

# CLASSIC DRIVER



## 1977 Renault Alpine - GTP Le Mans 1977 & 1978

GTP Le Mans 1977 & 1978

Preis	Preis auf Anfrage	Lenkung	Links
Baujahr	1977	Zustand	Restauriert
Zahl der Sitze	2	Standort	
Antrieb	Zweirad	Kraftstoff	Benzin
		Außenfarbe	Sonstige
		Automobiltyp	Coupé

### Beschreibung

Developed by Mauro Bianchi

Owned for 41 years by Mr Bernard Decure

Restored and entered in 2018 Le Mans Classic

The only Alpine A310 to have competed at the Le Mans 24 Hours

Eligible for Classic Endurance Race & Le Mans Classic

The history of Alpine is tied up with that of the Le Mans 24 Hours race, with cars which have become legends competing in this great race: the Alpine A110 and the Alpine A210 succeeded the M63, M64 and M65 which were the pioneers of the early 60s. Then, with the support of Renault, Alpine raced with the A442 (A and B) and the A443, culminating with an overall victory in the 1978 Le Mans 24 Hours. In this rich history shared by the French manufacturer and Le Mans - which still continues today - only one A310 ever raced! Although more than 10,000 cars were produced in its road version, it made only one appearance at Le Mans, in 1977, thanks to a private initiative by Bernard Decure. This particular Alpine A310 V6, a unique car in many ways, is now being offered for sale.

An Alpine A310 V6 that resembles a prototype

Bernard Decure, a technical Inspector at Alpine in the 70's but also a driver in circuit and hill races, came across an Alpine A310 which had been left lying around in the corner of a workshop. That was in 1976. The man from Rouen bought it and set himself the challenge of competing in the Le Mans 24 Hours race. The car, which had been side-lined by the Alpine teams, had undergone substantive work during the winter of 74-75. Mauro Bianchi had developed the chassis and François Castaing the engine, to create a "Group 5" Alpine A310. Young engineers from the Renault Gordini factory in Viry Châtillon, including Jean Pierre Boudy, worked on the car to turn it into a 320-horsepower monster weighing only 800 kg. At the time, it had a Renault-Gordini aluminium V6 engine and a beam chassis, with a lightweight polyester body. The base was an A310 1600 car body, with a very light, 2.8-litre Lucas injection engine.

So, having finally been set aside by Renault-Alpine - which subsequently developed a Renault Alpine A310 V6 for rally racing - the car was acquired by Bernard Decure... but without its engine! The PRV engine was the very heart of the monster, but it was also the reason why the programme was finally curtailed, due to excessive costs. Whatever. Bernard Decure bought the car and applied officially to Gérard Larrousse for support which never came. The parent company did not wish the Renault-Alpine name to be associated with this "private" initiative, at a time when all their efforts were concentrated on the A442 and its prospects for finishing first overall.

3,500 hours of work

It was the engine-maker Marc Guerbert (in particular) who helped Bernard Decure to prepare the A310 V6 engine, in the basement of his house in Cléon (near Rouen). 3,500 hours of work were required for the car to comply with the GTP regulations of the time. Several very different cars were grouped together in this category: an Inaltera LM77, a WM P76, an Aston Martin DBS V8 and lastly, a Lancia Stratos. Eclectic, to say the least....

Having been created as a sort of prototype, with Mauro Bianchi at the wheel, the Alpine A310 V6 with its atmospheric engine was, in 1977, more like a "big GT" with its 225 hp PRV engine. Its Weber carburetors and ZF 5-speed gearbox enabled the Alpine, in its French "tricolore" livery, to reach over 250 km / h down the Hunaudières straight - far behind the best prototypes, however, because of its reduced power. This was only logical because the regulations set the minimum weight at 925kg, with the Alpine thus becoming much heavier than the 800 kg it weighed in at when it was still a true prototype.

However, the work done by Bernard Decure and his companions was extensive: the rear suspension redone with wishbones and push bars, hub carriers with central nuts, a new 88-litre tank, and custom-made Gotti wheel-rims. It also included ventilated Citroën CX discs and ATE 2- and 4-piston brake calipers. A cross between a production car and a prototype, the car - which does not have a chassis number - was the perfect expression of a Gran Turismo prototype.

The "Poisson Dieppois" in at the deep end at Le Mans

Nicknamed the "Poisson Dieppois" (the "Dieppe Fish"), the Alpine A310 V6 owed its fishy name to the slogan it sported: "Poisson Dieppois, poisson de choix" ("Dieppe fish, choice fish"). At a time when manufacturers of cigarettes and brands of alcohol generally monopolized the advertising space available on racing-cars, this seemed an unlikely choice. It all started out as an insider joke, between Bernard Decure and Louis Gontier. They had a small-scale model made by Yves Legal with the sponsor "Poisson Dieppois" on it and presented the whole thing to the Dieppe Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Bingo! They walked away with 60,000 or 70,000 francs, which were used to finance the project.

At the Le Mans 24 Hours race, the car qualified in 55th place in a time of 4'31"1 and started 54th, after a higher-placed competitor was excluded. The wheel was shared by Jean-Luc Thérier, Bernard Decure and Jacky Cauchy, a.k.a. "Cochise" - a 100% Normand team. Although the car lacked a truly impressive top speed, the drivers quickly got to grips with this agile car which stuck safely to the road: an Alpine tailored for the track, corresponding to the observations initially made by Mauro Bianchi in 1974 and 1975.

The A310 V6 never got to see the checkered flag though, due to an over-tightened clamp on the

cooling tube that caused a leak. Making a pit stop in the 17th hour of the race, Jean-Luc Th  rier announced an engine problem that he thought was probably due to overheating, which was quickly confirmed. The car retired at 6:47 am, with the engine still intact... By that time, it had moved up into 28th position...

They tried to climb the Le Mans 24 Hours "mountain" again in 1978, with an improved engine. The Alpine A310 was fitted out with a 2,848 cm<sup>3</sup>, 310 horse-power engine. The preparation was done, in particular, using the Alpine test bench. The car now sported the blue and white livery of its sponsor Behar   lectricit   Moteur. Unfortunately, it failed to qualify and was placed on the reserve list. The hope of a second participation which motivated the team (Bernard Decure, William of Saint Pierre, Denis Morin and Marcel Mignot) right up to start time was ultimately disappointed.

Kept for 41 years by its owner

This unique Alpine was subsequently kept by Bernard Decure until 2017, when it was sold by Ascott Collection to some French collectors. This veritable "Time Machine" was entrusted to Yvan Mah  , whose workshop Equipe Europe undertook a complete restoration of the car. This perfect restoration was not at all intrusive, with the patina of the bodywork being preserved, while all the mechanical parts underwent far-reaching restoration work. The engine was overhauled by ORECA. The gearbox, the running gear and the brakes were renovated. A new electrical harness was made to measure. And a new tank and a standard harness finished off the whole thing.

Restored and entered in le Mans Classic

The "Poisson Dieppois" was ready in time for the Le Mans Classic 2018, for which it was selected without difficulty. Forty-one years after competing in the Le Mans 24 Hours, the "Poisson Dieppois" once more hurtled down the mythical Hunaudi  res straight, to the delight both of its owners and the public, who gave it a very warm welcome.

Considering that they had accomplished their mission, the owners, passionate enthusiasts, have now done Ascott Collection the pleasure of entrusting us with the sale of the car. It offers the opportunity to acquire a unique car of the Alpine brand and to compete in the Le Mans Classic in 2020. In the meantime, it is eligible for Classic Endurance Racing, which will give its new owner the chance to practice during the 2020 season ... unless he wishes to keep it in his collection and in that case, the presence and the beauty of this unique Alpine will no doubt bring him enormous satisfaction in owning an object which is literally unique in the whole world.

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