

CLASSIC DRIVER

Worth the Wait: Alfa 8C Competizione



The following is an extract from Richard Bremner's feature in Auto Italia magazine, issue 139...

This beautiful, limited-edition Alfa has arrived at last: the show-car-turned concept and the first rear-wheel drive Alfa since the 1992 RZ. The first of the fortunate 500 who have ordered them will be receiving their cars soon. Though if you find yourself fancying an 8C, and have the necessary £111,000 or so, there's disappointing news - every one of them has a name, and a deposit, against it. Your only remaining route to ownership is to buy a car from its first owner; which will almost certainly cost you substantially more than the £111,000 that Alfa is asking.

But we need to know whether the 8C can deliver the magic that so many past Alfas have provided. The 8C's design inspiration unquestionably comes from Alfa coupés of the early '60s, and the TZ in particular. It's the TZ1's gaping three-piece grille that you see in the 8C's nose, and there's much of the same car in the abruptly cut tail too, whose circular tail-lights are so redolent of '60s sportscars.

What's completely different, however, is the 8C's construction, all its exterior panels moulded from carbonfibre and attached to a steel sub-structure adapted from a shortened Maserati GranTurismo floor. It's effectively a carbonfibre monocoque at the rear, but at the front there's a steel structure from the GranTurismo that provides energy-absorbing crash boxes. Maserati also contributes the double wishbone suspension, the automated-manual six-speed gearbox (Cambiocorsa in Maserati parlance) and numerous smaller components.



The engine is Maserati-related too, this 4.7-litre V8 being an enlarged version of the V8 used in the GranTurismo and the Quattroporte. This stronger V8 produces 450bhp at 7000 yelling rpm, and a 354lb ft slug of torque at 4750rpm, enough to propel the Alfa to 182mph, with scope for demolishing the 0-62mph sprint in 4.2 seconds. Yet there's just as much to appreciate when this car is stationary. The finish of the carbonfibre bodywork is exceptional, the paint as smooth and as deep as a spill of fresh engine oil, with not a hint of weave beneath the surface.

The electric handbrake releases itself the moment you touch sink the accelerator. The Alfa drives off in

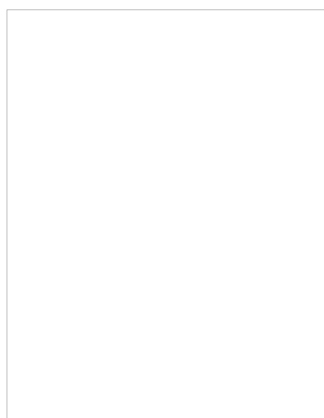
automatic unless you override it, its gearchanges reasonably smooth if not always jerk-free. Left in auto the 8C accelerates with a bold blare and a fair bit of zest, though you'll need a solidly sunk throttle and a good 3500rpm on the tachometer before it really gets moving, the torque peak appearing only 250rpm shy of 5000 revs. But once in that zone, this car goes – and sounds it, too.

“This gives you music,” says long-time Alfa test engineer Domenico Martino, pointing at the ‘Sport’ button that opens a pair of valves in two of the 8C’s four tail-pipes, sharpens the throttle’s response and cuts the gearchange interval from four milliseconds to two. The blat-blat-thump of an upchange adds deliciously to the drama of going for a horizon-shrinking, mashed pedal moment. And it’s good to know that the Brembo brakes, with six-pot calipers up front, and four-piston jobs at the rear, are up to slowing things down again.



All of which makes it that bit easier to make the most of the Competizione’s potency, and find out what it does through bends. The answer depends very much on what your right foot is doing. Enter a tight bend moderately, feed in the power early and you might get the nose running a little wide, though it will come straight back if you ease off. Power late and hard out of a bend and the back wheels will break free - though not for long, because the VDC stability control reins the Alfa in very readily in the Normal mode, and not much later in Sport.

During all this action the Alfa’s steering offers plenty of accuracy and a reasonable build of resistance in a turn, but feel is not something it has much of, making this a less interactive car than Alfa’s old-school rear-drive cars would be. Its manners could use some polish, it’s far from practical and it’s not the most sophisticated of supercars, but it’s beautiful and massively desirable. We’d defy any car enthusiast not to want one.



Words courtesy of **Richard Bremner**, respected motoring journalist and editor of www.cleangreencars.co.uk.

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Photos by **Alfa Romeo**.

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