

TheAlfaholic *Newsletter of the DSARC*

Welcome to *the Alfaholic!*

January, 2009

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

The Deep South

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President's Column

When was the last time you looked at your car? No I do not mean walked past it in the garage and smiled. I mean really looked at your car. When was the last time you popped the hood or crawled underneath just to see what was there. If the answer is never, or not often, then you need to reconsider certain aspects of your relationship with your Alfa.

Think about it. Does your Alfa ever leave you on the side of the road? Does your mechanic often recommend "extra" services when you bring the car in for an oil change? Are you always delighted and surprised when your car starts at all? There is a reason for all of this.

I do all my own maintenance and repairs on my Alfas. Several of us in the club pretend we are mechanics. It is a fun and important part of owning an Alfa. I know there are also quite a few members of this club who are checkbook mechanics. I think that is fine too. Especially the ones who bring their cars to me! But there is more to owning an Alfa than working on it. Some people actually drive them too. I must say my commute to and from work is the best part of my day!! What I am about to offer up is important to all Alfisti, drivers and mechanics alike.

A couple days ago I moved my spider out of the garage and into position for a good engine wash down. Every now and again I like to hose the whole thing down to keep the oil build up low. I know she leaks, but this way there is less grit and crud on my hands when I fix things. I was planning on blowing out the heater core in an attempt to have some heat for the winter. Reaching down the front of the motor to disconnect a hose and getting covered in black road sludge did not sound appealing. The first thing I noticed was the exhaust clanging on

the body. So I spent the next 45 minutes under the car adjusting things. While under the car I noticed a small drip under the engine. First I had to determine the type of fluid. Then I had to find an origin. Answer: coolant, not from the radiator or the front of engine. Hmm, that seems strange. If not the radiator or the front of the engine, where could this be coming from? I popped open the hood and saw the answer. The two coolant hoses running to the throttle body have just begun to give up and make a mess. Looks like now I would be doing more than just blowing out the heater core. New hoses through the firewall and under the dash became the order of the day. I will not depress everyone with how not fun it is to replace the hoses running to the heater core. The point I want to make is that I looked at my car. I listened to her, I smelled her, I stared at her in inappropriate ways....

Example number two happened on the Milano. I have been slowly fixing things that leak on this car. There is only a single leak left, and I think it is coming from the oil pressure-sending unit. Alfa in their infinite wisdom put this sensor on the back of the block in the V between the banks. While digging around back there I noticed one of the injectors was not seated properly. Under further examination I could see the two bolts holding the injector down had worked loose and were getting ready to fall out. Not good. So, now I abandoned the oil pressure-sending unit and jumped on the injectors. In the end I had to remove the intake plenum. While I was in there I checked all the injectors for tightness. I then replaced the plenum and went back to the oil pressure-sending unit. Once again, the point is that I observed the car.

Both of those problems could have become catastrophic failures. How much fun would it have been when the heater hoses let go on the way to work? Or what if the leak was slow and the engine ran dry and cooked itself? And what of the Milano? An improperly seated injector creates a massive air leak. This causes a lean condition for that cylinder. Next step is one really hot cylinder combined with 5 rich running cylinders as the engine tries to compensate for the lean one. I am pretty sure a burned valve would be in order too. How exciting.

Now, I just happened to already be working on my cars when I noticed these problems. If you work on your cars, good observation is easy. If you are a checkbook mechanic things might be more difficult. But either way, you need to schedule some time to just look at your car. You do not have to be a genius to notice a threaded hole with nothing in it and something hanging loose nearby. Or even just something rattling while the engine is running. Take some time to get to know your car. Then maybe next time it will not be your mechanic calling with extra stuff to do to the car. It will be you calling the mechanic with your list of things needing attention. Not to mention the joy of finding problems in your garage rather than the side of the road.

I do not work on my cars every day. I drive them every day. So in between repair sessions I have made a habit of popping the hood. I call it "checking to make sure the engine is still there." I just take a look. Perhaps there is something new that was not there yesterday. A leak perhaps, or some debris from something falling apart, who knows, could be anything. And that is the point!! When you are about to get into your car for a drive, just duck your head

underneath and see what is there or not there. This not only helps you see what is up with your car but it helps you get familiar with it so you can notice when something changes.

Tim Spruill....

You may now call me “Il Commendatore”.

President, DSARC

Tech Day, January 17th

The January meeting and tech day will be held at the Auto Skills Hobby Shop at the Naval Base in New Orleans. This year we are adding a theme - ignition. The original idea was “points and plugs,” but not many of us have points any more (see Tim’s research on points below). At the very least we can clean and gap everyones plugs. If you bring new plugs, points, wires, etc. we can give your car a nice little ignition tune up. With a little luck we can all learn something and have better cars for it!! The tech day will begin at 8 and go on till they kick us out. Which I think will be around 3:00. For those wanting to stick around longer, New Orleans is a big city with lots to offer! Perhaps we can all take a nice scenic drive around town.

Barbara Eilers is our sponsor on base for this event. I need to get her an RSVP list before the event. Please let Tim know if you will be attending (gofastwin@gmail.com) and what, if any, ignition problems you’d like to address at the tech day. The list goes to security at the base.... you get the idea.

More information and directions to the base are coming soon....

Tim on Point(s)

By: Tim Spruill

Ok, so what are points? None of my cars have any so I have no clue. This sounds like a job for Wikipedia!!!!..... Ok, back now from Internet land. Wow, that was very educational. I still do not fully understand how points work. But I did learn they act like a switch for the ignition system. And the point gap is crucial for setting the proper “dwell” time. I also found out the points can both oxidize and wear over time with use. Since my Bosch I-jet cars have an entire computer dedicated to doing the job of these little points, they must be pretty important.

Points are beginning to sound like those magical aspects of engine tuning you used to need a guru for. I can just imagine a group of guys out at Bonneville with tanned leather skin and weathered faces huddling over an engine in some streamlined hot rod. They would casually smoke cigarettes and argue the merits of various spark gaps, point gaps, and distributor settings. There is probably an

oscilloscope sitting on a table nearby and an adjustable timing light in someone's hand. One of the guys has a feeler gauge set hanging out of his pocket. And far off in the distance you can hear some fire breathing dragon of a car making a high speed run. Ahhh...

I am not one of those guys, but I bet we have a couple in the club. With some luck at least one will show up for the meeting and show us all how it is done. But I do know how to gap a plug back to factory spec and how to replace a cap and rotor. I can even replace a set of plug wires. I have done all those things many times. I know many of our club members do not work on their cars. If you are more of a driver than a mechanic, this could be your chance to dig into the engine compartment without getting into trouble.

Besides plugs and points, we have some cars in the club with much more modern ignition systems. For instance, all Bosch L-jet cars use computers to control the engine. There is still a distributor and a single coil, but the timing is controlled using engine vacuum, a Hall effect sensor, or flywheel position sensors depending on the car. The early GTV6 used a dummy box for the ignition control. I have no clue what that means, but I know the later cars had a more complex computer. And once you move into Motronic, things get even more complicated and simple at the same time. These cars only have one computer for all the engines functions, and most of the hoses and extra junk associated with L-Jet is gone, but the control is more complex. These cars use crank position sensors and idle air control motors and the like. Finally I know of at least one car in the club that left the factory with coil packs! Lets hear it for the 164LS. With the exception of the 164Q it has to be the most advanced and most powerful Alfa you could get at a dealer back in the day. These cars get rid of the distributor all together and give each cylinder it's own coil. The computer tells each one when to fire and things are very precise and controlled. Not to mention very powerful!

So lets all drive our Italian beauties down to the Big Easy and get our grease on!! For those who do not live in New Orleans (most of us), I recommend caravanning to the meeting. It is far more fun, and if you have a break down, there is another Alfisti nearby to help out. For those in and around the Baton Rouge area, send me an email. If anyone needs help finding another Alfisti nearby, let me know. See every one in a few weeks!!

Bonnie's Bio

By: Bonnie Menapace

DSARC Secretary/Treasurer

Hey y'all. I am Bonnie Menapace and I am the secretary and treasurer for the Deep South Alfa Romeo Club. My Dad, the newsletter editor, has asked me to tell you about myself. I am married to Andy Menapace, the club's current vice-president and past president. We live in Raymond Mississippi, which is approximately 20 miles from Jackson.

I practically grew up in the Alfa Club. My Dad is a lover of all cars, but he is especially enamored with Alfas. By the time I was a teenager, he had owned

around a dozen Alfas. The models and conditions were varied, but I thought they were all super cool. (Well, all except the Alfetta GTV that my Dad gave my brother. That car was not my cup of tea.)

As my sixteenth birthday approached, my Dad told me he would give me the car of my choice (within reason, of course). I told him I either wanted a mid-sixties Mustang convertible or an Alfa Spider. (I later learned it's a series 2 Spider.) I turned sixteen in December 1986. My Dad started looking for a car almost a year before my birthday. In August, while away on business, he called. He had found a yellow 1979 spider and it was in decent shape. I was absolutely mortified. I had seen Alfas in several shades of yellow over the years. I thought some were cute, but none were exactly my idea of "cool." I imagined driving to high school everyday in a lemon yellow car and could practically hear the laughs and jeers.

Well, when he finally brought the car home, it was not some cute shade of yellow. No. . . it was this cool sporty shade that I had never seen on a car before. It was an orange-yellow, almost the color of the stripes on the road. It looked great. It had a black interior and black top. Almost immediately, it earned the nickname (and the personalized tag) "Bumble B."



Since the car arrived home months before my birthday, I was not allowed to drive it until my birthday. That was torture. I had to ride to school with my

brother (in his Alfetta GTV) and, since he had football practice after school, I had to bum a ride home. All the while my car was sitting in the garage. Almost everyday, I would sit in the car and pretend to drive it. I think I must have washed it a thousand times between August and December.

Finally, on my birthday, the car was mine. And she has been mine ever since. I love that car!!! She has rust and the paint is not in great shape, but I love that car. I will never sell her! I drove the car as an everyday driver in high school and throughout college. The car has broken down many times, but has never (knock on wood) left me stranded. She always had her issues near a gas station or a payphone.

After college, Bumble B was in need of an engine rebuild so she went to live at my Dad's. She lived there for almost ten years. When Andy and I got engaged, he was not yet an Alfa person. But he suggested that we move the car from my Dad's on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, to his garage near Jackson. Once the car was in Andy's garage, he too was hooked. Over time, he learned to work on the car. He has nursed her back to health and she runs great. Hopefully, you will see her at an upcoming Deep South Alfa Club event!

Miscellaneous

By: Mike Hemsley

First – **BE SURE TO RSVP TO TIM IF YOU'RE COMING TO THE TECH DAY. BASE SECURITY HAS NO SENSE OF HUMOR, AND IF YOU'RE NOT ON THE LIST OR DON'T HAVE A MILITARY ID, YOU WON'T BE ALLOWED ON THE BASE.** And don't forget to let Tim know what, if any, ignition issues you'd like to check out on your car.

The following item comes from *Autoweek*, October 27, 2008: “The Indy Racing League is pursuing various avenues in its ‘green’ initiative, and the latest goes through Brazil. Sugar cane, cheap and abundant in the South American country, might be the key ingredient for the IRL’s ethanol fuel when new engines are introduced in 2011. As for those engines, there are five interested manufacturers, including Honda, the sole supplier for the past two seasons. The others (confirmed by the IRL) are Volkswagen, Audi, Porsche, and **Alfa Romeo.**”

I was writing regular competition columns for *Alfa Owner* in the days when Alfa was involved in Indy car racing (then called Championship Auto Racing Teams or CART). Drivers were Roberto Guerrero, Al Unser Sr., and Danny Sullivan. The cars were fast and unreliable, and Alfa only lasted three seasons, I think. It did get me to the Indy 500 on two occasions for

qualifying, which was cool. It would be great for Alfa to be involved in racing in the US again.

Speaking of Alfas in racing, it looks as though the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) may allow the Giulietta Spider (non-Veloce) to run in H Production. That's the smallest production class and used to be the owned by Austin Healey Sprites (Bugeyes). More recently, a number of other cars, including VW Rabbits, Honda Civics, 1300 Triumph Spitfires, and Datsun 510s have been running competitively in the class. I'd love to be covering someone competing in an Alfa Spider in HP this year when the Runoffs (national championships) goes to Road America.

P.S. Write an article for the *Alfaholic* and send it in to me at jmichaelhemsley@hotmail.com! 🌐

