



## ***Me And My Car: Alfa Romeo fan comes full circle from 'poor man's Alfa' to Giulia QV in 50 years***

***By Toh Yong Chuan, Straits Times***



SINGAPORE – When Mr Wong Seng Cheong started driving in 1974, his first car was a Fiat 124 sedan.

“It was also known as the poor man’s Alfa Romeo,” the 71-year-old retired architect says. The Fiat ignited his interest in cars and Alfa Romeos.

“I was so smitten with the Alfasud then that I almost bought a second-hand unit even though it had a rust hole on its door the size of a 50-cent coin,” he recalls.

The Alfasud was a small family car made by Alfa Romeo in the 1970s and 1980s.

Fast-forward 50 years, and Mr Wong’s association with the Italian marque comes full circle.

He is currently driving an Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio (Italian for “four-leaf clover”) – the top-of-the-line variant of the Giulia line of sedans launched by Alfa Romeo in 2015.

The latest Giulia QV, powered by a 2.9-litre V6 engine, was launched for sale in Singapore in March and Mr Wong is the first owner to take delivery of the car here.



The self-professed petrol head bought the car without test-driving it.

“This type of car, one has to buy by doing extensive research on other people’s test drives,” he says. “Locally, there is no way one can do a proper test drive, even if one has the skills.”

He recalls researching about the car and walking into the local Alfa Romeo showroom in May 2023 to make inquiries about it.

At that time, local multi-brand dealership Komoco Holdings had just been appointed the new distributor of Alfa Romeo cars in Singapore. It set up Capella Auto and opened a new Alfa Romeo showroom and service centre in Chang Charn Road on April 1, 2023.

Mr Wong booked his car in August 2023 and waited about seven months before it was registered in April 2024. He picked the car in red as it is “an Alfa original colour”.

But why the Giulia QV? “Well, why not?” he says with a smile. “It is a veritable four-door Ferrari but without the badge.”

The 2.9-litre V6 engine in the Giulia QV is developed by engineer Gianluca Pivetti, who also developed the Ferrari V8 family of engines powering various Ferrari supercars. The V6 engine is sometimes regarded as a Ferrari V8 engine, less two cylinders.

Although Ferrari does not own Alfa Romeo, a brand within the Euro-American Stellantis group, both marques have a shared history through Formula 1 racing. Ferrari founder Enzo Ferrari worked and raced for Alfa Romeo in the 1920s before he founded his own racing team, Scuderia Ferrari, in 1929.

Also, Mr Wong is captivated by the story behind the development of the Giulia.

“It was created by one man’s steely conviction and vision to reclaim Alfa’s heritage,” he says, referring to the late Fiat Chrysler chief executive Sergio Marchionne, who was the driving force behind the development of the Giulia.

It was conceived as a rear-wheel-drive sports sedan built on a new platform. It was unveiled in 2015 as part of a broader plan to revitalise the Alfa Romeo brand.

Mr Wong is not bothered by the Giulia being a nine-year-old design.

He had considered the G80-generation of the BMW M3, but two factors swayed him to the Giulia.

The M3 cost “a whopping \$600,000”, compared with \$430,000 for the Giulia QV then. “That’s a no-brainer,” he says of the price.

The other factor was the “over-complexity” of the M3. There are too many driving modes, and too much electronics and touchscreen-related control, Mr Wong says, preferring the simpler Giulia QV.

Before the Alfa, he owned an FK8 generation of the Honda Civic Type R, which he bought from Honda agent Kah Motor in February 2021 after a six-month wait.

“I thought it would be my final car, or at least my final car powered by a combustion engine,” he says. But he recounts often being mistaken for driving his son’s car.



“I was greeted with this comment many times: ‘Uncle, your son’s car very swee,’” he remarks, using the Hokkien word for good-looking.

“It made me decide that I had to part company with the FK8, unless I could reverse-age.”

Besides the Giulia QV, Mr Wong also has a 2017 Honda Odyssey. The other cars he previously owned include a few Honda Civics, an E36 generation of the BMW 3-series and two Subaru WRXs.

Mr Wong is planning to drive the Giulia QV to Penang in July, with stops in Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur.

He has no intention of modifying his car. “It is not wise to modify the car. Having paid so much for all this engineering, why mess around with it?”

On Alfa Romeo’s reputation for poor reliability, Mr Wong notes that the platform on which the Giulia is developed “is of a different quality from Alfa’s previous product”.

He is also hopeful that since the car has been in production since 2015, Alfa has ironed out its early bugs.

Even so, he says: “All my fingers and toes are crossed.”



What's in the boot?



A sports bag and two containers with car washing and cleaning gear