive a tribute in the form of the road-legal, Alfa Romeo 4C-based Abarth Classiche 1000 SP, but before we get to this rare modern classic homage, it's worth taking a stroll through the history books.



The Birth of a Legend

The original 1966 1000 SP was born from a collaboration between Alfa Romeo and Abarth, which saw Carlo Abarth poach Alfa's Mario Colucci as the Scorpion brand's technical director. He and his team were tasked to work on an ambitious and revolutionary Sports Prototype: a covered-wheel car made exclusively to compete in racing competitions, with few models actually being built. The result was a light and powerful spider featuring simple, low and streamlined shapes, and one that was destined for greatness.



Abarth and Colucci's relationship was built on strong mutual respect, but they had their differences when it came to how the car looked and acted. Abarth dedicated his version to the Porsche set-up, which favoured vehicles with a square steel body and rear overhang engine. Meanwhile, Colucci preferred vehicles with a tubular trellis chassis, and the engine in the centre of the car. As a result their differences, where Colucci's were driven by passion and Abarth's influenced by financial struggles, firmly believing that his solution was cheaper and therefore more profitable for his company, two different concepts of the racing car were created.



After both were completed, it was Colucci's mid-engined machine that was immediately the better of the two. Its lightweight chassis and body made from polyurethane and fibreglass boasted an incredible 480-kilogram dry kerb weight figure, allowing it to abuse every single one of its 105 horses to reach top speeds far quicker than its rivals. The first important success for the SP was achieved at the gruelling 500 km of Nürburgring in the autumn of 1966, which saw drivers Müller and Steinmetz winning the 1000 category outright and finishing third overall. The 1000 SP would keep on racking up successes, even in the hands of gentleman drivers, further cementing the car as one of the brand's true icons.

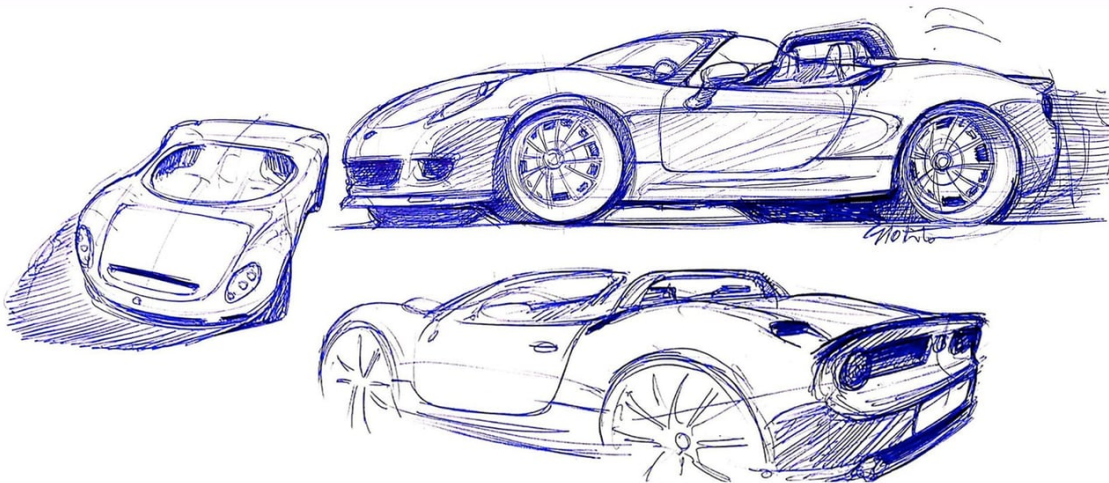
Finding an intact Abarth from this era is difficult to say the least, but while creating this article, we were shocked to find [this incredible example from 1968 grace the Classic Driver Market](#), which was heavily raced from the moment it left the factory, completing the Targa Florio and the Mugello Grand Prix.

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A Fitting Modern Classic Homage

Fast forward to 2009, and after the triumphant rebirth of the Fiat 500 and the hugely-successful Abarth variant that followed soon after, the motoring world's desire to see more Abarths hit the streets was clearly there. Working from the Fiat & Abarth Style Centre, headed by Roberto Giolito, various alternatives were considered, all of which based around a medium-sized sports car with an attractive silhouette and essential lines that were reminiscent of the original 1000 SP. Our first glimpse at a reborn 1000 SP came in the form of a concept that closely mirrored what you see here, which unfortunately never made production. However, it ultimately inspired another car that would continue the tradition of Alfa Romeo sports cars: the 4C. While Alfa's 4C quickly became one of the brand's icons of the 20th century, Abarth's 1000 SP project remained at the concept stage, its technical drawings neatly kept in the brand's 'what could have been' file.



However, Fiat clearly weren't willing to let the idea of a reborn 1000 SP, and in 2021 the project was revisited using the same mathematics as the prototype imagined in 2009, only further advanced in order to perfect the car's ultimate design using the Alfa 4C as a basis. As modern-day reinterpretations go, the 2021 1000 Classiche SP is perhaps one of the closest to the original, with bold curvaceous mudguards that reinforce the visual impact of the wheels - echoing the layout of the central-engined spider. The windscreen features the famous sculpted side deflectors, with a low profile sweeping up towards the rollbar. This key safety element has been deliberately left exposed, underlining the spider's deep-rooted heritage.



Buried under the Classiche 1000 SP's rear decklid is a 1.8-litre supercharged 4-cylinder engine, pushing 240 horsepower to the rear wheels. With the highest of ambitions, the Classiche project would stumble once more, and despite production cars arriving on the driveways of a few, the car was simply too ambitious to become a full-blown consumer vehicle. The result means just five cars exist, with this striking red example being the very first to leave the assembly line. With heritage seemingly bursting out of every aspect of a worthy modern-day icon, the chances of finding another Classiche 1000 SP are impossibly low, making this opportunity truly once in a lifetime! The big question is, are you ready to continue the legacy in the Classiche, or follow in the footsteps of Carlo and Mario with 1968 1000 SP?

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Period photographs from Fiat & Abarth Heritage

Gallery

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