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Full yearly Membership fees:

1 January to 31 December
Social \$45
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Family \$90
(2 adults + kids under 18 - Family rate allows up to two competition members.)
Note: Applicants who wish to join part-way through the year will be charged a pro-rata membership fee based on the number of months left in the membership year. See the application form for details.

Meetings

Southern members meet on the final Tuesday of each month, January through to November, at the Civic Club, 134 Davey Street, Hobart.
The committee meeting is held between 6.30-8.00 pm. Drop in any night.

CMI's AGM is generally held at 7 pm on the last Tuesday of November at the Civic Club, Hobart.

All contributions to Veloce

Nota are welcome and when published earn points towards the Clubman of the Year Award.

Please send all letters and contributions to The Editor: cmi.editorial@gmail.com

Disclaimer

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CMI Life members:

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Steve Caplice—State Motorsport Official of 2024

Steve Caplice and I have been friends ever since I joined the club, and have been fellow Targa Tasmania competitors more times than I can remember. So I am very pleased to filch some kind remarks about him from the Club's Facebook page:

Congratulations to CMI club member Steve Caplice in being awarded State Motorsport Official of the year for 2024.

Steve has been a member of Club Motori Italia for over 30 years

during which time he consistently served the club as its Scrutineer and regularly as Clerk of Course. As well as preparing event entry lists and allowing his workshop to be used for vehicle scrutiny and a communication base for CMI activities.

Steve has also been chief scrutineer at Baskerville and Symmons Plains race meetings for 25 years and has just recently been serving as national Aussie Car technical delegate at races around Australia and New Zealand. Thank you Steve!

I just did the Hillclimb/supersprint at Baskerville in Franklin Trouw's MX-5, which was a revelation in handling and performance. Thanks, Franklin!

Taking about one second a year off your best lap time is OK until you get in a car you have hardly ever driven and knock three seconds off it!

Still, 180 hp and 21st-century handling makes a lot of difference. And I found that when pushed hard it would certainly misbehave—by sliding the back end, although a little less suddenly and more controllably than the OT does!



Pic by Alastair Watson

Presidential Patter

After a quiet couple of months our Hillclimb/Supersprint out at Baskerville was a welcome return to club activities. I hope everyone who attended had as much fun as I did. From my point of view, It was thoroughly enjoyable running around in the green Alfasud, alongside Dad (Robert) in his Alfasud, the only representatives of Scuderia Italia.

Looking ahead, we have a cryptic drive booked in for late May, which will no doubt be a pleasant day spent traveling through the Tasmanian countryside.

That's all from me.

Ciao

John



After the OT 1600 lunched its diff at Symmons Plains I started putting in the spare gearbox while I tried to source new diff parts. This involved removing the engine, the half-shafts and the broken gearbox – and to take the half-shafts out I had to undo the safety wire I had put in to prevent the various bolts unscrewing (which they do).

I may have mentioned this before, but I originally made myself a wire twister out of an old square screwdriver with a hole drilled through the end. It works quite well, but when I had a lot of safety wiring to do recently I bought a kit: a roll of stainless-steel wire and the fancy pliers to put it on with. These are much faster and easier.

I got my pliers from Scott Arthur at Mobile Workshop Supplies. I've wired a bolt in the vice just to show both methods in action.

The pliers have built-in cutters and a locking device, as well as a nifty spiral that you pull to twist the wire.

Two words of warning: don't over-twist, as the wire will break; and make sure you bend the cut-off ends over. They are needle-sharp!



Non-immobilising

The Bambino has been a pretty reliable car on the whole. The countless quips from all sorts of strangers after finding out that it is a Fiat just didn't ring true. "You know what FIAT stands for don't you?..." Take a deep breath, feign a smile then tell them that it has been reliable and my everyday car since I bought it in 1982.

Despite the vast majority of the time being hassle-free motoring it did have its moments, so it is not entirely faultless, but there were not many. Not bad for a fairly heavily modified car.

In spite of the fancy crankshaft and the engine having been balanced by Tim Harlock, who was Brisbane's leading balancer at the time, it still vibrated. It is a parallel twin after all. One of my routine service jobs was to check all of the accessible nuts and bolts on the drive train.

One sunny weekend in the late 1980s, my brother, two friends and I decided to take the Bambino down to the Gold Coast for the day. This was a roughly 250 km round trip from home. We travelled down there happily keeping up with the traffic cruising at 100 km/h on flat sections and slowing a bit on the hills with four on board. We enjoyed a swim and decided to adjourn to a local pub to escape the heat of the afternoon. We were listening to live music, consuming cold beer and decided to eat then head home a bit later. I was the designated driver (even back then!) and eventually encouraged everyone to insert themselves into the Bambino and we headed home quite late.

After a while the engine started randomly missing. No obvious

pattern, just missing, then running fine. Load didn't matter. Revs didn't matter. I kept a new condenser in the glove tray-compartment-thingy because the Bambino had a habit of consuming condensers. By the light of a phone box and a bit of jiggery pokery we changed the condenser and the miss was seemingly fixed. We continued on our merry way until shortly the miss came back and quickly turned into running on only one cylinder.

Most of the road back then had no lighting and we did not have a torch so attempting to diagnose the problem was near impossible. And everything on a Bambino engine gets really, really hot. There was nothing to do but limp on – no mobile phones in the 1980s and very few other motorists on the road that late at night. What should have been a roughly 90-minute trip turned into a 5-hour epic journey.

The poor one-cylinder Bambino couldn't manage hills with passengers on board. Everyone else had to get out of the car. Our routine became passengers out, drive up the hill to a point where it could get going with full load again, wait for slightly drunken stragglers to walk up the hill to the car and off we go until the next hill.

We followed this procedure on the highway until we got into Brisbane proper - which presented new challenges. We soon discovered that not only was the Bambino unable to negotiate hills with passengers, it could not do a steep hill start at all. And there were several steep hill starts necessary because of stop signs and red lights on Brisbane's hilly streets. The

cunning plan hatched by the band of sobering passengers was to stop before such hills, passengers disembark, someone run ahead up the hill to the intersection, attempt to stop any traffic and signal the all clear for the Bambino to chug up the hill then comically and very slowly crawl through the intersection without stopping.

After a long night and a short sleep, I was up the next morning expecting to find bad news in the engine bay. I opened the boot and had a quick look around. The spark plugs on these air-cooled engines pass through holes in the shrouding tinware to access the cylinder head. The spark plug leads also pass through these holes and there are rubber grommets that fit firmly over the leads and seal the holes. I immediately noticed that one of the grommets was popped out of the hole. I grabbed that lead and it was not connected to the spark plug any more. I pushed it back on, re-seated the grommet, started the car and bingo, running on all two cylinders again.

I now frequently check that the leads are properly seated on the spark plugs.

The loose plug lead was not the only occasion that the Bambino ended up running on one cylinder. This time, one cylinder stopped firing without warning and was accompanied by a worryingly loud rattle. Thankfully it happened almost right outside a friend's house. Not liking the rattle, I didn't want to drive anywhere and left the Bambino in his driveway. My friend took me home to grab tools, then I started investigating.

Plug leads and plugs were in place and there was spark to

both cylinders. I removed the rocker cover to check valve clearances and it was obvious what the problem was. The pushrods are alloy tubes with steel ends pressed on. The end on one of the inlet valve pushrods had come loose. Thankfully it was just floating around in the top of the pushrod tube and no other damage had been done. No wonder it was running on one cylinder because the inlet valve was not opening and the top of the pushrod was the source of the loud rattle. Another trip home to grab a pushrod out of a spare engine and half an hour later the car was up and running properly again.

On another occasion I thought that the engine was down a bit on power and sort of surging with slight changes in throttle. This behaviour progressively became more pronounced, to the point where I had to investigate. Compression was fine in both cylinders and valve clearances were in specification. The carby was functioning properly. A timing light revealed that strange things were going on with the ignition timing.

At idle it was close to where it should be but open the throttle and it would retard as revs picked up. If the throttle was held steady then eased off a little the timing would greatly advance for a moment, then retard if throttle was applied. I removed the distributor and our local auto electrician checked the advance curve and reported that the distributor was in good health and advancing properly. Very strange.

I refitted the distributor and the engine continued to have the unusual symptoms. I drove to the auto electrician for him to see what was going on as I

thought that maybe my cheap adjustable timing light was misbehaving. He witnessed the strange behaviour, scratched his head and jokingly suggested that the ignition was haunted.

The distributor is driven by a gear on the camshaft and the only thing that I could think of was that there was something going on with that gear. I didn't know if the gear was integral with the cam (likely) or, I was hoping, was pressed on (unlikely) and perhaps became able to move several degrees around the camshaft. I dismantled the engine to extract the camshaft and ... the gear was one with the camshaft. Damn. I was starting to think that it *was* haunted.

I reassembled the engine and started it to witness the same symptoms. I turned it off, pushed it into the naughty corner of a shed and walked away. Nobody had any idea other than checking the things that had already been double-checked.

I started doubting myself about the gear drive and decided to again pull out the camshaft to show to John McLean Motors. Maybe there were signs of wear such that the distributor could skip a tooth and my amateur, inexperienced eye wouldn't know the difference. No. Nothing wrong with the camshaft or gear on the distributor.

I despondently decided to thoroughly clean everything ready to reassemble the cursed engine when I noticed something. I was removing oil sludge from the centrifugal oil filtration cover before fitting it when I found shavings and small chips of metal. My spirits worsened as I assumed that there was nasty damage lurking deeper in the engine. I found tubs to put all of the en-

gine bits and pieces in as there seemed no point continuing with assembly. I picked up the crankshaft timing sprocket to put into its container, idly looked at it and wondered why they would bother to machine a couple of millimetre deep grooves that gave clearance on one side of the woodruff key slot. Obviously, to make it easy to initially locate the sprocket on the woodruff key.

Wait on! I grabbed the woodruff key and fitted the sprocket on the crankshaft. I had assumed that once torqued up the key went into the sprocket much deeper than the groove. I torqued it on then slightly backed off the nut. I could rotate the sprocket many degrees along that groove.

It turned out that the woodruff key was not the correct one. Once I knew (remember amateur, inexperienced) it was obviously way too short in the slot in the crankshaft, had been engaging the sprocket by a couple of millimetres only and was happily machining its way around the sprocket. That's where the metal shavings and chips had come from.

The result was that for a while I had the first (and last) 1969 Fiat 500 with variable valve and ignition timing. Accelerate and both timings would retard.

In the next issue: the Bambino reaches its potential



In late December/early January, I set about developing the Alfasud to be more competitive in the under 2L category of Improved Production. The first step was to build up a new, race orientated motor for it. I spent a substantial amount of money on this motor, with fresh bearings, rings, seals etc, balanced pistons, conrods and crankshaft. The party piece was a set of Autodelta camshafts from the Alfasud Trofeo race series in Italy. To make the Alfasud cams compatible with the Ported 33 QV heads I had, Richard Gibbs machined a set of inlet valves to specific measurements.

Thanks to the use of an engine crane, swapping the old engine for the new one was a much simpler task than it had been previously. I spent the next day preparing the engine for its first start. During this process, we discovered the fuel pump was leaking. A bolt holding the pump to the engine was stripped. Three hours later, it was sorted. A little while after that, the car was running!

While running in the motor, a few problems cropped up. One was a huge oil leak, thanks to some aftermarket drain holes in the cam boxes (a modification by the previous owner). New washers fixed half of these, while the remaining screws decided to strip in the aluminium thread. We fixed this by glueing the screws in. The second issue was an abundant lack of power. A faulty distributor was the perpetrator, so I borrowed one from Dad's car (thanks for that). After that, hills were no longer a such a challenge.

Once the motor was sorted out, I set my sights on modifying the

front suspension - the Alfa being well documented to churn through tyres. I had been put in touch with a Motorsport engineer – Jack Perry at Imagin Motorsport.

Jack modified the base of the shock, allowing for more camber. When I got these back a week before the event (yep, cutting things close, again!), I discovered I could not put the wheels on the car without spacers. This wasn't such a big issue as I already had spacers. What I didn't have however were wheel bolts long enough to use with them. In a desperate attempt to make something work, I test fitted different wheels and discovered Lancia wheels let the bolts stick slightly further out. But with 18mm of spacing required to clear the shock, I had to order longer bolts from Melbourne. These arrived Tuesday, 4 days out from the event.

On Thursday, I got it all together, and felt I was ready for a wheel alignment. On Thursday morning, I went off to the wheel alignment in Moonah. As I set off however, the car was dangerously wobbly due to the seriously out of whack alignment. In a mad rush, I put the car on the trailer, and raced out to Moonah as fast as the law permitted. But by the time I arrived in Moonah, I'd missed my appointment. Stressed and panicking, I called Jack, the motorsport engineer, who happened to be having a quiet day, and he told me to bring the Alfa to his workshop.

After a quick wheel alignment, we discovered the car had 5.5 degrees of negative camber. I wanted -3.5. So poor Jack had to undo his previous efforts on the car and do it all again. By mid-afternoon, the car was set up

how I wanted. But I had a new problem. The wheel bolts I had were now too long! With less camber, I required a smaller wheel spacer to avoid banging the guard. A friend who does tyre fitting was willing to help out the next morning. After swapping the tyres from the Lancia wheels back to the Alfa wheels, I now had a correctly set up race car. That same afternoon, I made the journey up to Symmons Plains.

It was now race day! I was excited, but also nervous. Qualifying was the first session of the programme. I was taking it easy the first few laps, but on my first push lap, I noticed a slight



lack of power down the straight. Aware something was off, I pulled into the pits. While going down the pitlane, I could hear a very subtle, yet unmistakable death rattle associated with big end bearing failure. I dreaded the thought of another big end bearing going. To put my mind at ease, and confirm what the rattle was, I ripped the sump off, unbolted big end cap #1. There it was, one destroyed big end bearing—my race was over. I spent the remainder of the event on a flag point.

When I returned home a couple days later, I relegated the car to solitary confinement, while I slowly built up the willpower to get back in the shed. After a few

weeks avoiding any mention of race cars, or indeed cars at all, I put on a brave face and spent a couple of days swapping the “new motor” for the “old motor”. A week later I put my work to the test, spending a day taking passengers for hot laps around Baskerville.

Happy with how the passenger hot lap day went, and having learned from my previous mistakes, I left the car alone until its next event—round two of the Tasmanian Circuit racing championship (TCRC).

My new low stress strategy netted me my best ever event results-wise. Even though I was

treat, unlocking more performance out of the car, bumping nearly a whole second off my PB! I was now into the low 1:06s!

My success didn’t stop with a new pb either: after my bad luck last round, it was everyone else’s turn this time! An Escort had a gearbox fail on Saturday, so they missed the first race, another Escort blew up their engine on Sunday, ending their weekend. The accelerator pedal fell off the leader’s Datsun 1200 in the penultimate race. And a nasty crash for Mary in her Mirage allowed the little Alfa to sneak through to claim second place!



I've recently come to the conclusion that while driving racing cars is an absolute hoot, getting in and out of the damned things is a proper pain in the bum! John Madigan's Improved Production series Alfasud TI is no exception; climbing over—or more accurately *through*—the car's six point roll cage and into its narrow, super-supportive driver's racing seat requires yogic levels of flexibility and dexterity that I don't really possess.

The strapping-in procedure was similarly fraught, fighting with broad slabs of webbing, adjusters, buckles and, worst of all, the six point system's too-snug crotch straps! Just as well John was there to close the door for me, because I had no chance of reaching the door-pull by myself.

Now securely trussed-in, I was surprised just how low the Alfasud's seating position felt, with the dashboard being much higher than I'd imagined and the grippy, deeply-dished suede steering wheel closer to my face than anticipated. However, the car's instruments remained visi-



Baskerville. Image by Callanrs2000 Motorsport Media.

ble and the gear-shift was beautifully positioned, falling easily to hand. Any doubts I had about the narrow, lozenge-shaped pedals' spacing were soon dispelled, with practice heel-toe shifts found to be easily achievable.

It only took a few turns of the key and a bit of right boot to fire the feisty little Alfa up, the car making the most glorious combination of induction noise - courtesy of its twin 36 mm Weber IDFs - and a rorty but not overly loud exhaust note via standard manifolds, a two inch pipe and a single sports muffler. There's no sound deadening, it being one of the few things that can be legally deleted

in Improved Production cars, but the interior wasn't too noisy, even at high engine speeds.

The 1.5 litre Quadrifoglio Verde boxer engine puts out about 105 bhp - maybe a little more thanks to its ported heads - which is up about 10 ponies on the standard unit. It pulled strongly from low revs, but really came alive when kept between the 5,000 rpm mark and just short of its 7,000 red line. It's no powerhouse but made for great fun in a car that only weighs about 870 kg.

Steering was agile, with super-quick turn in and heaps of feedback, adding to the car's "chuckability" as I negotiated what is, for one day a year, the 11.5 k Longley stage of the Targa Tasmania tarmac rally (<https://targa.com.au/>), only 15 minutes' drive from Hobart's CBD. John credits this to a set of modified coil-overs that permit as much as five degrees of camber, three more than they initially allowed. He runs them at two degrees short of their maximum, though, as he's found that adjusting the camber to its fullest extent isn't good for CV

longevity.



Considering how long the gear shift is, cog-swapping was remarkably precise but not super-rapid. The standard pattern five-speed relies on a solid rod from the shifter to the 'box itself, which is mounted behind the engine in what's a quite rare—and very Alfa—north / south, front wheel drive configuration.

Braking was reassuringly firm and consistent, with good feel and no fade at quickish but road-legal speeds through the tight, twisty Targa stage. The original inboard front discs have been replaced with outboard VL Holden Commodore callipers and ventilated Fiat Punto rotors, while the rear discs are standard issue Alfa fare. The racing pads worked efficiently from cool and only got better from there. Any additional unsprung weight of the now-within-wheel mounted front braking hardware would seem to be a worthwhile trade off.

At speed, the pugnacious Italian felt very nearly unstickable, benefiting from much stiffer than standard springs all-round, coupled with fully height- and rebound-adjustable shocks front



and rear. The ride was firm with no discernible body roll, or pitching under deceleration. The entire chassis was impressively rigid, which is no doubt aided by the inclusion of the aforementioned Targa-spec roll cage.

This combined brilliantly with the car's grippy 185/55/14 Yokohama AO50 Improved Production control tyres on a set of classic Alfa "tele-dial" alloy wheels. Add a really narrow footprint into the mix—'suds are only 1,590 mm wide - and you

find yourself with a lot more road to play on than you would with a more corpulent vehicle.

And play I did, making use of as much of the serpentine, bumpy country road as safely possible, exploiting all the Alfasud's performance and balance in what was one of the most enjoyable country blasts I've had in several years. It was analogue and raw, and very much worth the price of admission, even if that was the risk of a slipped disc! Post-script: The weekend after I drove John's mighty machine, he raced it to second place in his class at the Improved Production meeting held at southern Tasmania's Baskerville Raceway, also shaving a very creditable 0.9 seconds off his personal best lap time on the circuit. Congratulations, John!

Story by Alastair Watson, whose blog you can find at uppermid-dlepetrolhead.blogspot.com.au



Baskerville. Image by Scotty B Photography.

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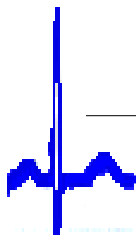
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