



**“It’s important that the cars live!
We want people to see them on the roads,
not only in the museum.”**

*Pasquale Oliveri,
Director, Museo Storico Alfa Romeo*

Above: Event organizer, Hans-Andre Bichsel, congratulates a team as they cross the finish in Rambouillet. Top: The 1917 American La France Type 12 driven by the Swiss father and son team, Landolt, backs out of its overnight perch. Note the pace-note stand and Blue-tooth capable helmets. Above right: The Squadra Storico rips through the French countryside as a group. Leading is the 1900 Sport Spider, followed by the ex-Fangio 1953 6C 3000CM, 8C 2300 Le Mans and a 1963 Giulietta Sprint. Ask any *Alfista*, this is the way Alfas are meant to be seen. Right: The rakish 1934 Riley Ulster IMP, driven by Swiss pilots Thoni and Stampfli, roars off from the start in Dijon.

its conservation. As the Museo’s Director, Pasquale Oliveri said, “It’s important that the cars live! We want people to see them on the roads, not only in the museum.”

To that end, the Squadra Storico shows the Museo’s wonders extensively. From events like the Raid Suisse-Paris and Mille Miglia to the Ennstal Classic and Pebble Beach, Alfa Romeo animates its history. According to Oliveri, the Automobilitismo Storico participated in 45 events last year and 50 in 2005. The exposure brings enjoyment to many and no doubt swells the already formidable ranks of *Alfisti* worldwide.

If Axel Marx isn’t the world’s number-one *Alfista*, his passion for the legendary brand places him among its top supporters. It’s not just his magnificent collection and knowledge of all things Alfa, it’s the joy with which he infuses his comments about the cars from Milan. Marx has driven the 6C 3000 CM in a number of events and likens it to a wild creature.

“Mechanically it’s a like a furious animal. It has a 3.5-liter inline-six with six single-barrel carbs of 48mm! This gives the car a great powerband and definitely more than 250 hp. It has a 110-liter tank. With those 100 liters you might go between 300 and 400 kilometers, but no more. In some ways it’s very advanced. It has great disc brakes (a



1955 upgrade) but it has this strange multi-disc clutch that was really outdated technology by that time. I don’t know why they put it on unless they just had it available and reasoned that you only use it once really—starting the race. That’s it. This makes the car a little bit strange to drive but the motor is very elastic. The steering is very nice, very precise. It’s huge fun to drive and if you know you are driving a car in which Fangio has won a race, you feel very privileged.”



vives stop-and-go traffic only if the revs are brought up and the clutch let out immediately. Feathering it quickly leads to a dead gearbox. With the initial lurching out of the way, the run up through the five-speed is straightforward. Changing to lower gears requires a double-clutch dance that's challenging even for experienced heel-toers. It gives you a new respect for Fangio and the passing thought that he might have performed as well as Helio Castroneves on "Dancing With the Stars."

Steering effort is high by modern standards but the racer communicates well with the driver, as its big wooden hoop creates new calluses on your hands. Braking via four-wheel discs is quite effective, probably better than the drums that originally equipped the machine. Handling is neutral and confidence inspiring. Marx clued me in on the relatively hard rubber the car wears, which he indicated allowed for safe, controllable powerslides. Fun!

A glance to the left or right during the sequence of right and left-handers that lead to a pre-lunch stage finish at mammoth Château de Thenissey could, in one instant, communicate the charm of the Raid-Suisse-Paris. Eight decades worth of vintage machinery (bookended by a 1917 American La France Type 12 and a 1981 Ferrari 308 GTSi) could be seen simultaneously as they spread out over miles of the twisting tarmac. Looking up the hill I caught sight of a 1925 Lancia Lambda followed by a 1934 Riley Ulster IMP and a 1927 Studebaker Commander Big Six. Craning my neck to look below and behind our 3000 CM brought the rapidly retreating sight of a 1959 Aston Martin DB4, 1953 Austin Healey 100 M, 1957 Mercedes Benz 300 SL and various postwar Peugeots, Maseratis, Lotuses, Porsches, Cadillacs, Corvettes and many more.

The Squadra Storico generally rips through the stages at high speed, eschewing the regularity and special tests. These racing cars want to go fast not slow. But most take the rally seriously, alternating their pace to achieve targeted times and accrue as few penalty points as possible. The great thing about the Raid-Suisse-Paris is just about any approach provides loads of fun. Run hard and grin or adopt a comfortable gait and take in the scenery. It's a unique way to see France, all from the seat of your classic automobile.

Populated overwhelmingly by Swiss entrants, the rally nonetheless draws participants from Italy, Austria, France, Belgium, Germany, Liechtenstein, Japan, Mexico and the U.S. Meeting and conversing with them over terrific dinners at fine hotels is the other half of the equation. Expertly organized by Hans-André Bichsel (former president of the Swiss Association of Vintage Car Collectors) and the Raid staff, the event is warm and unpretentious.

Top it off with the better part of a week spent in company with the generous and proud members of the Automobilità Storico, the sound of 6C 3000 CM, startled bovines and excited onlookers, rain stinging my forehead at the wheel of the 1900 SS and an all-too-brief stint in the 8C 2300 Le Mans and the conversion is complete.

I confess it freely. I'm an *Alfista!*



Below, top to bottom: The supercharged straight-eight tucked under the bonnet of the 8C 2300 Le Mans. A look at the powerplant that took Fangio to victory in the 1953 Supercortemaggiore Gran Prix. The 6C 3000 CM's iron-block/aluminum-head inline-six breathes through six big carbs and churns out 275 hp; enough to give the car terrific performance even by contemporary standards. A glass of champagne atop the 8C 2300 Le Mans' bonnet at the finish-line party on the grounds of Château de Rambouillet near Paris serves as a fitting celebration of the Raid-Suisse-Paris 2007.



Privileged indeed—I came to appreciate the 3000 CM's qualities during the three days of the Raid, from the exciting trip over the starting ramp in the Basel Messe (convention center) to the finish at lovely Château de Rambouillet just south of Paris. Highlights included a trip to Circuit de Dijon-Prenois for Sport class competitors at the conclusion of Stage Two. Turning laps on the undulating 2.3-mile natural terrain road course (home to the French Grand Prix intermittently from 1974-1984) in company with the 8C Le Mans and 1900 Sport Spider and other Sport class competitors was fantastic.

Just as revealing and visually exciting was Stage Three on the second morning of the event. After departing Dijon, smooth Burgundian two-lanes began to wind through stunning countryside, snaking back on themselves as we ascended and descended hills. We roared through amazingly green pastures dotted by startled cows and past beautiful historic villages, such as Vézelay (a main stop on the medieval pilgrimage to Santiago De Compostela in Spain). It was here that harmony with Fangio's car could best be felt.

The 275 ponies credited to the car actually feel closer to 300. As Marx related, launching this racer from a stop was not a consideration Alfa gave much thought to. It was meant to start once and run. I learned its odd multi-disc clutch sur-