
**Featured
Owner**
*Dayan
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"The proud owner Dayan"

My First Alfa

I switched from wild animals and birds (the feathered kind) to cars as my favourite interest when I was six or seven. Since then it has been a 30+ years of high rpm acceleration into the present day with regard to automobiles.

Forced onto a strict Japanese diet by the Sri Lankan society from the late 70s I knew deep inside that there has to be a better way to really enjoy cars and driving.

To put Sri Lanka into perspective, I only discovered international car magazines when I was 16. Until then I did not know that such things existed. Most of our population still doesn't know and their world is predominantly Japanese.

Being a former British colony, Sri Lankan enthusiasts have a massive affection towards cars from their former mother ship. Therefore Italian marques only register with an exclusive and perhaps better informed few.

Unsurprisingly the Cars like the Datsuns -240Zs and Ford Capri Mk2 were my favorites.

However one important thing did happen to me when I was a kid that would shape me into the raving mad Alfisti that I am today. When I was very little (I can't recall how old I was) But possibly when I was 13 years old (1983) one evening I laid my car hungry eyes on an Alfasud Sprint that arrived at the entrance of a Hotel in Colombo. I only saw the rear three quarter view, but that incident ingrained a memory that I can still recall extremely clearly. For example I even recall that it had a green line running along its side. So now I know it was a Green Clover leaf.

I then started noticing Alfas very slowly. One of my cousins had a brochure of the Alfetta GTV and I remember thinking thoughts like "I would love to own one of these", and "I have not seen a more beautiful car" etc. I was also confused about the Sud Sprint, and the Alfetta GTV in the brochure, initially wondering if they were the same car but knowing there was something different.

Later on I got to see a few Alfa Suds on the roads of Colombo. Of course I had not read anything about them and my father kept telling me that Mercedes was the best car in the world.

I clearly recall that when we were about to buy our first family (used) car, I suggested an Alfasud. But that seemed too much of a crazy move and we settled for a rare in Sri Lanka Mazda 808. Next up was a Mk 4 Cortina even though I cried for a 131 Mirafiori instead, after a few ripping rides in my cousins' 1600 S.

When it was time to buy my 1st car I opted for a Mk 2 VW Jetta Diesel avoiding the default eastern choices. By now I was reading British Mags and so although I always stopped and admired the occasional Alfa on those pages, the blurb contained within hardly inspired confidence. I did however go and see an "Alfa Romeo Car" that was advertised in the Sunday newspapers by a Buddhist monk, at a temple just outside Colombo! It turned out to be a rough red Alfetta saloon. Again that magical feeling hit me just as it had done in the early 80s when I saw the Sud Sprint but soon evaporated when my father and I discovered a Toyota 1400 engine sitting under the bonnet!

When I was in my early 20s working as a stock broker I really wanted something special and so looked around for a "Classic Car". And no we could not afford red 911s despite the job title. More importantly there weren't any! When I consulted a so called expert he directed me towards a Morris Minor which I flatly refused. I was thinking more on the lines of a Renault 5 Gordini or a Fiat X1/9. You simply cannot go out and buy a classic as there's no real market. And cars over 3 years of age are prohibited to enter the country. So locating one is the big hurdle and then influencing the non enthusiast moron to part with it at a reasonable price or at all is an even bigger issue.

In 1995 I left the brokerage and joined my fathers' printing business. I remember reading a news paper ad again that said "Alfa Romeo Sports Car". I went to see it very excited. I was expecting the fast back shape of a SudSprint or an Alfetta GTV. But what I saw was a black GT Junior. Can you believe that I had never seen or heard of a Giulia in my life before?!!!!! I was impressed but on seeing the twin choke twin webbers I

shuddered, thinking of fuel economy and "who's gonna to fix this if ever something goes wrong?" in typical Asian curry car buyer fashion. The blank look that the fellow employee who accompanied me gave me did not help either. So somewhat reluctantly and still awestruck with those big webbers I turned away towards my 1.6 D Jetta. I cannot recall a single word uttered by the seller.

One day my father located a peacefully resting project Citroen ID19 and our Classic Car dreams were alive again. After much persuasion and many visits the owner reluctantly agreed to sell only to refuse us when we 'showed him the money'! On the return journey that was filled with disappointment I spotted a Triumph 2000 Mk2 estate and the twin carbs and straight six made us part with the Citroen money. Then I went down under.

After two years of education in the land of the Holden Commodore, where I learned a bit more about and saw Alfettas, 75s and Transaxle Giuliettas I returned back to Sri Lanka and back to our small family business. However I was not yet an Alfisti and I just dreamed about owning an X 1/9 and the Triumph.

On returning I discovered that the Triumph was in a very poor state compared to what it was when I left the country. This was *after* the complete resto by a rogue restorer.

Frustrated, I tried in vain to sell the thing even though I was impressed by the straight six's smoothness. Obviously no one wanted it and in desperation I was forcing my mind into a 2nd attempted resto that was speeded up when a potential part ex with a 260Z also crumbled. Just as the decision was about to be cemented, a friend pointed to an ad in the local motor mag and suggested I try to do a part ex. "Alfa Romeo Sports cars" it said and had a private address. The picture was that of a Giulia with what looked like Japanese tail lamps. I dismissed it saying he would never agree to a part ex, but we decided to check it out anyway.

It was the same black LHD GT junior except that now it was in (as the owner put it) Ferrari red. The body was far from perfect, it had an engine miss that would not go away and there were those bloody Daihatsu tail lamps. Love at first sight then! To my surprise and glee the seller agreed to take the Triumph wagon and a cash difference.

I *ONLY* drove it on the way home after paying. But the fast drive was an event that changed my car feelings forever. I could feel that this was something very special and that this was the most exotic car that I had ever experienced, while missing on coming traffic by a few inches as I got used to driving a left hand drive car.

After an initial period of trying to get it running 'properly' I settled for an acceptable compromise knowing that my Giulia was indeed in need of a complete strip down and rebuild.

I soon learned that this was only one of 3 105 series Giulias that were alive in Sri Lanka. This particular car was imported to Sri Lanka by a Swede who was employed at the engineering company Skanska. I recently put her picture up on the 105 registry website and Mark tells me my car first went to Panama from the factory. That makes sense as Skanska had some major projects over there before they came to Sri Lanka. I have tried to trace the first owner Mr. T. Person who imported the car. So far the results have been negative.



156 & Giulia Together

However since the year 2000 life has never been the same for me. Classic Car club rallies, races, long drives, the odd hill-climb, or just a mid week blast around Colombo for the sheer heck of it, my Giulia and I became intimate. The scream from the engine at high revs on a good day, the feel from the gearbox (bar the gut wrenching crashes on 2nd and 3rd), the steering, and the ability to totally confuse and stun modern Japanese econoboxes in a sprint got me diving head long into the world of Alfa Romeo. I began reading and learning more and more. The more I read the more I liked as you might expect.

However I had not really got those my wet dreams of the Sudsprint and Alfetta GTV out of memory. Although I was in love with the Giulia, those two lingered inside my head. I began to search and just my luck.....one of each came up for sale at the same time! Tossing and turning in bed for a whole week (or was it two?) wondering which one I should go for, and hopelessly unable to come to a decision; with blood shot eyes derived from a severe lack of sleep I slap banged some hard earned cash on two tables for both. The GTV was in a dismantled state and the Sprint drivable but hardly Concorso D'Eleganza. When they get back on the road they will be the only 'running' GTV and Sprint V in the country



The idea was to keep my Giulia running until these two were sorted out, despite glaring evidence that there was rust in dangerous places of my beauty. The engine would also whisper in my ear that it needed a complete rebuild while the gearbox banged its head in desperation trying to tell me that it is facing a serious lack of attention crisis.

In our sixth year together and on what would have been a wonderful drive through Sri Lanka's misty hill country with winding roads and lush green scenery, at around 110km/h there came from below a shock of a crunch from the gearbox that sent my nervous system into system-overload mode.

When I finally ground to a halt it was evident that something inside the box had broken. It was clearly the time for that total restoration and rebuild.

Right now she's finished her much needed metal work which was considerable (a lot of filler and believe it or not; glass fibre was holding her little red dress together) and awaiting a visit to the paint booth.



On the hillclimb

While her other two siblings are at different stages of regeneration (things happen very **very** slowly over here), the Alfetta GTV being the most complete, I have only my 156 which is my daily runner to fly the cross and serpent flag. Initially I made do with a 2001 Amazonia Green metallic 1.6 TS and have now upgraded to a Nero '01 2.0TS with the 1.6 becoming my father's car. I love them both like I never did the BMWs, Mazdas and Peugeots and even a Mercedes 500 SEC among others that preceded them.

Owning a modern-ish Alfa in our country right now is considered a bit of madness as there is no official dealer (all previous ones were horrendously atrocious and I bet would make the now defunct really bad UK dealers seem like Lexus guys).

I have done a great job in spreading the virus. My brother, a new Mercedes salesman, chose a late 155 2.0TS after a few drives in my 156, while one of my cousins' owns the only running Alfa Sud in Sri Lanka – an early L saloon.

Furthermore all this Italian car fever got me meeting with like minded folk together with whom I have played a part in forming "THE ITALIAN CAR ENTHUSIASTS' CLUB SRI LANKA". Quite a mouthful, I agree. But we have put Italian cars and especially Alfa on back on the map in Sri Lanka.

We have two track days a year among other smaller events and have got a small support from the Italian Embassy.

Alfa has become a part of my life now, and I simply cannot do without that intangible whiff of magic that they do for you on a half decent drive.

And I do get to drive many newer cars in our market thanks to my part time hobby job as a test driver for our local Motor mag. I occasionally think maybe its all some mental disease that I really should snap out of especially after driving an expensive top of the line car. But when I get back and am in my Alfa and suddenly there's a clear stretch of road..... I smile again.

Do I want anymore Alfas? Quite simply the answer is a big YES! I'd like a Duetto/Spider to fill the classic roadster vacancy in the portfolio, but then I can't get past the incredible purity of a 750 series Giulietta Sprint or the sheer drama of the SZ as well! And I would love to replace my 156 with the new Mito or maybe the 149/Milano should it come here some day and if I am able to afford.



156's past & present

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