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COMPETING in the European Touring Car Championship in the Snetterton 500 kms. The Alfa Romeo Giulia GTA looked a likely winner until electrical trouble intervened.



Roberto Bussinello

A profile by DICK SUTER

As with French, German and most languages but English, there are two ways of saying "you" in Italian: the formal and the friendly. After a few minutes' conversation with Roberto Bussinello before the Italian Grand Prix he dropped any formalities. This is typical of the man, who is refreshingly more natural than many of the stars of the Italian circuits.

Roberto started racing in 1958 at the age of 28. "I would have liked to have got started long before," he said, "only lack of money stopped me." First car to be used was an Alfa Romeo Sprint Veloce, which was followed by an OSCA 1500 Sports. No outstanding success was achieved with these cars, but he got the feel of driving fast against others and quickly learnt that to finish a race "you've got to try to stick on the track, though the paying public sometimes find off-course excursions far more entertaining."

For 1959 he obtained a F.J. Stanguelini-Fiat, and won the first junior race at Monza. Later in the year he won the F.J. race at the Adriatic resort Cesenatico, and the Boscohiesanuova hill-climb near Verona, which is as fiendishly twisty

as its very name. At the end of 1959 Alessandro de Tomaso invited him to become the test-driver and development engineer for the various de Tomaso projects at Modena. As Bussinello holds a doctorate of engineering this seemed a logical move for both of them.

Driving diverse de Tomaso aspirations Roberto added to his experience, but major successes eluded him. In 1961 he finished fifth in the Naples Grand Prix, driving a Giulietta-engined de Tomaso. The winner was the rising star of that time—Giancarlo Baghetti in a F1 V6 Ferrari. In 1963 he left de Tomaso to work on development projects at Alfa Romeo. "The time spent with de Tomaso was interesting, but he had some crazy ideas, some of which were fine in theory. Invention is fine, but I got the feeling that too many attempts at too many things were the order of the day, rather than a concentrated development programme for one project at a time."

It was not until 1964 that results started coming in more tangible form. Starting off the year with the Sebring 12-Hours race he finished second in the 1,300-1,600 c.c. G.T. class in the Tubolare TZ which he shared with veteran driver Consalvo Sanesi. Then came the Targa Florio, won by Colin Davis and

Antonio Pucci in a 904GTS Porsche, and Bussinello with co-driver Todaro in the Alfa TZ third in general classification. This result was particularly pleasing, for although Ferrari did not send an official entry, the works Porsche, Shelby Cobra, Abarth and A.T.S. teams were there in force—plus a galaxy of independent Ferraris. At Le Mans he and Bruno Deserti finished 13th in general classification and first in their class. A fine finish to the season was at Sandown Park, Australia, where he and his Giulia TI beat the ebullient Bob Jane and his Lotus Cortina.

For 1965 Alfa Romeo formed Autodelta, similar to the Alfa Corse of years gone by: virtually the works racing department. Successes this year include a second place in the 1,300-1,600 c.c. G.T. class at Sebring (with Andrea de Adamich), second place overall to de Adamich in the opening round of the European Touring Car Championship at Monza, and a class win and seventh place in general classification in the ill-fated 1,000 kms. at Monza.

In the Targa Florio he was again leading his class when co-driver Todaro left the road and damaged the new plastic-bodied Alfa TZ2. At the Nürburgring 1,000 kms. the windscreen was smashed shortly after the start, which made driving a draughty business: it did not add to the car's maximum speed either! Bad luck struck at Le Mans when the camshaft broke after 18 hours of racing. At the time the car was well placed for another class win.

Apart from circuit events Roberto took part in the Trento-Bonbone hill-climb with the now homologated Alfa Romeo GTA—and won the class rather easily. But hill-climbing is not his favourite way of spending a weekend, and this event was treated more as a "development session". Closest thing to an absolute victory this year was at the final round of the European Touring Car Championship at Snetterton, when a lighting defect on the newly homologated GTA ruined his chances of beating John Whitmore and the Lotus Cortina. "Next year we'll make sure those lights work," he quipped.

Although contracted to Autodelta for all the events they enter, he has driven for Scuderia Centro-Sud a number of times. He should have driven one of their greater ageing B.R.M.s at Syracuse this year, but in practice the car ran a gearbox bearing and as the Scuderia was not carrying any spares, Roberto did not get a drive in the race. On his first visit to Silverstone for the International Trophy he drove steadily to finish 13th, again in the early model B.R.M. He also went to the German Grand Prix, but after some practice laps it was discovered that he did not have an entry, so another driver took over the car for the race.

At the wheel of the B.R.M. he drove a lonely Italian Grand Prix, with his eyes in the mirrors even more than on the road, to keep out of the way of the more competitive F1 machinery. But he was classified, though he finished last. Next year he will again drive for Alfa Romeo—who have something interesting up their sleeve but won't say what it is. I think it may be a largish engine, perhaps a V-type.

He may also drive for Centro-Sud, but this depends on engine availability. He likes big engines and road circuits: given the right car he should be worth watching next year, especially on Targa Florio, Nürburgring and Mugello-type courses.