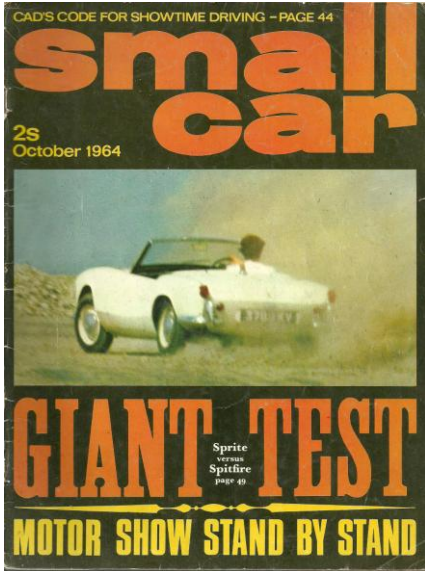


SMALL CARS '65



Leafing through the October 1964 issue of *Small Car* magazine -as you do in your idle moments- I came across a feature on the small cars at that years' Motor Show and a price guide with the above title. Their definition of a small car was one with an engine size of 1800cc or less, a self-confessed arbitrary figure no doubt partially imposed to give them plenty to write about, although we should also bear in mind that a 1.8 engine of that period was also far less powerful than one of today. As some of you may know, *Small Car* eventually became *Car* magazine and continued with its founding principles of unusual layouts, typefaces and

illustrations along with original writing styles and content until it began to take itself rather too seriously during the 1980s.

So, what Italian small cars were to be found within its pages? Well, quite a few and spanning quite a price-range too and it set me thinking that one of the biggest reasons that Italians cars of this period are so rare in Britain today was not just their oft-stated propensity to corrode to just a memory even quicker than was normal at that time but also the fact that there were often rather expensive, sometimes painfully so. Before we look at them in more detail, perhaps we should see what some other cars were costing at that time? For instance, a Mini was £449, an Austin-Healey Sprite £612, a Hillman Super Minx £696, a Lotus Cortina £991, a Morgan £684, a Mini-Cooper S £696 and a Triumph Vitesse £746, all including purchase tax. Of the other foreign contenders, a BMW 1800 was £1441, a DAF 750 £599, an NSU Prinz 4 £551, a Porsche 356 1600C £2064, a Renault 4 £499, a Simca 1000 £600, a Skoda Octavia £601 and VW Beetle 1200 £626, again all tax-paid.



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ALFA'S GT Fast and generally sexy

Taking the Italians alphabetically, an Abarth 850TC seem reasonable value at £975, but a 1300 Bialbero at £3596 was a bit eye-watering. The “truly hideous” Alfa Giulia TI saloon was £1384 while the “fast and generally

sexy” Giulia Sprint 1.6 weighed in at £1841, quite a contrast to the Fiat 500D “Britain’s cheapest proper car” at a bargain £400. Some of the other Fiats were looking a bit expensive though, with the 1500 saloon at £925 and the LHD-only 1600S cabriolet at £1597.



FIAT'S 850 Italy's answer to the Imp

The Lancia Fulvia saloon, “one of the world’s very few really small luxury cars” started at £1390 while the Flavia range began at £1761. As was so often the case, the journalists had very much that was good to say about most of the Italian models, but then it is always easy to do that when you are just driving something and not paying the sticker price.



LANCIA'S FULVIA Back in the business

In truth, not only were the Italians often up against it in terms of price but there was always the matter of a restricted dealer network -remember when Ford and BMC dealers were literally just about everywhere?) and the British distrust of the unconventional, not to say their innate conservatism. However, shortly after this the 1960s exploded and Britain, perhaps rather bemusedly, found itself at the centre of a world-wide revolution in so many spheres. Things were about to change and not only did foreign car ownership soon become far more popular, but nothing would never be the same for our domestic car industry ever again.


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