

CLASSIC DRIVER

What do you call a Franco-German leaf-blower?

Lead

If you wanted to make a statement in the 1980s, you drove an Alpine A310 V6 in order to express some Gallic flair. Had you wanted to exude European eccentricity, however, you'd have sent it to German tuning house Fleischmann for a makeover that'd blow rival nonconformists into the weeds...

Living in Brighton means that I have become somewhat immune to eccentricities. To elaborate on this, I first need to explain that I'm not originally from here, but what some might see as peculiar in many parts of the world, in Brighton, it can be normal or even mundane.

Vying for attention



Put your cat on a lead and take it for a walk down the high street in West London, for example, and you will be shamed on social media in no time. In Brighton, though, there is a woman who walks her parrot each day to the beach-front, where they enjoy sharing a packet of nuts and having a chat. To each other. This borders on normal behaviour. She is only outdone by the gentleman who sunbathes in stilettos with his chameleon on a chain during the summer and he is, on the whole, ignored.

It is for these reasons that I had to travel out of Brighton in order to spend some time with something that would be totally ignored there, this 1979 Renault Alpine A310 Fleischmann GR4.

A new lease of life



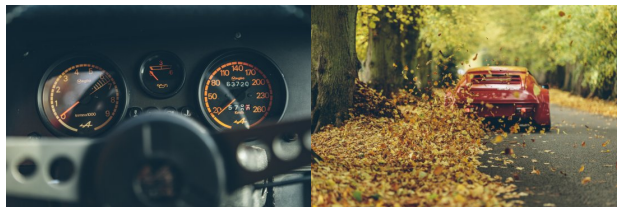
The Renault Alpine A310 was introduced in 1971 and followed on from the highly successful (and World Championship-winning) A110. From launch, the A310 was equipped with a 1600cc four-cylinder Gordini engine, which did a fine job but was perhaps a little breathless. Later, in 1976, the A310 was re-engineered to incorporate a 2.7-litre V6 producing some 150bhp. This was much better suited to the car and transformed it completely. Thanks to its incredibly lightweight design, the Alpine weighed just 980 kilos – and with its new power plant, it was now capable of almost 140mph.

Group 4 for the road



The A310 followed in the footsteps of its predecessor in its motorsport endeavours, albeit with a limited degree of success. One notable triumph was a win at the 1977 Group 4 French Rally Championship. Shortly afterwards, a firm called Fleischmann Tuning of South-West Germany began producing body-kits and tuning parts for the A310, which echoed the aggressive look and performance of the Group 4 cars. Three-stud Gotti deep-dish wheels completed the look, and the ruched soft cloth interior and figure-hugging seats instantly made you want to roll up the sleeves of your leather jacket, pull down your shades and fire up a power ballad.

Full-circle cool



Here in the quaint countryside, the Alpine commanded attention wherever it went – a pretty solid vote of confidence that this era of ‘tuner car’ has completed its full-circle transition, becoming cool once again. In a time when aftermarket modifications are appearing far more, looking back at just how it could and should be done in respect of quality and design cohesion is not a bad thing. And getting home to Brighton and discovering that I now have a new neighbour who has put four pink flamingos in his window means I was right not to bring the car here all along.

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Gallery

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