



# RETRO DRIVES



## AA meeting

Alfaholics GTA-R 290 £240,000

**WE SAY: ALFAHOLICS HAS CREATED SOMETHING INSTANTLY ADDICTIVE...**

**I**t's two hours since I slid into the Alfaholics GTA-R for the first time. I'm on the M5, the window is lowered, and the spartan little cabin is swimming in such a sea of induction noise that I can't hear myself think. But with every downchange, throttle blip and ripe burst of acceleration, the truth reveals itself: this is the most entertaining car I've driven since two days last summer in a McLaren F1. Yep, a West Country Alfa Romeo specialist has conjured a match for the Greatest Supercar Ever Made™ out of a 50-year old Alfa coupe.

Nosing around Alfaholics' workshop unpacks a further unexpected connection to the epochal F1. Tucked away in a corner is an Alfa Junior Z, a wedgy late Sixties rare-groove gem, now in the early stages of a full Alfaholics restoration. "Ah," says company boss Max Banks, "that's just arrived. It's owned by Gordon Murray. He likes what we do here."

It figures. Max and his brother Andrew have skillfully finessed their father's 40-year old business into the world's leading Alfa 105-series specialists. Successful historic racers in their own right, racetrack learnings soon made their way onto Max's personal car, whose underpinnings have come a very long way from the 1967 'step nose' 1300 GT Junior it started life as. Alfaholics' bread and butter remains its mail-order parts business, and the company employs a handful of genius mechanics to oversee its restoration wing. But when increasing numbers of clients began asking for the bits Max had been developing for his car, the circle was squared. Which

led to the GTA-R, Alfaholics' resto-mod evocation of the GTA racing car, and a reimagining as obsessive as Singer's 911.

We'd refer you to the company's website for the full rundown, but highlights include carbon-fibre doors, bonnet and bootlid, an aluminium propshaft with rifle-drilled half-shafts, counter-weighting on the pistons, gas shock absorbers that adjust for bump and rebound and six-pot aluminium front brake calipers with 300mm ventilated discs. Hinges, fasteners and screws are ultra-lightweight. The mail order business's economies of scale are such that they can build most of the components themselves, and their partners are top-drawer. "The company that does our CNC milling is a mile away," Max says, "and is Airbus's biggest subcontractor."

SBP 699E weighs 830kg. Its engine is the classic Alfa Twin Spark 2.0-litre, newly bored and stroked to a 2.3-litre capacity, and now producing 240bhp and 200lb ft. TG maths reveals a power-to-weight ratio of 290bhp-per-tonne, hence the name. Small on the outside, snug inside, you clamber over the roll cage and into the GTA-R 290's Recaros, and get to work with the four-point harness. The dials are facsimiles of Veglia and

Jaeger originals. The pedals are carved out of solid aluminium by the bloke who did the turned ally on the Bugatti Veyron.

There's a competition clutch, lightweight flywheel and unassisted steering (power assistance is available), but it's instantly apparent that everything works with unparalleled harmony. No wonder Gordon loves it: this is a masterclass in the virtues of weight-saving. Everything flows from that 830kg figure: the engine doesn't dominate the chassis, which is expertly set up. The 'box uses a standard linkage (with bespoke synchros and bearings), and while the shift is long, as per original 105 spec, it's unfailingly accurate. As is the rest of it: it's firm over bumps and crests, but supple where it matters, the body control is exemplary, and the steering writhes in your hands, alive with fabulously analogue information. It may also be the best-sounding 4cyl in the world.

Be warned, though: drive this car and you will want one. Such is the effort that's gone into it, Alfaholics charges £240k for the GTA-R 290, which may bring any idle fantasies shuddering to a halt. But believe me when I say it's right there, next to the McLaren F1, in the personal dream garage. **JB**

### SPECIFICATION

- 2270 4cyl, RWD, 240bhp, 200lb ft
- n/a mpg, n/a g/km CO<sub>2</sub>
- 0-62mph in 4.6secs, 145mph
- 830kg

**10** **VERDICT** The GTA-R 290 is way more than the sum of its - highly impressive - parts. OK, so it's ludicrously expensive, but after a few hours at the wheel it feels like money well spent. A genius reimagining of a classic Alfa.

