

CLASSIC DRIVER

The 2007 Coppa Milano-Sanremo Historic Rally



This story involves luxury and a Lotus 26R. Two words not normally seen in the same sentence. This 'ex-works' 26R started life as a rally car, evolved into a racing car, and ended up as a quick-change all-rounder. Early March is a bleak time for competition cars, but not in Italy. Milan is where the money is, and Sanremo is where you spend it.

Very much a season opener, this rally takes place in the tail-end of winter, so weather is an issue. A dump of snow on a mountain pass is a distinct possibility, as is fog on the Plain of Lombardy. However, without the risk of bad weather that anxious first-day-of-term feeling would be lost. It is also a bit like the UK's Oxford v Cambridge Boat Race – you know that summer is coming.

With wartime interruptions, the **Coppa Milano-Sanremo** was held from 1906 until 1973. Its revival came in 2003 and eligible cars have a late 70s cut-off date. Amongst an international, 220-car entry our 26R was a solitary Lotus. The un-informed onlookers paid it little attention, while jaw-dropping identified those in the know. I like that about this car.



The Italians' obsession with originality guarantees magnificent machinery. For 2007 I navigate, report and take pictures from a famous **Lotus 26R** (chassis 26-S2-33, the ex-Ian Walker/Team Lotus rally car of 1965/6) driven by the Scot Jane Watson. It competed in many international rallies including the **1966 Lyon-Charbonnières** and the **Gulf London**, evolving into a successful racing car in the hands of Lotus expert Malcolm Ricketts and the late Mike Ryan. Today it has a '20-minute' quick-change specification enabling it to race or road-rally.

Most **Milano-Sanremo** entrants opt for the competitive regularity trial, while some (yours truly included) chose the **Turistica Class**, which provides time to take pictures and report. Unless you have a similar agenda, I recommend the regularity class. Superbly organised, the 250 rally personnel are backed up by Monza marshals, armies of police, as well as countless catering and hotel staff.



Thursday

Early birds arrive at the **Autodromo Nazionale di Monza** to check in and collect goody bags donated by the event sponsors. This is a classic car event and some entrants drive from their homes to Monza, finish the rally in Sanremo, and then drive home. Others have transporters and crew who do everything while the driver and co-driver jet in and out. This team **P&O'd** the Channel in **Club Lounge** luxury to Calais for the long drive south. A classic **1991 Range Rover Turbo D**, towed the 42-year-old rally car tucked away inside a **Dastle Racebox** – the Rolls-Royce of covered trailers.



Friday

Monza. The organisers see to it that as each crew checks into its 5-star hotel, the bags (containing a suit, posh frocks and tiaras for the 3 glitzy nights and 3 gala dinners) are already in the appropriate rooms. Lapping of the hallowed Monza track is free until 12.00 midday - a slot for competition licence holders only. I left my race licence back in the UK. No problem, Monza grants its own one-year competition licence. A doctor asks if you are okay. You say, "Yes", hand over 42 Euros, and he gives you a temporary race licence.

With laps completed and lunch done, it is time for the 220 cars - and almost the same again in support vehicles - to drive the 10 miles from Monza to Milan's beautiful **Piazza Duomo** for public display. Milan's traffic is horrendous. Even with police outriders escorting the convoy through red traffic lights, cars get stuck and overheat. The hot Lotus with its road-going spark plugs and quick release electric radiator fan survived, just. This dilemma will have to be improved for future events. If a machine can thrash round Monza all morning and then spend a couple of hours in a traffic jam, the rest of the rally is going to be easy.

Celebrity Milano-Sanremo entrants include famous Italian singers, actors, models and sports personalities, and all enjoy the Friday night gala dinner.



Saturday

The start is in Milan's Piazza Del Duomo. Multi-lingual top car consultant and eloquent presenter [Simon Kidston](#) talks the cars out each morning and talks them in at the finish. This is a regularity trial which includes 19 sections over 16km. Crews are given target times and target average speeds. Sometimes they know how long a trial is, sometimes they don't; it all sounds very difficult and complicated and for reasons that no one understands, the slightest slowing demands vast speeds to get back on target. The navigator is not allowed modern electronics, and it is he who is the hero, not the driver. A motor race is a lot easier.



Lunch is in the [Monterotondo Resort](#) and highly recommended. Then over the high **Scoffera Pass**. Thanks to the perfect weather much of the route is lined with spectators, the locals bringing out their children to wave at the passing rally, thereby continuing the Italian love affair with cars.

Just south of **Genoa** and the Med's largest port, is the exclusive **Rapallo, Santa Margherita, Portofino** playground and the rally's night stop. Another gala dinner, this time in the **Excelsior Palace Hotel**.

Sunday

The cars start in number order. We are car number 207, so no rush. A brief run along the coast before a diversion onto some fabulous mountain roads with breathtaking views, then lunch in the world's poshest room - the **Sala del Maggiore Consiglio** in Genoa's **Palazzo Ducale**. The police are very much on-side with Italian car events, and this one is no different. Cars from the **Police Museum** as well as countless outriders complete with an **Italian Polizia Stradale Lamborghini Gallardo**.



All the police eat and drink with the crews and are very much part of this sociable event. The rally route leaving Genoa for the 100 mile coastal drive to Sanremo includes a small section of autostrada to leaf-frog Genoa's western suburbs. With 180bhp and 580kg, thanks to **Tony Thompson Racing, Millers Oils** and **Dunlop** tyres, the trusty 26R performed perfectly. Race track, traffic jams, mountain roads and motorways, you certainly have varied driving on this historic rally.

This "rolling museum" included **Police 1962 Ferrari 250 GTE Squadra Mobile** and a **1956 Alfa Romeo 1900 Polizia**, as well as stunning cars from the **Alfa Romeo Museum** including a **1952 Disco Volante Spider**. Alfa Romeo is a major supporter supplying countless course cars as well as one of the numerous prizes – the **Third Trofeo Alfa Romeo**. The overall winner was car number 40 the **1953 Lancia Aurelia B20 GT**, given new to world champion cyclist **Fausto Coppi** by the Lancia dealers following his victory of the same year. It was driven in this 2007 event by **Rapisarda** and **Colombo**.



Notable cars are too many to list, so see www.milano-sanremo.it for a splendid gallery as well as **You Tube** clips. If you fancy some spectacular driving, top locations, superb Italian cuisine, luxurious evenings and superb cars, check the website for the March 2008 event. Entry fees vary but circa 2600 EURO (around £1700) includes two people and everything. If you itemise each element, you can see what good value this is.

RESULTS

Final Classification "Fifth revival Coppa Milano-Sanremo":

1st place: Rapisarda Giuseppe/Colombo Giovanni Lancia Aurelia B20 GT 1953 (n° 40)
 2nd place: Bordogna Alberto/Bordogna Riccardo Fiat 1100 TV 1955 (n° 50)
 3rd place: Lui Luciano/Sassi Alberto Lancia Fulvia Coupè Montecarlo 1973 (n° 132)
 4th place: Redaelli Giuseppe/Redaelli Gianandrea Aston Martin Le Mans S 1933 (n° 14)
 5th place: Cartabbia Paolo/Rillosi Stanislao Fiat 500 F 1966 (n° 100)

Winners of the "3° Trofeo Alfa Romeo:

1st Barvas GiorgioGrossi -Nicoletta Alfa Romeo Giulietta S 1957
 2nd Di Franco Nazarena- Indelicato Soraya Alfa Romeo GT Junior 1972
 3rd Sato Yukinobu Sato- Sachiko Alfa Romeo 6C 1500 SZ 1928

Text/Photos: [Roberto Giordanelli](#)/The Organisers

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