



NEWSLETTER

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20 YEARS OF ENTHUSIASM

The business started 20 years ago in 1967. But the love affair started years earlier. It was 1958 when John Shankle bought an Alfa Giulietta Veloce Spider from Thoroughbred Motor Cars in Oklahoma City. As a young engineer John campaigned his car regularly, gaining valuable race experience in careful box stock engine tuning which was the only "competitive" advantage allowed under the rules.

In 1962 he moved to California to begin work in fluid flow and thermodynamics with Garrett Air Research. His experience in aerospace engineering had direct application for his hobby in two ways: he gained first-hand experience in using a scientific approach to pushing back the limits of the unknown, and gained some very practical experience in fluid dynamics.

This on-the-job training could'nt have come at a better time. Racing in Southern California was conducted under "Cal-Club" rules, which permitted extensive modifications for improved performance: indeed, to be competitive, a car had to be improved.

A measure of growing commitment to racing was the purchase, in 1966, of a GTA Alfa Romeo. In order to gain wider exposure for the new GTV coupes, Alfa produced a very limited series of lightweight racing GTA coupes. At a glance, they appeared identical to the GTV, but were thoroughbred race cars lightened with panels of aluminum and fitted with a specially-tuned engine and modified suspension.

AutoDelta, Alfa's racing organization, campaigned some specially-modified GTA's in the USA: it was one of these cars which John obtained, in the GTA, he had not only a very competitive platform for further development, but also the definitive statement of how Alfa thought its own cars should be modified.

The decision to leave Garrett to pursue his own interests came in 1967 when John and a Garrett co-worker, Dick Gebhardt, formed Shankle Automotive Engineering. The new company's first challenge was to build a dynamometer which could be used to monitor the results of their engine modifications. In addition, a flow bench was constructed to test improved cylinder head designs. It all paid off.

The Shankle GTA made an immediate impression on west coast racing. John won his second race in it, at

Santa Barbara while he was still really learning to drive it. These were the halcyon years of Cal-Club, with BMW and Lotus Cortina Ford being John's frequent competitors. It was also the Ausca era: Horst Kwech campaigned GTA Alfa's out of Chicago with active factory support, while Chuck Stoddard fielded a Turbolare Zagato Alfa from his dealership in Cleveland.

Late in 1967, the GTA was wrecked, John installed the good pieces of his wrecked GTA in Vic Provenzano's GTA for the National Championship races at Daytona. This proved to be a winning combination, and was just the first of Shankle equipped National Championships to be won.

Now concentrating on custom engine development for many diverse racers including Dennis Firestone, Craig Breedlove, Al Unser Jr., Dan Gurney, race winning horsepower was derived from Lancia, Lotus, Ford Pinto, Super Vee. National Championships were won with Lotus CSR, Alfa CSR, Alfa GTA Jr., Formula Ford, Alfa Giulia. Horsepower is king.

Slowly, Shankle Automotive Engineering moved away from pure race preparation and into applying race-developed techniques to street cars. Under Dave Light, Alfa aficionado, Lotus lover, and motorcycle enthusiast the first Shankle performance catalog appeared in 1976. In 1977, George Cheyne a many time amateur racing champion in various road racing cars from Alfa Romeo to Formula Ford, joined the company to round out the management team.

There is probably no part of an Alfa that Shankle Engineering has not looked at, trying to improve it. Part of the investigation springs from the love of a challenge, and part from a curiosity in discovery how new things work. Alfa owners world-wide have benefitted from these inquiries into the intricacies of Alfa engineering.

In 1982 the company moved from its original Van Nuys location to a new facility in Chatsworth, California. The business continues to thrive, as this 20th-anniversary demonstrates. It is perhaps a long way from the stock box production car races of the late 1950s to the expansive business they inspired. But 20 years' of curiosity, training and a willingness to meet challenges continue to make Shankle Automotive Engineering a single source of information and parts for Alfa enthusiasts world-wide. We invite Alfa enthusiasts everywhere to share in the celebration of John's 20th anniversary.

