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BAT Facts: Understanding the extraordinary Bertone-bodied Alfa Romeos of the 1950s

Lead

You might well have seen them at Pebble Beach or Villa d'Este, but what exactly were the futuristic curled-wing wonders known as the 'BAT cars'? Let us be your guide.

What's in a name; are we talking about the Caped Crusader?

Well, no. 'BAT' is not a reference to Gotham City; it stands for 'Berlina Aerodinamica Tecnica Alfa Romeos'.

So how did they come about?

Bertone was commissioned by Alfa Romeo in the early 1950s to produce a series of striking concept vehicles designed to explore the effects of drag on a vehicle. It was all very space-age and took place at the same time as Carrozzeria Touring made the [Disco Volante](#) ('flying saucer'). Bertone's Franco Scaglione masterminded the design project, building all cars on Alfa Romeo 1900 SS chassis.



And were they successful?

In terms of low drag, yes. A drag coefficient of 0.19 was recorded for the very best and, despite the modest 1900cc, four-cylinder engine and extravagant bodywork, a top speed of over 120mph was achievable. Publicity-wise, the cars created a storm wherever they were shown. And still do.

So, BAT 5, BAT 7 and BAT 9 - how many were made?

Between 1953 and 1955, one car per year was revealed at the Turin Motor Show. Three cars in all. Legend has it that the '5' came about as it took five attempts before Scaglione was happy with the final result.





And what happened to them afterwards?

In the period immediately after 1955, all three were bought by American entrepreneur (and business partner of Nuccio Bertone) Stanley Harold 'Wacky' Arnolt II. He drove BAT 5 on the road for many years. When the collection was split up, BAT 7 was raced and fell into quite bad disrepair, and BAT 9 served as a 'gate guardian' outside a General Motors dealership in Michigan. All very sad.

So where are they now?

Thankfully, in good hands, in a single collection. All three were restored in the UK prior to a magnificent unveiling at the 2005 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. They occasionally make other visits to the concours lawn, and have been seen at the Goodwood Cartier Style et Luxe, the Louis Vuitton Bagatelle Concours d'Elegance, Paris and Villa d'Este.

Gallery

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