

Series 4 SPIDER



Authors Jim Talbott and Stuart Taylor with their Spiders at North Weald. (Photo: Andrew Brown.)

Jim Talbott and Stuart Taylor look back at the final version of Alfa's much loved and longest serving sportscar

When the Series 4 Spider was launched at the beginning of 1990, the Giulia 105 Spider had been in production for almost 25 years and many were expecting a completely new Alfa Romeo sportscar. There had been a sudden resurgence of interest in open two seaters, after years of speculation that they would be outlawed in the USA, a prime market for this type of vehicle. The Mazda MX5/ Miata, launched in 1989, was an immediate commercial success, and Lotus had announced its interesting front wheel drive Elan. Fiat, the new owners of Alfa Romeo, were not able to launch the new 16v Spider until 1994 and asked Pininfarina to rework the existing car, and give it a fresher look.

Improved exterior styling

It is universally acknowledged that the restyle was an improvement over the previous model. Pininfarina,

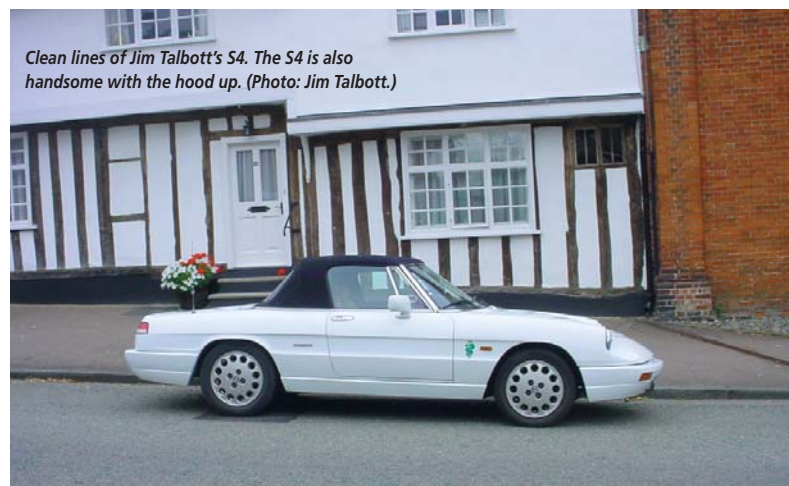
who were by then manufacturing the Spider for Alfa Romeo, produced a car with a much simpler, cleaner and more integrated appearance, losing the 'add on' black plastic look of the Series 3. The front bumper became a one piece, body coloured, item, incorporating the traditional Alfa recesses for the side and front repeater lights and low set side air intakes. It is interesting that this bore an incredibly close resemblance to the one supplied with the Series 3 Zender body kit. Plastic side sill covers, of a more harmonious shape to those seen on the Series 3 Green Cloverleaf, and a one piece rear bumper incorporating an exhaust tail pipe cut out, also coloured coded, were fitted. In place of the black plastic rear spoiler and heavy rear end treatment, the boot lid and rear wings acquired a distinct kick up and wrap around rear lights, similar in style to the 164, which improved aesthetics. The rear lights featured either red or white striping. Large body

coloured electric mirrors, of a new design, were fitted to the doors. US specification cars had a boot mounted 'stop light' and bumper mounted side 'marker' lights, otherwise they were essentially identical to the European cars. In the UK the Spider was offered in 5 colours only: Cold White, Alfa Red, Black, Silver and Metallic Red. In other markets Broom Yellow and English Green were offered.

Close attention was paid to corrosion protection. Better quality steel was used and front wheel arch liners fitted. Wax injection and a durable underbody covering were applied. Although I have spotted Series 4s with tatty bodies and faded paintwork, I have yet to see any with the serious rust problems that so blighted their ancestors. My own 1991 car, which has now done over 100K miles, and was used all the year round for a long time, has only had one small piece of welding, on the floor under the driver's heel. I have kept on top of things, with a



Just the car for a fine day. (Photo: Jim Talbott.)

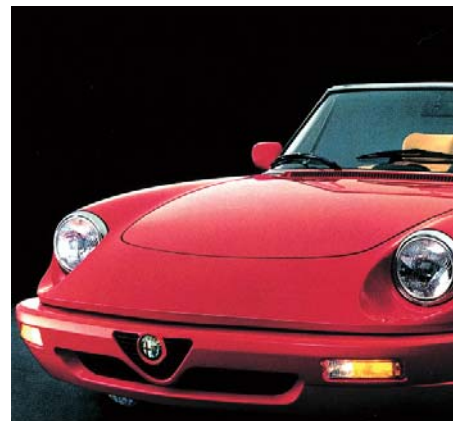


Clean lines of Jim Talbott's S4. The S4 is also handsome with the hood up. (Photo: Jim Talbott.)



Stuart Taylor owned this hard-topped metallic red S4 with Carlos Fandango (OZ) alloys and low profile tyres. (Photo: Stuart Taylor.)

regular Waxoyl top up and a recent ramp check revealed everything is in good order apart from a couple of patches of flaking underseal, soon remedied.



Part of the brochure cover. (Photo: Andrew Brown.)

Dubious interior durability

As well as revising the exterior, Pinfarina carried out a minor re-work of the interior. Much was carried over from the late Series 3 Green Cloverleaf including the single pod instrument panel and 33 style air vents. The door mounted arm rests and pockets were unchanged. US cars featured prominent 'knee protection' padding and some models offered air conditioning. The steering wheel was still the GTV6 style leather item, plastic on the 1.6. US cars had a 164 style four spoke item incorporating an air bag. The seats were redesigned, with Alcantara centre panels and available in vinyl or leather. Interiors were either tan or black, door cards PVC or Alcantara. Regrettably interiors are not very durable and although they looked great when new deteriorate quickly. The foam of the seat bases compress and the Alcantara tends to go 'woolly'. Tan carpets get tatty very quickly, wearing through to the black plastic backing, particularly where they cover the inner sill. Don't let this put you off, however, as re-trim kits are readily available from specialists. I managed to get a moulded Alfa floor carpet in black, which was very expensive and probably no longer available. The rest of the carpet was made up by a local trimmer who did an excellent job and would have made a complete set if required. He also re-stuffed the driver's seat base and fitted a re-trim kit from EB spares, including the door cards, a bit bulky in Alcantara. It is essential to ensure the door gaskets are in good condition to prevent the backing boards from rotting. When carrying out the re-trim it became apparent that many plastic items are no longer available in original tan. To remedy this I arranged for Bradleys, a specialist in plastic coatings for the motor industry, to make up a matching aerosol. This was spot on for colour and works very well. The serial number for this is 10793-01.

Electric windows were fitted to 2 litre cars and they are a mixed blessing. Access to the mechanisms is very tight and the motors on the driver's door tend to go slow before giving up the ghost. My advice is always to replace the cables/regulator and the electric motor at the same time. I found this out the hard way! The switches for these and the electric mirrors are mounted on the centre console, which was slightly revised and featured an analogue rather than digital clock.



Standard steering wheel and interior on Stephen Judd's LHD S4. (Photo: Chris Savill.)



Early Bell & Colvill conversion without the glove box. (Photo: Andrew Brown.)

Specification and performance

Alfa Romeo revised the mechanical specification of the Spider with the launch of the Series 4. It was disappointing that the 2.0 litre 'Twin Spark' engine as fitted to the 75, was not included in the package, instead Alfa opted to fit what was basically the unit from the Alfetta Gold Cloverleaf. This featured variable valve timing and Bosch Motronic ML4.1 electronic fuel injection and ignition. This produced 126bhp at 5800 rpm (120 bhp in catalysed form). Autocar published a 0-60 time of 9.4 secs and a top speed of 118 mph. Adequate but hardly exciting! Fuel consumption: 26.6 mpg urban, 42.7 at a constant 56mph and 32.4 at 75mph. The 1.6, available in some European markets until 1992, continued to use the engine from its Series 3 predecessor with Weber 40DCOM4/5 carburettors, rated at 109bhp. The 2.0 litre came with 6J x 15 alloy wheels, as seen on the Series 3 Green Cloverleaf, fitted with 195/60 R15 tyres, but now the ZF power steering took the effort out of parking and improved drivability. The 1.6 came with 14" steel wheels with plastic wheel trims aping the appearance of the 2 litre cars, or more usually Campagnola five spoke alloys.

The rest of the Series 3 mechanical specification was carried over. The very full engine bay, however, meant that the battery was moved to the boot on the 2 litre and a new twin fan radiator was fitted. A catalyst became standard in 1993 and the 1.6 was dropped in 1992 after 2951 had been built.

RHD conversions

All Series 4 Spiders were built as left hand drive only and any right hand drive cars will have been converted. Alfa Romeo announced at the model's launch that it would be sold in the United Kingdom through the dealer network but in left hand drive form only. To encourage sales they included the hard top as part of the package. This was identical to the Series 3 type. Body coloured, it came with headlining, heated rear window and interior light. Although these make a Spider into a snug two sweater coupe in the winter, the lack of guttering can cause a degree of water ingress and poor sealing can create more wind noise than the easily operated soft top. Bell and Colvill had been importing Series 3 Spiders from the Europe for some time and offering a right hand drive conversion, carried out by Ellisons of Hull. They continued this operation following the launch of the Series 4 but these were not warranted by the manufacturer. Alfa Romeo eventually offered its own warranted conversion, engineered by Seaking, part of TKM, the



Bell and Colvill (Ellison) conversion with the glove box. (Photo: Andrew Brown.)



Seaking conversion: notice the small plaque next to the clock. (Photo: Andrew Brown.)



Seaking conversion plate on the B pillar. (Photo: Andrew Brown.)



The limited edition Beaute of Barry Love. (Photo: Andrew Brown.)



All white interior of Beaute. (Photo: Andrew Brown.)



S4 under bonnet layout wasn't the tidiest. (Photo: Jim Talbott.)

old Alfa Romeo importers. The cost of this was an additional £2000+ bringing the price of the Spider into competition with more sophisticated and newer rivals. My experience is that they are both good. My own car is a 'Seaking' conversion and these can be identified by a plate in the B pillar on the driver's side.

Any conversion requires a fair amount of butchering of the interior trim. The first Bell and Colvill cars lost the glove box, with vinyl merely pulled over the space where it should be. Later cars have a neat moulded dashboard and the Seaking cars have a 'factory look'. Neither stand too close scrutiny inside but are well engineered! Left hand drive pattern windscreen wipers take a bit of getting used to, leaving an unswept area of screen in front of the driver, requiring regular cleaning to improve vision. A word of warning for those with converted cars: On inspecting the scuttle area of my car, I found that water wouldn't drain through the rubber hose on the driver's side, causing a build up of water in this vital area. I discovered that the steering column was pressed so tightly up against the drain hose, that it effectively blocked it. Using some plastic plumbing fittings and re-drilled hole, the situation was remedied. If you have a converted car, take the time to check this out.

Owning a Series 4

I have owned my 1991 Spider for 11 years, using it in all seasons until 2001 when I bought a 156 and relegated it to pleasure motoring. I first saw it advertised in Exchange and Mart at a sports car specialist in Hertfordshire. It was the right specification, Seaking conversion, hardtop, low

mileage and after some haggling, price. The car was gender threatening 'cold white', which I thought looked great but many of my friends thought a bit 'hairdresser'! Previously owned by a merchant bank it was a typical City car with the odd parking scuff and dent. A full, 'London specialist' service history came with the car, which proved to be an interesting piece of creative accounting, rather than mechanical excellence! Not having owned a Giulia for 12 years, I had forgotten how these cars drive. The Spider's 1966 heritage was very apparent and it took a little while to settle in to the car. The nicely weighted power steering felt strange at first but I soon got used to it. The 15" wheels and low profile tyres provided good grip and road holding and almost entirely removed the wet back end breakaway, familiar to Giulia owners. The suspension felt very soft and more 'boulevard' than 'sporting'. I fitted a set of EB spares specially valved Bilsteins and Red Code springs. These transformed the car and at the same time reduced scuttle shake, an unfortunate feature of all Giulia Spiders. I must admit that at first I was disappointed with the performance. Whilst the engine was torquey, I found it fussy and reluctant to rev below 4000 rpm at which point it became more responsive. It was however a great cruiser, quiet and relaxed, except for the wind noise, and 35 mpg was readily achievable. When the exhaust needed replacing, I changed the manifolds and centre section, without a catalyst, for a Series 2 type and fitted a Series 4 rear box. This had quite a significant effect, liberating some extra power and transforming the Spider's drivability. Running the car through the winter months was a bit of a challenge, as it often had to live outside. The heater didn't seem to work until the car was under way and I

confess I used to put a fan heater inside to clear the ice, whilst I ate my breakfast (don't do this at home!) Condensation used to build up on the inside of the, not very well insulated, hard top, freeze overnight and give me a shower on the way to work. In the same way, the long flat boot lid collected snow and ice and the underside required a regular wipe down to keep it free of moisture. The LSD was not very effective in snow covered roads yet to see the snow plough, but a drive home from work on a sunny day, with the hood down was a definite plus. The car has been remarkably reliable apart from its ability to eat batteries and is now fitted with an electrical cut out switch to help with this problem. The gearbox was rebuilt at about 40K miles and a top end overhaul carried out by Jamie Porter at 95K. It has just received its second clutch and has had the odd wheel bearing fitted along with normal service items. A new set of plug leads, however, was frighteningly expensive, for some reason. Series 4s appear to attract wear in the differential, mine appears to be OK so far. As already mentioned the body has been rot free and only required attention due to my or other drivers' carelessness and one encounter with a Red Deer that leapt out of the hedgerow on my way home from work.

With its timeless good looks, the car still attracts a large amount of attention. Many people tell me they always wanted a Spider but were afraid to buy one. I keep advising them a Series 4, properly looked after and maintained by a specialist, is probably more reliable and cheaper to run than many more 'agricultural' sports cars, so go out and find one. I intend to keep mine for good.

Jim Talbott



Boot is of useful size and shape. (Photo: Jim Talbott.)



Black and tan is a pleasing contrast but seats are hard to keep this smart. (Photo: Jim Talbott.)



Smart red S4 belonging to Central Midlands member Dave Atkins. (Photo: John Griffiths Collection.)



Yellow S4 seen at Zandvoort in 2004. (Photo: Stuart Taylor.)

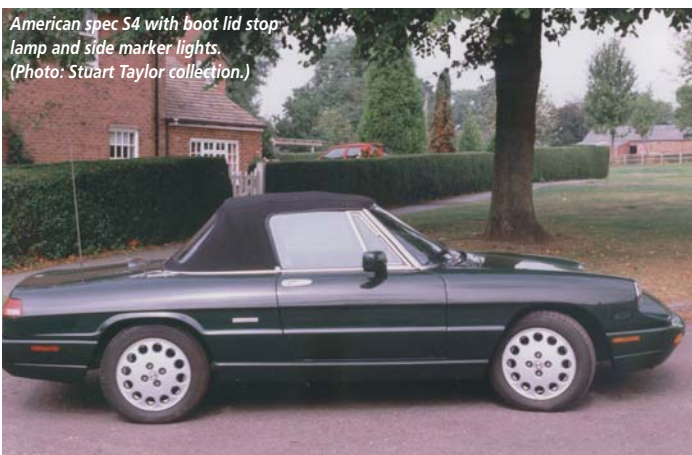
Series 4 'Bits and Pieces'

- 18,456 Series 4 Spiders were made and the US accounted for 75% of sales in the last year of production.
- US models included the Spider and Spider Veloce. The former had a lower specification similar to the 1.6 including the 14" wheels.
- 3 Speed ZF automatic transmission was available in the US. This required a major re- work of the dashboard and centre console.
- The US Series 4 Spider was the only Giulia 105/115 Spider, apart from the Duetto that had virtually identical specification to its European counterpart. Interesting that these were the first and last versions!
- A US run out limited edition, the 'CE' model featured walnut trim, an authentication certificate, and special badging.
- The 16V Spider was never imported in to the USA and the 164 and Series 4 Spiders were the last official Alfa Romeos sold.
- The Beaute had two tone blue and white paintwork and a white interior. The origin of this model seems a bit elusive. Has anybody out there got any more information?
- A Proteo Red Spider appeared in an edition of 'Absolutely Fabulous' driven by Edina
- The distinctive 'teardrop' door handles were fitted to late Fiat Spiders, also built by Pininfarina
- 'Carlos Fandango Bling' OZ wheels, often fitted to Series 4s look great outside a night club, but do little for the ride.
- Spider headlights can be easily improved by fitting 'blue bulbs' available from Halfords

Stuart Taylor



American spec S4 with boot lid stop lamp and side marker lights. (Photo: Stuart Taylor collection.)



Series 4 Marketplace

Alfa Romeos are cars that people can get very passionate about – and the Spider is no exception. You might be seduced by its sleek looks and the prospect of summer motoring with the roof down, enjoying that glorious exhaust note, but take care not to fall for the first car you see and drive. Although left-hand drive examples will look cheap, they will be harder to sell when the time comes.

£1000 - £2000 :

basket cases without an MOT, requiring extensive restoration. Avoid!

£2000 - £4000 :

runners in varying states of repair, showing signs of serious neglect.

£4000 - £5500:

average to good cars, decent left-hand drive examples. Beware of tatty interiors, and most probably early signs of corrosion in the usual places. Check service history and get an expert appraisal.

£5500 - £7500:

the best left-hand drive examples and some of the nicest right-hand drive examples; enthusiast owned with good documented history.

£7500 - £10,000:

mint, low mileage, concours standard, dry weather only cars. Detailed main dealer/specialist service history.

Buy the best one you can, treat it to a good Waxoyling session and revel in the fact you own a true Italian classic that will remain utterly timeless. After several years of stagnation, S4 values have, over the last year, begun to rise significantly. Those in the know have been quick to snap-up the well cared for, low mileage cars as they come on the market and values are definitely reflecting this trend. My advice is buy now, you have never had it so good!

Stuart Taylor

Acknowledgements

Alfa Romeo Spider – Marco Matteucci

S4 Spider Buyers Guide - Tony Soper / Auto Italia



Stuart Taylor's current black S4. (Photo: Stuart Taylor.)