



**Alfa has pinned  
great faith in its  
stylish  
newcomer, the  
164. However,  
Simon Arron  
wonders  
whether its  
many plus points  
compensate for  
one or two  
serious flaws**

THERE ARE many generalisations in the world of motoring. Volkswagens are reliable. Cavalier drivers on the M25 are all psychopaths. Alfa Romeo's large saloons can't be taken seriously.

Any rule, no matter how dubious, has its exceptions. Alfa hopes that the 164 will be

just such a thing, for both the Alfa Six and Alfa 90 were elephants of the whitest kind. See if you can spot one of either on a British road, or for that matter an *autostrada*.

Happily for Alfa, the 164 is no lumbering monstrosity. Style is purely subjective, of course, but this is a car with flair, one which stands out in the crowd from Granada-sized rivals such as BMW's 5-series, Renault's 25 or the Rover Vitesse. The front end may not be to everybody's taste, but you can't deny that the 164 is elegantly clothed.

It's an effective performer, too. There are four engine options: a 2.5-litre turbodiesel; the 2.0-litre Twin Spark so effective in the 75; a revised version of the 2.0-litre turbo used in the Lancia Thema ie; and – first to reach the UK – the 3.0 V6, a development of the similarly-sized unit previously seen in the 75.

The Alfa Romeo orchestra's six trumpets rasp aggressively as you make full use of the 192bhp through the lower gears. The engine sounds

right, is flexible, strong and will propel the 1,300kg mass to a shade above 140mph. In short, a true gem.

Bearing in mind the glorious sound effects under acceleration, the V6's cruising capabilities are extraordinary, and at quite the opposite end of the cacophony scale. At anything up to 120mph in top, the cabin remains entirely peaceful – unless those of you who can afford compact discs have the CD player (standard on the Lusso model) in multi-decibel mode.

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It's a brisk sprinter too, capable of 7.6sec from rest to 60mph, but respectable for a car of its size.

So far, so good. Less satisfactory is the manner in which the 164 transfers its copious power to the road, or rather, doesn't. On a dry surface,

brisk application of the throttle in first or second sends the front end skipping alarmingly across the tarmac in a frenzy of torque steer. In the wet, this already serious problem is amplified.

Perhaps the 205/55 VR15 Pirelli P4000s do not mate well with this chassis. To us, the P4000 was an unknown chunk of rubber when the 164 arrived, and Pirelli's UK division is similarly in the dark, knowing only that it is a standard Alfa factory fitment which has yet officially to be launched

over here. In this instance, the marriage is not a success, all the more unusual since the V6 164 at its launch, on different rubber, was free from problems of torque reaction.

This mars an otherwise well-balanced chassis, the crisp handling of which is comple-

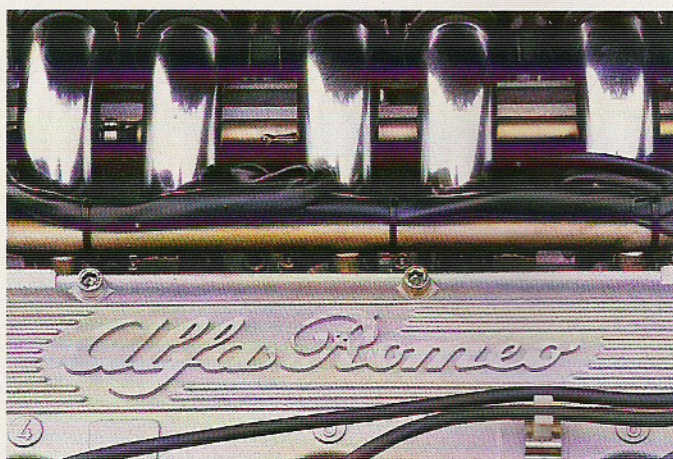
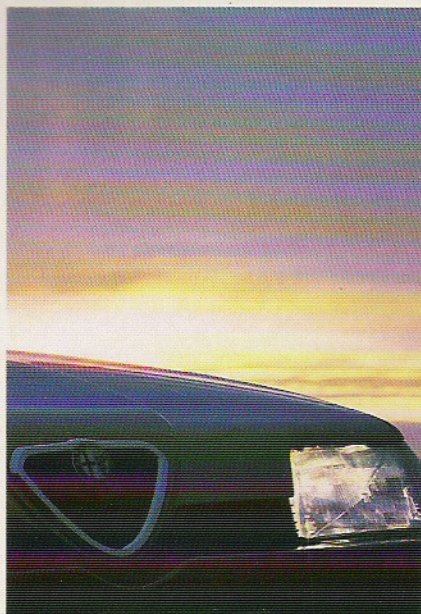


# NEARLY, BUT NOT QUITE



DAVID GOLDMAN





mented by well-weighted power steering. As you would expect given the front-drive configuration, it is that end which loses grip initially, but you have to go some to provoke such a reaction. It turns into quick corners precisely, and flows neutrally through once you're committed. It's such a shame that the aforementioned torque steer gremlin mucks things up around slower, low-gear bends.

In addition, the ride is a match for anything else in the class. The car is as relaxed on motorways as it is quiet, and handles the merciless ruts of Surrey B-roads with equal composure.

The gearbox is by no means perfect yet, with a slightly notchy change that requires a little getting used to. It is, however, a great improvement over other Alfa 'boxes of the recent past, of the rear trans-axle variety, and the five ratios are well-chosen.

Those who drove the initial left-hook 164s on its launch found the all-round ventilated discs (backed up by Bosch ABS) made for a nicely-weighted pedal and progressive braking. Unfortunately this reassuring state of affairs has been lost in the translation to RHD. There is now too much pedal travel before anything happens, and when it does the retardation comes in all at once, leaving you a choice of all or nothing. Smooth braking requires more

than a degree of finesse.

Indoors, the 164 is an extremely comfortable conveyance for four. The driving position is better than that in previous Alfas, although its heritage is vaguely apparent. The range of steering adjustments applies only to rake, rather than reach, which may prevent some drivers from finding a happy compromise.

The seats themselves (electrically adjustable front and rear) provide ample support,

tronic windows and sunroof. Far less satisfactory is the outbreak of black plastic switches on the centre console. Most relate to the over-fussy heating system, with its four-speed fan (extremely noisy) and multi-directional capabilities.

Lost among this lot are such as the fog lamp and heated rear screen controls. It is all rather OTT; nobody could reasonably be expected to operate it as required without diverting their eyes from the

**"The doors slot into place with the sort of thump that echoes 'luxury car'"**

although the hard, flat backrest allows the enthusiastic driver's torso to slide around during fleet cross-country transit.

All dials (analogue to the last) and major controls are well-placed, as are the switches for ancillaries such as elec-

road for longer than would be advisable.

Presuming you have activated the correct heating controls, the system functions well enough via a comprehensive array of vents, which are also poorly labelled and require education in Italian automo-



# ALFA ROMEO 164 3.0 V6 LUSO

bile hieroglyphics. However, the ventilation is dependent upon heater setting.

All-round visibility is first-rate and, generally speaking, the cockpit feels like a good place to be. The overall finish, inside and out, is excellent. Even the doors slot into place with the sort of resounding thump that echoes 'luxury car'. Alfa has also managed to play down its use of plastic; it hasn't yet matched BMW's ability to make cheap materials seem more substantial, but the cabin has a solid, quality feel to it.

For the family man there is a capacious boot, although interior storage space (save for an enormous glove box) is mediocre, and the door pockets are sufficiently inaccessible to be

of virtually no use.

The standard equipment list covers all the aforementioned electrical gadgets plus such as heated electric door mirrors, climate control and six-speaker

er CD/radio hidden from prying eyes by a hinged plastic flap. The 164 buyer will want for little, whether he goes for the 'plain' V6 (at £17,925) or the Lusso (at £20,250, but with alloy wheels, low profile tyres, electric sunroof and CD, all of which would add £2,750 to the

price of the lesser model).

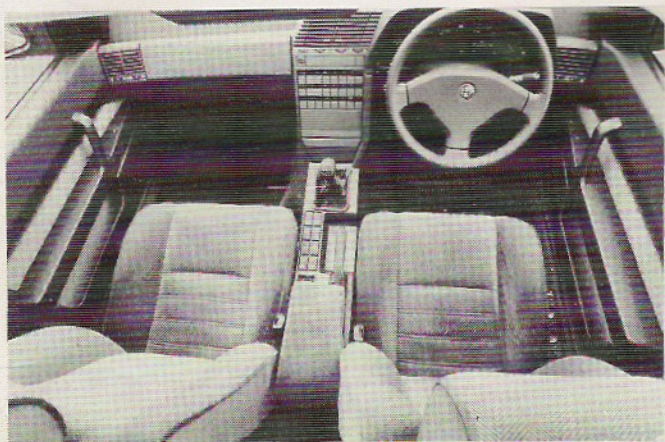
The 164 comes up against the likes of Rover's Vitesse (£19,944), Honda Legend 2.7 (£20,300), Vauxhall Carlton 3.0 GSi (£18,999), BMW

ply on the grounds of its newness. Of the rest, only BMW and Rover can claim any sort of fresh initiative.

It is thus such a shame that the Alfa falls slightly short of initial expectations. It isn't a bad car, far from it, for it has a fine chassis, a wonderful engine and many other attributes.

It is seriously let down by the excessive torque reaction, overservoed brakes and a lack of fine attention to detail in some areas. Given the eagerness with which its arrival was anticipated, it was thus slightly disappointing, although there is nothing amiss which can't – and therefore, we hope, will – be cured.

525iSE (£20,250), Renault 25 V6 (£20,400), Ford Granada Scorpio (£19,918), Volvo 760 Turbo (£20,790), Mercedes-Benz 260E (£22,100) and – conceivably – the Jaguar XJ6 in 2.9-litre guise (£18,400). The Alfa is perhaps the most interesting of the bunch, sim-



## ALFA ROMEO 164 3.0 V6 LUSO

Price (as tested) £20,250

### ENGINE

Cylinders	Six, in 60deg vee	Capacity, cc	2,959
Bore/stroke, mm	93/72.6	Camshaft	Sohc per bank
Compression ratio	9.5:1	Fuel system	Bosch Motronic ML4.1 electronic injection/ignition
Maximum power, bhp/rpm	192/5,600	Max torque, lb ft/rpm	181/3,000

### TRANSMISSION

Type	Five-speed manual		
Internal ratios and mph/1,000rpm			
Fifth	0.93:1/25.8	Fourth	1.13:1/21.2
Third	1.52:1/15.8	Second	2.24:1/10.7
First	3.5:1/6.8	Final drive	2.94:1

### DIMENSIONS

Length, in	Width, in	Height, in	Wheelbase, in	Front/rear track, in	Fuel tank, gall	Kerb weight, cwt
179	69	55	105	59.6/58.6	15.5	25.3

### PERFORMANCE

Maximum speed, mph 141

Acceleration through gears, sec

0-30mph	0-40mph	0-50mph	0-60mph	0-70mph	0-80mph	0-90mph	0-100mph	0-110mph
3.0	4.1	5.9	7.6	10.2	12.9	15.9	20.9	27.2

Acceleration in fourth, sec

30-50mph	40-60mph	50-70mph	60-80mph	70-90mph	80-100mph
7.5	7.5	7.7	8.1	11.3	12.6

Acceleration in fifth, sec

30-50mph	40-60mph	50-70mph	60-80mph	70-90mph
10.1	10.1	10.4	11.1	12.4

### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Overall test figure, mpg 23.1

Government test figures, mpg

Urban cycle 22.1      Steady 56mph 39.2      Steady 75mph 31.0

### MANUFACTURER/IMPORTER

Alfa Romeo GB, Poulton Close, Dover, Kent CT17 0HR