



# 1954 Alfa Romeo 1900 Sport Spider: Prototype for a supercar

By JAN TEGLER on 5/19/2010

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and track-going Alfas. Planned as both a coupe and a roadster, it shared a version of the 1,997-cc twin-cam, iron block/ aluminum head inline-four developed from the 1900's 1,184-cc unit for the sensational 1900 C52 Disco Volante. With hemispherical combustion chambers and twin Weber carburetors, the 1900 SS's four sent 138 hp to its rear wheels via a five-speed transmission.

Two coupes and two spiders were constructed on short, tubular spaceframe chassis similar to those of the C52. All were sent to Bertone for dressing. There, designer Franco Scaglione penned two unique aluminum bodies: a coupe, which foreshadowed styling ingredients of the Giulietta Sprint, and this spider. Underpinning both versions was a suspension combining front dual-transverse arms/coil springs and a de Dion rear with transverse rods and coil springs.

Chassis number 19005-00003 nor-mally resides in the Alfa Romeo Museo in Arese, Italy. But the museum's Automobilitismo Storico unit frequently takes this and other treasures out for public display.

We got behind the wheel of the 1900 SS during the 2007 Raid Suisse-Paris rally. Weighing in at just more than 2,000 pounds, the spider makes the most of its 138 horses. Acceleration is on par with most contemporary exotics. Top speed, reported to be 137 mph, seems realistic, though diminished steering feedback and a bit of chassis float at the triple-digit mark make approaching that limit difficult.

Shifting the right-hand-driver's five-speed is satisfying, with double-clutch downshifts smoothing operation in the lower gears. The Sport Spider's four-wheel drums require a firm push but provide fine stopping power. Nimble handling and a surprisingly compliant ride make the car a fine grand tourer. The combination works well on the track, too, fulfilling the mission of these prototypes.

Supportive leather buckets, a bodycolored dash, full gauges and a handsome wood steering wheel lend the cabin a simple but sporty look. Add in the racy tones emanating from its dual exhaust, and you have a supercar with performance and styling to compete with the Jaguars, Mercedes-Benzes and Ferraris of the day.

Ultimately, Alfa Romeo chose not to produce the 2000 Sportiva/1900 Sport Spider, and the four prototypes were the only examples of Alfa's supercar.

In the decade following World War II, Alfa Romeo transformed itself. The Milanese manufacturer famous for low-volume, brilliantly designed cars for the street and the track entered the realm of mass production. Debuting in 1950, the 1900 was the maker's first unibody car. Commercially successful, it gave Alfa Romeo a new image, but the marque's leaders were keen to emphasize the brand's legacy of success in racing and high style.

Taking a cue from the past, the company set out to build a limited-edition sports car that could be driven spiritedly on the street or raced competitively in the emerging two-liter sports category.

The design, also known as the 2000 Sportiva, was a hybrid, combining elements from contemporary road-

and track-going Alfas. Planned as both a coupe and a roadster, it shared a version of the 1,997-cc twin-cam, iron block/ aluminum head inline-four developed from the 1900's 1,184-cc unit for the sensational 1900 C52 Disco Volante. With hemispherical combustion chambers and twin Weber carburetors, the 1900 SS's four sent 138 hp to its rear wheels via a five-speed transmission.

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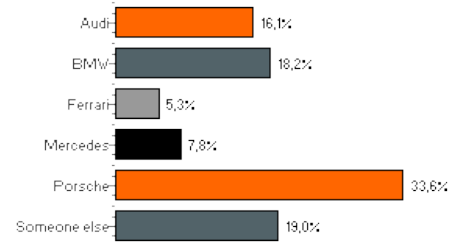
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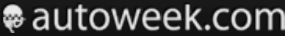
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