

THE COMPLETE STORY

Lancia Aurelia Spider B24S-1117

In the early Eighties, I was having a conversation with a friend about what cars we lusted after. When I said I'd always loved the Lancia Fulvia Sport (Zagato), he mentioned that a reclusive retiree from where he worked as a machinist, the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory (originally the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory), had often talked about his old Lancia. Not being in a position to do anything about it at the time, I filed the car and the name in my memory. After a few years, I decided to try to track him down. Being pre-internet era, and only having a rough idea of where he lived, this involved a lot of time searching through old phone books in libraries and such. Letters were sent, and went unanswered, but finally I was able to reach him by phone. At that time he didn't even remember what model it was, only that it was an open car. I remained in touch, but it was another two years before I was granted an audience, though not before being told that it wasn't for sale, and that he was planning on leaving it to his nephews. No matter, I still wanted to know what it was.

I found myself jumping over a chain link fence at a ramshackle ranch on the back roads of Martinez, CA. As he was a retired machinist, I was expecting a neat, precise man, but instead was greeted by a tired old cowboy in ill-fitting clothes. He was just as relieved that I wasn't some sharp kid looking to hustle him out of his prized car. After a time, and more warnings not to be getting any ideas, we headed to his barn. He peeled back the doors, and there, all the way in the back, in all its filthy glory, sat an Aurelia Spider.

He'd bought it new from British Motor Cars, San Francisco, in 1956, trading in his first new car, a Jaguar XK120, receiving \$3,500 towards the \$5,520 for the Spider. Used as a daily commuter, as well as at club events (he belonged to the Tyred Wheel Motor Car Club), it was never raced. After just under 22K miles, mechanical issues had led him to put it away in his barn, where it spent thirty years untouched, spared the fate of other cars that he left to the elements.

We became good friends, and visited regularly. Some years later, when he was terminally ill and in the hospital, he told me he'd heard that his home had been burglarized, and stripped of copper wire, by the same nephews he'd been saving the Spider for. Wanting to be sure the Spider would be in good hands, he'd decided I was to be its caretaker. When he passed away, I wasted no time getting it out of his barn. It took a day and a half to clear a path, and three hours to move it the last twenty-five feet.

It looked worse than it was, though, and the interior and exterior were, for the most part, just cleaned of thirty years of barn dirt and rodent droppings. The motor though, was frozen from sitting for thirty years, and the rest of the mechanicals also needed similar attention. The next five years were spent methodically preparing the Spider to return to the road in as authentic a condition as possible. NOS pistons and liners were a special find, and many small parts had to be fabricated. Though I did almost all the work myself, many friends contributed to the effort, and I could not have done it without their enthusiastic help. In May 1997 I hit the ignition key, and Spider B24S-1117 was cranked

back into life for the first time since 1963, blowing the last acorns and bay nuts out the exhaust pipes in a huge cloud. It made its public debut in 1998, at Concorso Italiano. Over the next dozen year's travels it has averaged 1000 miles a year between reunions, club events, and the Monterey weekend. Designed as a Grand Touring car rather than a racer, it has taken us with ease over the snow covered Sierras to the high deserts, up and down the coast, in the blazing sun and the bitterly cold fog, and has been a reliable companion, never letting us down.

Wear and patina tell a story, and are very much a part of the value of artifacts and antiques, but the concept of conservation, rather than restoration, has only recently been applied to cars. At first merely determined to keep the original paint, a beautiful period pastel green (Verde Alassion), I became ever more committed to saving the original finishes. Factory markings were preserved, or replicated where necessary. Most period changes were retained, in particular the carburetor linkage made by Bill Breeze, a contemporary of Phil Hill, an organizer of the SF Bay Area SCCA, and one of the people who laid out the original Pebble Beach road course. The Spider has its full complement of weather protection gear, complete tool kit, and the original, though spoiled, owner's manual, as well as the original sales contract and manufacturer's warranty.

The intention had never been to make it a show car, but rather to have an honest and usable example of a car of its time, while retaining its history. One other point I've kept in mind is that as one of two known unmolested Spiders, it serves as a benchmark to authenticate others against, so there is a responsibility to maintain it as is.

Even thirteen years ago, in 1998, when we first brought out the Spider, many people thought that an old car should be repainted, re-chromed, etc., and we've turned down many offers from those wanting to restore it "the way it ought to be." Instead, we've taken it as an opportunity to educate, and advance our point of view. We've seen attitudes change (the inclusion of a Preservation Class at many shows is a clear indication of that), and while once our perspective was considered odd and aesthetically challenged, we now are complimented for not ruining the car.

“The Queen of Desires”

-Pininfarina

Story and Photos by: Steve Katzman