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We have a Launch Edition 4C in the family (#171), and I drive it a lot. I use it to do instructional and demonstration laps at track events for Ferrari and others.

I've had a few sportscars in my day, and I've driven a boat load more on track. I've got seat time in lots of exotica that if I listed them all people would think I was delusional:-)

But this is all just to say that the 4C is absolutely hands-down the most engaging and race-car feeling on the track of any of them. My Elise and the Ferrari F40 in some ways are probably next closest as far as street cars. I attribute this character to a few things primarily. First and foremost being the unassisted steering. The completely natural feel of this makes the most noticeable difference on track or just driving a pleasant backroad than practically anything else. And it's a sensation that's all but forgotten by many modern enthusiasts these days. If you ever see plots of steering deflection force vs. steering angle, a manual steering rack has a curve that is completely different than any boosted system. Managing traction at the front becomes a completely intuitive exercise. And you feel everything the front end is doing just as you do in a formula car or kart.

Second is the carbon chassis which, no matter how good alloy chassis are, just don't provide the same level of damped but complete rigidity that (I believe) is what gives you a big part of that unique feel and complete connectedness with the car that many people talk about with the 4C.

Another obvious thing that contributes to the formula-car feel is the table-top hard brake pedal that Alfa intentionally engineered into the car. Most high performance cars have pedal feel designed such that the braking force on the car is proportional to how far the pedal has traveled down. Not so with formula cars or karts...and the Alfa. The stopping force is proportional to foot pressure on the pedal, not travel. Big feel difference here. I've not experienced quite the Alfa's brake pedal feel in other sportscars, at any price.

Another major contributor to the characteristically racy feel of the Alfa is the zero toe and very small caster angles at the front. This causes the nose to hunt and move around constantly. To some people, like a lot of the young auto writers who think this is a problem, I have only to say that this is precisely what all racecars that are not based on production cars feel like, and there are few things more evocative of a focused competition car than this. Porsches, as well-respected as they are (I have one), all have trademark loads of self-centering caster. Good on an autobahn but antithetical to a formula car feel (by design for sure).

There are two other essential things about this car's character that are often misunderstood among the press and casual enthusiasts, but which are in fact so thrilling that I want to share to help others understand...

Those who say that normal aspiration would be better than the turbo have missed the point of this car. Its snarls, braps, bangs, whines, whooshes, and wastegate flutters and chatters all add an essential "Le Mans" aspect to the driving experience of this car. You find yourself driving it precisely to have it make these noises; high-performance Italian drama at its finest. The turbo sounds and behavior is essential to the spirit of this car. It couldn't be any other way. And to drive it is to know.

Similarly, those who say that a conventional manual gearbox would be better than the paddle actuated hard-clutch sequential have again missed the point of this car. Pulling the paddles in rapid succession is at the very core of this car's driving experience. Rowing around through gears simply is

incongruous with the performance, response, timescales, and character of this car. Trust me on this one. I made sure my V8 Vantage had a good old fashioned manual, because that suited the power delivery and behavior of the car. But for the 4C, no way. That gearbox is essential to the essence of this car, It couldn't be any other way. And to drive it, *con brio*, is to know.

The very racecar-like quality of utter connectedness also comes from a seat that is basically just a thin rigid low-profile form bolted very low and directly to the carbon tub. With seatbelts pulled tight, you are now wearing the machine like Iron Man. Your sit-bones are now mechanically coupled directly to the chassis of the car, so you will feel the tiniest amount of yaw rates well before you ever would if you were sitting on a seat cushion stacked a foot above the floor. This, (like the feel through manual steering) instantly makes everyone a better driver by making the car-control somehow more instinctual for even an average driver without particular skills. Little subtleties like this, add up to big differences. The Lotus also does this aspect of the seating very well. In fact the fixed one-piece thin seat in the Elise is even better in this regard. The Alfa at least offers a seat-back adjustment (though only a few degrees).

All these things together...the quick bang bang bang of the upshifts, the immediate kick in the small of your back, together with engine noises you'd expect to hear at the Dunlop chicane, and braking and steering feel that are so close to my Winfield Formula Renault, put this 4C in a class of its own, at any price. When you drive it around town it feels like you're driving a 333 SP around a paddock. You always have a ridiculous grin on your face, as I've had each and every time I'm in it. Modern McLarens and Ferraris, for example, are unbelievably impressive sportscars, but they just do not have the same effect on me any more, if ever.

I think most of us know the 4C's are all made literally by hand in Italy. (Google the "How It's Made" series episode on the 4C build for an idea.) But what folks might not know is the "origin of content" numbers on the window stickers of the LEs show 95% Italian. Compare that to other exotic cars of national heritage, and even other famous Italians. Oh and did I mention 40,000 miles so far with no real problems to speak of at all. The doors, suspension, chassis, and driveline feel just as they did when it was new. I attribute this as well to the full carbon architecture. It still feels as if it's entirely carved from billet. I've never seen anything like it really. My Porsche of the same age and mileage is aging quite gracefully of course, but the Alfa is remarkable to still feel like new.

That reminds me I forgot to mention another nice surprise for an LE owner: contrary to the reported-then-repeated nonsense we've all heard, the interiors of the LEs are very well appointed. Nothing cheap about them. OK, so there are 3 climate control dials off of an older Alfa Mito or some Alfa stable-mate like that, and these seem inexplicably to comprise the entirety of every criticism of the car's interior cosmetics. In fact, every single other square millimeter in a 4C LE interior it seems is either wrapped in hand-stitched leather (like the door panels and the entire dashboard), OR is alcantara, OR is pure exposed carbon fiber with an outer weave layer so beautiful that Horacio Pagani complimented it. I had the car at a dealership of a competitor when it first came out, and the first thing the staff said upon checking out the inside was "This is really nice! Not cheap at all." One nit I'd pick is the paddles really should have been nice alloy. The paddles are the most touched "touch points" for the driver and a rigid material with great hand feel there would have gone a long way.

As I've done in the past, I waxed effusive and wrote a short book here for this comment because this Alfa, like others in the marque's proud history, inspires passion. It is nothing short of an Italian masterpiece.