



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

ALFA ROMEO 8C2300

VS.

TRIUMPH 8C DOLOMITE

BY **RON VERSCHOOR**

PHOTOS BY BOB & GRACE GLUCK, BOBBIE'DINE RODDA AND RON VERSCHOOR



Photos this page, top to bottom:
1932 Alfa Romeo 8C2300 Touring Spider owned by Sir Michael Kadoorie; 2311201, Alfa Romeo 8C2300 Le Mans from the Simeone Collection.

Photos opposite, top to bottom:
The 8C2300 Monza in the Simeone Collection, chassis 2211112; DHM2 receiving an award at the 2000 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

"IMITATION IS THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY," THOSE WORDS OF WISDOM ARE CREDITED TO ENGLISH WRITER CHARLES CALEB COLTON, TO WHICH OSCAR WILDE ADDED, **"THAT MEDIOCRITY CAN PAY TO GREATNESS."** APPLIED TO THE AUTOMOTIVE PAIRING PRESENTED HERE, ALFA ROMEO WAS THE IMITATED AND TRIUMPH WAS THE IMITATOR, AND INCORPORATING MR. WILDE'S POINT OF VIEW, THE TRIUMPH WOULD BE RELEGATED TO MEDIOCRITY. PERHAPS THE WILDE ADDENDUM IS NOT APPLICABLE IN THIS INSTANCE, FOR TRIUMPH'S DOLOMITE IS ANYTHING BUT MEDIOCRE. FEW WOULD ARGUE THAT THE GREATNESS IS ALFA ROMEO'S 8C2300, IN PRODUCTION FROM 1931 TO 1934 AND SERVING AS THE INSPIRATION FOR THE COPYCAT TRIUMPH 8C DOLOMITE.

THE ORIGINAL: ALFA ROMEO 8C2300

Alfa Romeo is one of a few Classic nameplates still in production today, and A.L.F.A. is actually an acronym for Anonima Lombarda Fabbrica Automobili (Lombardy Car Manufacturing Company) whose automobile production began in 1910 in Milan, Italy. It was the evolution of the bankrupt firm SAID (Societa Anonima Italiana Darracq), which assembled the French Darracq automobile in Italy.

Its first model was the four-cylinder 24 HP and by 1911, the firm was already involved in racing, competing at the Targa Florio that year. The origins of the Romeo name date to 1915, following new ownership by Nicola >





Photos left to right: Seen at the 2012 Annual Meeting were John Riding Lee's 8C2300 and the Dolomite next to it; Seen at the 2008 CCCA Annual Meeting in the Seattle area was this 1932 Alfa Romeo 8C2300 with Touring coachwork; The supercharged 2.3-litre, 8-cylinder engine; The Triumph Dolomite at Pebble Beach.

Romeo who combined his engineering firm with automobile manufacturing and engaged in armaments production for World War I.

Alfa Romeo's early history can be segmented by its engineers beginning with Guiseppe Merosi whose six-cylinder RL road series also enjoyed some racing success garnering 1st- and 2nd-place wins at the Targa Florio in 1923. On the racing front, Merosi designed the P1 in 1924, a two-liter, six-cylinder racecar. Merosi was eventually replaced by Vittorio Jano who was hired away from FIAT in 1924. Jano's P2 racecar was the firm's first eight-cylinder offering, a twin-cam, supercharged design which dominated the racing circuit.

For the road, Jano developed a series of models that were equally at home on road or track, depending on the state of tune and the type of coachwork fitted. First came the 6C1500, produced from 1927 to 1929, available with or without a supercharger, followed by the 6C1750 with a slightly larger six-cylinder engine (bore & stroke dimensions of 65 x88 mm, or 1,752 cubic centimeters) produced from 1929 to 1932.

The addition of two cylinders using the 6C1750 bore and stroke dimensions resulted in the 8C2300, all of which were equipped with a Roots supercharger yielding 140 to 155 HP. Just under 200 were produced from 1931 to 1934 in different chassis lengths equipped with a variety of coachwork. The Lungo (long) version used a 3,100 mm wheelbase chassis

(122") and was known as the Le Mans model, having won that event four years in a row, from 1931 to 1934 (and placed 2nd in 1935). The Corto (short) version employed a 2,750 mm wheelbase chassis (108.3") and is often referred to as the Mille Miglia version.

Supplementing those offerings was the very rare Monza version, utilizing an even shorter 2,650 mm wheelbase chassis (104.3") and a tuned engine producing 165 HP. The

first of these won the Italian Grand Prix in 1931 and Monzas would accumulate an impressive string of wins for the next four years. In addition to in-house built Monzas, some were made under the guidance of Enzo Ferrari. Simon Moore's exhaustive work on this model, "The Legendary 2.3" is a three-volume effort detailing each chassis. He estimates Monza production at ten.

Another excellent work, "Alfa Romeo

Monza: the autobiography of the celebrated 2211130" by Mick Walsh explores the complete history of one of the ten Monza models produced. The forward to that book is written by racing driver Alain de Cadenet who in a few words, eloquently conveys the joy of driving one of these remarkable machines:

Even today a Monza in fine fettle, driven with gusto by an accomplished driver, is uncatchable on a twisty cross-country road. Instant torque at low revs and smooth delivery from eight cylinders in a row with a blower pumping away at 1.3 times engine speed, burning high-octane fuel with a few drops of castor oil added, is four-wheeled paradise on earth for those in the know. Tip in the crescendo of open exhaust at 5,000 rpm and you have total bliss.

Zagato and Touring produced the majority of bodies for the 8C2300 chassis with Brianza, Castagna, Figoni and Pinin Farina each producing five or more bodies for this model.

For those attending the 2020 Annual Meeting in the Philadelphia area, one tour destination is the Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum which has three 8C2300s in its collection, a 1933 Mille Miglia Spyder, a 1933 Le Mans model and a 1933 Monza model.

Alfa Romeo vs Triumph

	Alfa Romeo 8C2300	Triumph 8C Dolomite
Engine layout/design	Inline 8 Cylinder, DOHC, Supercharged	Inline 8 Cylinder, DOHC, Supercharged
Bearings	10	10
Bore & stroke	65 mm X 88 mm	60 mm X 88 mm
Displacement	2,336 cc	1,990 cc
Horsepower	140-165+	140
Wheelbase	3,100; 2,750; 2,650 mm	2,650 mm
Weight	2,128; 1,938; 1,900 lbs	2,128 lbs. (19 cwt.)
Transmission	4-speed	4-speed, Wilson pre-select
Brakes	4-wheel mechanical	4-wheel hydraulic
Wheel size	19"	19"

Specifications from period brochures.

THE DUPLICATE: TRIUMPH 8C DOLOMITE

The manufacture of bicycles and motorcycles marked the origins of the Triumph Cycle Company which began automobile production in 1923 in Coventry. Its early offerings were not up to Classic Car standards and only the mid-1930s Gloria (the six-cylinder variant only) and the Dolomite discussed here are recognized as Full Classics®.

Triumph's first six-cylinder model, the Scorpion, appeared in 1931 as an attempt to move up market. Managing Director Claude Vivian Holborok believed Triumph could fill a gap in the market between premium offerings like the Derby Bentley and 3-Litre Lagonda and the more pedestrian offerings from MG and Singer.

Introduced for the 1934 model year was the Gloria, available with four- and six-cylinder engines of 1,087 and 1,476 cc

capacity. Displacement grew to 1,232 and 1,991 cubic centimeters and more sporting variants such as the Speed Model and Competition Tourer served as the inspiration to build Triumph's finest offering, the Dolomite, named after the mountain range in northern Italy through which the Alpine Rally traveled.

A Gloria-based Dolomite may have been planned, even teased to the public, but never reach production. A brochure promoting "The Dolomite Speed Models" was published, listing both four- and six-cylinder engines and stunning two-seat, roadster coachwork designed in-house by Triumph's Frank Warner, but nothing came of it, until . . .

In 1933, Holbrook hired Donald Mitchell Healey as Triumph's engineer. Healey had racing experience behind the wheels of not only Triumphs, but Rileys and Invictas, too. Healey wisely concluded that the mechanicals of the Gloria were simply not up to the task of powering a world-class Triumph sports car and on top of that, the company was hardly in a financial position to develop a new engine on its own. Instead, he decided to copy the best of its day, the Alfa Romeo 8C2300. In a 1986 *Automobile Quarterly* article (Volume 24, Number 4), Donald Healey explains the process:

The most difficult car to drive, of the ones I knew, and the most powerful was the Invicta, but it was nothing like as good a car as my own Dolomite. That was a wonderful car. We made

I went over and visited their chief engineer, the famous Jano, and we discussed it and they were very pleased, honored that Triumph would want to copy the engine.



Photos left to right: On the field at Pebble in 2000; DHM2 at the Texas Grand Classic in 1999; Triumph 8C Dolomite DHM2 on Rodeo Drive.

the thing in about six months. The engine was copied from the Alfa Romeo; there was a lot of criticism of my copying an engine. I copied every nut and bolt, because Triumph had never built a racing engine in their life. They'd only got straight four- and six-cylinder engines, with push rods. It came in for a tremendous amount of criticism and there were a lot of silly stories about Alfa Romeo taking action against Triumph. As it happened, I went over and visited their chief engineer, the famous Jano, and we discussed it and they were very pleased, honored that Triumph would want to copy the engine.

The 8C2300 that Healey copied was not one of the "standard" models; it was the rare Monza version. Donald Healey recalled it as chassis #2211130, but records documenting ownership and the whereabouts of that chassis and another, #2211125, suggest it was

#2211125 that served as the Dolomite pattern.

Total Triumph 8C Dolomite production consisted of one complete car built by the factory (chassis #DMH1), one chassis shown at the 1934 London Auto Show (DMH2), a spare chassis and possibly as many as six engines. While participating in the 1935 Monte Carlo Rally on a stretch through Denmark, Donald Healey was at the wheel of DMH1 accompanied by Lewis Pierce as his navigator, when a train hit the car. Neither occupant was injured but the Triumph sustained significant damage to its engine and chassis.

DMH1 was repaired using the spare third chassis and engine, which was enlarged to 2.5 liters. Advertised for sale in the November 8, 1938 issue of *The Motor* were both DMH1 and DMH2, now fitted with roadster coachwork built by Corsica of Cricklewood.

The second car, DMH2, is often referenced as an HSM, instead of a Triumph, those letters signifying its sale in the late 1930s by High Speed Motors in Paddington. Following a string of owners, CCCA member David Cohen acquired the car in 1979 and restored it to match the original design. Subsequent CCCA owners included John Mozart and John Ridings Lee, the latter who entered the car at the April 3, 1993 Southwestern Grand Classic where it scored 99.5 points for first-place Primary win and was awarded with Senior badge number 1784. It was judged again in 1999, scoring 99.0 points and securing a first-place Senior win. In 2000, it won a first-in-class award at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance as well as the Lord Montagu of Beaulieu trophy. Both cars are currently located in England.



FINAL THOUGHTS BY BEVERLY RAE KIMES

Based on the success of the recent 20th Century Fox theatrical production, "Ford vs. Ferrari" (\$220+ million in worldwide receipts on a budget of \$97.6 million), Bev Kimes summation of the Dolomite in her 1990 book, "The Classic Car" seems oh so appropriate:

"The Triumph Dolomite by Healey courtesy of Alfa Romeo has Hollywood written all over it. What a movie it would make."

FURTHER READING

- "The Legendary 2.3, Alfa Romeo 8C2300," by Simon Moore.
- "Donald Healey's 8C Triumph Dolomite," by Jonathan Wood
- "The Spirit of Competition," by Frederick A. Simeone.
- "The Alfa Romeo Tradition," By Griffith Borgeson
- "Alfa Romeo Monza: The autobiography of the celebrated 2211130," by Mick Walsh
- "Donald Healey: His Own Way," by Mike Taylor & Julie M. Fenster, *Automobile Quarterly*, Volume 24, Number 4.