

CLASSIC DRIVER



This Alpine A110 and Renault Estafette are the perfect Tour Auto twosome

19 April 2016 | Alex Easthope

With Renault's revived Alpine project simmering away nicely, renewed interest in the Gallic brand's historic cars is inevitable. This early A110 'Tour de France' is fresh from restoration, along with the Renault Estafette that will accompany it on historic rallies. Now that's 'joie de vivre'...

The tasteful French duo is owned by Jürgen Clauss, the founder of [AlpineLAB](#) - an online platform for passionate owners and enthusiasts of the Alpine A110. He believes that classic Alpines in general are massively under-appreciated, and is striving to earn them the recognition they deserve, by uniting owners and extensively logging the most original examples. The A110 is a car that needs no introduction - a rally sensation in the late-1960s/early-1970s, it had Gallic charm in abundance and put France back on the motorsport map.

Tour de France



Fresh from a two-year restoration absolutely focused on authenticity and originality, this A110 is an ultra-rare 1100 'Tour de France' model, named by the car's visionary designer Jean Rédélé after the famous French road race. "The Tour de France was a special model prepared by the factory for rallies, equipped with an extra-light body and some rally-specific options," Clauss tells us. The latter included twin-fuel tanks for endurance events, a heated windscreen, lightweight glass-fibre bodywork and bumpers, S.E.V. Marchal headlights, special 'mille miles' rear suspension, and a front-mounted cooling system - an option otherwise reserved for the potent factory competition cars.

This 'Tour de France' was bought by the Swiss racing driver André Wicky for use in his own racing outfit, the Wicky Racing Team. "It was delivered without a motor," says Clauss. "Wicky had a good relationship with the renowned Nice-based engine tuner Bernard Collomb, who we suppose installed a more powerful Gordini racing engine." The resulting 1296cc unit (which remains in the car today) was good for around 135bhp - a useful 40bhp more than the regular 1100.

Short-lived success



Its known competition history is interesting, albeit fleeting. On the treacherously icy stages of the *Rallye Lyon-Charbonnières-Stuttgart-Solitude* in 1966, the car's inherent rallying credentials came to the fore, resulting in a respectable fifth place for Wicky and his co-driver Claude Haldi. Other Alpine A110 1100s claimed first and second overall, in what was the model's first attempt at the event. After its retirement in 1974, this car was miraculously stored in Switzerland for almost 40 years, until Clauss located and negotiated to buy it in 2012.

Rédélé's vision



The final, most potent and wide-bodied Alpine A110s might be most fondly remembered, but there is definitely something to be said for these pure, early examples. "What's so special about the 'Tour de France' in comparison to the later - and much more famous - A110 1800s," comments Clauss, "is

that it retains Rédélé's elegant and wonderfully inconspicuous narrow body – as originally intended.” It's also got rarity very much on its side, with only 10-15 models with the competition additions believed to have ever been built. “It's one of the rarest Alpines in existence, so much so that there's almost no information about it on the Internet!”

Complete the look...



For the discerning owner looking to compete in road-rallies and other events, what better counterpart to such a special car than a custom team van from the period? Another overlooked classic (in comparison to the ubiquitous Citroën H Van, at least), the Renault Estafette was a staple of France in the 'Swinging Sixties'. When Clauss located this remarkably original example, he decided it would make for the perfect 'Service Course' vehicle for his own historic outfit. “I found the Estafette in France last year,” he says. “It's a very rare 'Zone Bleue' version, built specifically for the narrow streets of Paris, with a steering rack that allows for a much tighter turning circle. It's now my AlpineLAB team van, and will accompany me on rallies and events.” It's a French match made in heaven, much like *steak et frites*, or red wine and cheese.

Talk of the town



We can think of few more appropriate cars in which to tackle a rally such as the Tour Auto – the Tour de France Automobile’s spiritual successor. While it might not be the fastest means of travelling from Paris to Cannes (especially in comparison to the ultra-exotic machinery that spearheads the entry list), it would certainly be among the most enjoyable, especially given its rally-bred characteristics. And with your mechanics in tow aboard the team van, you’d surely be the talk of the event.

Photos: AlpineLAB, Editions Maurice Louche

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