

Alfa 155 Cloverleaf 4



Alfa's own Integrale is quick enough to make the SZ blush, but does it rate as a driver's car?

Price as tested £21,306 **Top speed** 139mph
0-60mph 6.7secs **MPG** 16.3

For Strong performance, grip, precise and communicative steering

Against Appalling fuel consumption, turbo lag, modest handling, driving position, left-hand drive only

FOR A COMPANY THAT has built its reputation on producing cars with an overtly sporting bias, Alfa Romeo's latest model, the 155, hasn't exactly had enthusiasts jumping for joy. And that includes us.

Tested in Twin Spark (26 August 1992) and V6 forms (24 June 1992), the BMW

3-series-sized executive saloon proved to be a spacious but essentially uninspiring car, hung around two very good engines, the 2.5-litre V6 in particular.

Thankfully, all is not lost. The range-topping Cloverleaf 4 puts some much-needed fire into the 155's hitherto soft underbelly.



PETER BURR

Here you'll find real intent behind the triangular bonnet badge in the form of a turbocharged twin-cam 16-valve two-litre engine that produces 190bhp at 6000rpm and a thumping 219lb ft of torque at 2500rpm.

There is also an advanced permanent four-wheel drive system with three differen-

tials — the rear one being of the Torsen variety — and a Ferguson viscous coupling. The distribution of torque between the front and rear axles varies according to the level of grip available, but under normal conditions 47 per cent goes to the front wheels and 53 per cent to the rear. As you may have

guessed, apart from its more reserved bodywork the Cloverleaf 4 is to Alfa what the Integrale is to Lancia.

Falling beneath the Fiat umbrella as both cars do, comparisons between the two come naturally. Both are competition inspired — the Cloverleaf 4 forms the basis of Alfa's touring car efforts in Italy and now Germany — and both are sold as road cars in left-hand-drive form only. Available to special order only and priced at £21,024, the Cloverleaf 4 is more than £1000 cheaper than the latest HF Integrale (£22,703) and easily undercuts its other obvious rally-bred rival, the Ford Escort RS Cosworth (£24,810).

Such is the recent growth in the number of visually understated, turbocharged four-wheel-drive saloons that British buyers can also choose from the Vauxhall Cavalier Turbo 4x4 at £19,137, the Subaru Legacy Turbo (£17,758) and the Rover 420 GSi Sport Turbo (£17,232). Neither will it be long before Peugeot swells these numbers with its left-hand-drive-only 405 T16. Expect it to cost around £20,000.

Powered by what is essentially a detuned Lancia Integrale 16v engine, the Cloverleaf 4 returned the kind of performance figures that would embarrass even the exalted SZ sports car,

pace of these rally-bred rivals. We were wrong. It hits 60mph from rest in just 6.7secs, passes the quarter-mile post in 15.2secs and sprints from 30-70mph through the gears in just 6.4secs — all superb results and, give or take a few tenths, within a hair's breadth of the Lancia's performance (6.0secs, 14.7secs and 6.0secs respectively) and even closer to that of the Escort Cosworth (6.2secs, 14.9secs, 6.3secs). A fine top speed of 139mph confirmed that every one of the test car's 190 horses was in peak physical condition.

All 219lb ft of torque was on parade, too, though not necessarily in the same place that Alfa scheduled it to appear. Expect the big bang to coincide with the claimed torque peak of 2500rpm and you'll be disappointed. We had to wait until the far side of 3000rpm before the turbo spooled up to speed. But it's worth waiting for. The 155 takes just 5.6secs to cover the 50-70mph increment in top; that's more than any TVR Griffith or Porsche 928 can claim. Gearing plays a big part in making the Cloverleaf 4 such a strong sprinter: its top ratio is only 21.7mph per 1000rpm.

The price for using such performance is paid every time you fill up, which is going to occur frequently if the dreadful 16.3mpg we



Alfa costs more than saloon rivals but less than Lancia

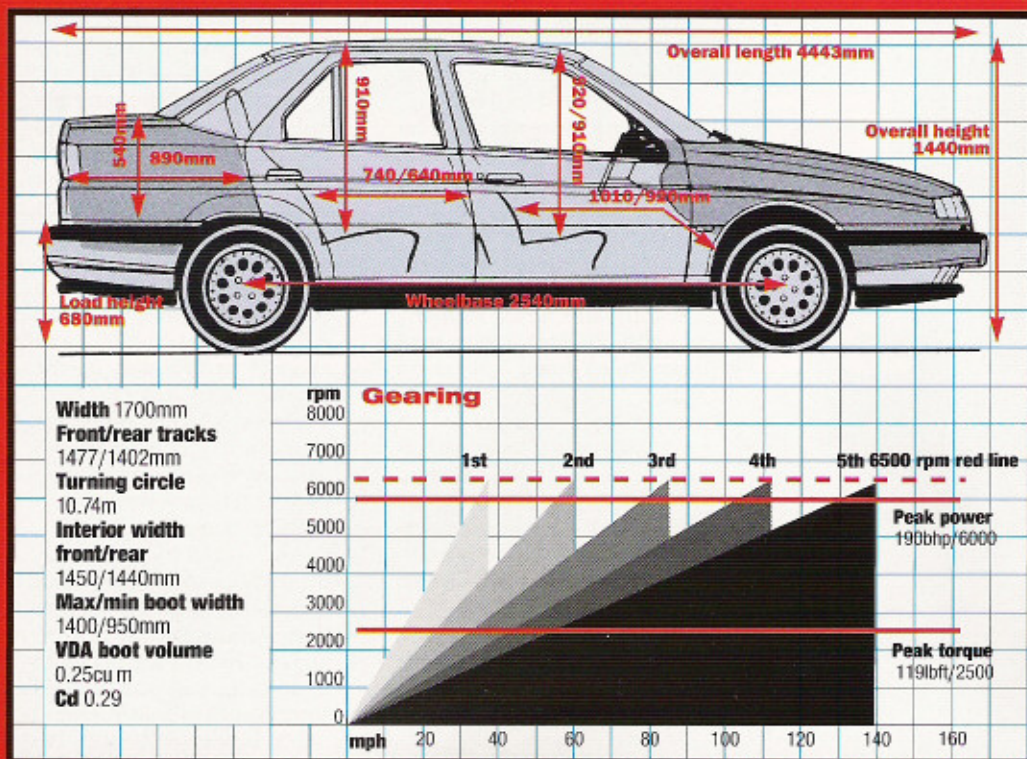
never mind the 164 Cloverleaf, until now the most accelerative Alfa you could buy in the UK.

With a power-to-weight ratio of 130bhp per tonne (the Escort Cosworth has 174bhp per tonne, the Integrale 155bhp), we expected the Cloverleaf 4 to be rapid but not close to the

achieved overall is any indication. Even on our gentle touring route it managed just 21.8mpg, perhaps the best any owner could expect from their Cloverleaf 4.

With the help of struts at the front and trailing arms at the rear, chunky 205/50 tyres on attractive 15-inch alloy rims and an advanced ►

The Autocar Road Test



Specification

Engine

Layout	4cyls in line, 1995cc
Max power	190bhp/6000rpm
Max torque	219lb ft/2500rpm
Specific output	95bhp/litre
Power to weight	130bhp/tonne
Installation	front, transverse, four-wheel drive
Made of	iron block, alloy head
Bore/stroke	84/90mm
Comp ratio	8.0:1
Valves	4 per cyl, dohc
Ignition and fuel	electronic ignition, Weber-Marelli P8 multi-point fuel injection, turbocharger, inter-cooler, twin catalysis

Gearbox

Type	5-speed manual
Ratios/rev per 1000rpm	
1st	3.530/5.7
2nd	2.176/9.2
3rd	1.524/13.1
4th	1.156/17.2
5th	0.917/21.7
Final drive	3.35

Suspension

Front struts, lower wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

Steering

Type rack and pinion, power assisted
Lock to lock 2.9 turns

Brakes

Front 284mm ventilated discs
Rear 240mm discs **Anti-lock** standard

Wheels and tyres

Size 6Jx15ins **Made of** cast alloy **Tyres** 205/50 ZR15 **Spare** space saver

Made by

Alfa Romeo, Arese, Milan, Italy

Sold by

Alfa Romeo (GB), 266 Bath Road, Slough, Berks SL1 4HJ. Tel: 0753 511431

Performance

Maximum speeds

Top gear 139mph/6405rpm
4th 112/6500 **3rd** 85/6500
2nd 60/6500 **1st** 37/6500

Acceleration from rest

True mph	Secs	Speedo mph
30	2.3	31
40	3.7	42
50	4.9	52
60	6.7	62
70	8.7	74
80	10.9	84
90	15.0	94
100	18.6	104
110	25.2	116
120	33.1	126

Standing qtr mile 15.2secs/91mph

Standing km 28.0secs/113mph

30-70mph through gears 6.4secs

Acceleration in each gear

mph	top	4th	3rd	2nd
10-30	—	—	7.1	4.3
20-40	12.3	7.9	4.8	2.7
30-50	9.1	5.3	3.3	2.3
40-60	6.4	4.2	3.1	2.9
50-70	5.6	4.4	3.6	—
60-80	6.1	4.7	4.3	—
70-90	7.0	5.5	—	—
80-100	8.3	6.9	—	—
90-110	10.0	10.1	—	—

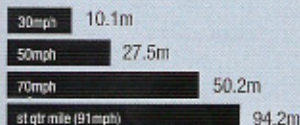
Fuel consumption

Overall mpg on test 16.3
Best/worst on test 21.8/12.4
Touring* 21.8
Range 287 miles
Govt tests (mpg):
urban 23.0 **56mph** 36.5 **75mph** 28.0
Tank capacity 60 litres (13.2 galls)

* Achieved over a pre-set test route designed to replicate an average range of driving conditions. **The figures** were taken at the Lotus proving ground, Millbrook, with the odometer reading 2434 miles. Autocar & Motor test results are protected by world copyright and may not be reproduced without the editor's written permission.

Brakes

Distance travelled under max braking
Track surface damp
Anti-lock fitted



Fade tests

Consecutive brake applications at 0.5g retardation from st qtr terminal speed



Weight

Kerb (incl half tank) 1458kg
Distribution f/r 61/39%
Max payload 455kg
Max towing weight 1500kg

What it costs

Prices

List price £21,024
Total as tested £21,306

Equipment

(prices in **bold type** denote option fitted to test car)

Automatic gearbox	—
Metallic paint	£282
Seatbelt pre-tensioners	—
Variable speed intermittent wipe	★
Electrically adjustable mirrors	★
RDS radio/cassette/CD player	★
4 speakers	★
Alloy wheels	★
Adjustable steering column	★
Electric windows all round	★
One-shot electric driver's window	★
Central locking on any door	★
Height/tilt adjustable driver's seat	★
Driver's seat lumbar adjustment	★
Electric seat adjustment	★
Rear central arm rest	★
Anti-lock brakes	★
Anti-theft system	★
Full leather trim	—
Outside temperature display	★
Traction control	—
Trip computer	—
Heated seats	★
Air conditioning	★
Courtesy delay light	★

★ standard — not available

Insurance group n/a

Depreciation n/a

Warranty

12 months/unlimited mileage, 6 years anti-corrosion, 1 year recovery

Servicing

Major 24,000 miles, service time 4.2hrs,
Interim 12,000 miles, 1.0hr

Parts costs

Set spark plugs	£8.46
Brake pads front	£95.83
Brake pads rear	£47.78
Exhaust (inc cat)	£2007.41
Door mirror glass	£116.74
Tyre (each, typical)	£154.99
Windscreen	£137.89
Headlamp unit	£140.93
Front wing	£101.05
Rear bumper	£196.23



- 1 Electric windows switches
- 2 Electric mirrors switch
- 3 Lights/indicators stalk
- 4 Headlight level adjustment
- 5 Water temperature gauge
- 6 Oil temperature gauge
- 7 Speedometer
- 8 Revcounter
- 9 Oil pressure gauge
- 10 Fuel gauge
- 11 Bonnet release
- 12 Wipers stalk
- 13 Air conditioning controls
- 14 Check control panel
- 15 Radio/cassette/CD player

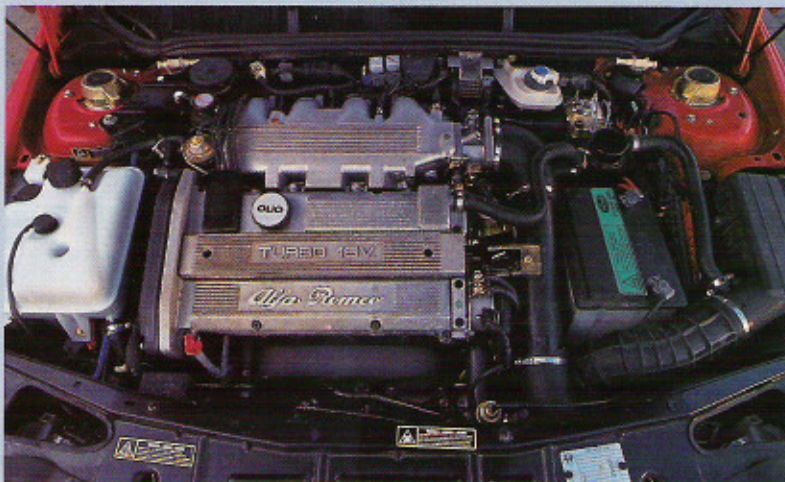
◀ four-wheel drive system, the Cloverleaf 4 goes where it is pointed up to very high speeds with little body roll and impeccable traction — something that cannot be said for other versions of the 155. But while the Cloverleaf 4 is easily the best-handling model in the line-up, the true enthusiast may still feel a little short-changed.

Once you have reached the tyres' limits, it is understeer rather than progressive neutrality that greets you. That's a pity because the communicative speed-sensitive power-assisted steering deserves better messages through its directly geared (2.9 turns lock to lock) rack. Press the issue into a tight corner and the 155 consistently demands more lock than you would imagine — a far cry from the inspirational handling of the Integrale on which the Alfa is, on paper at least, so closely based.

The ride is stiff but only becomes intrusive with the electronically controlled dampers set on 'sport' mode. We found it best to leave the system on the 'auto' setting, which automatically firms up the dampers when required anyway. Left to its own devices, the Cloverleaf 4 successfully treads the fine line between being sporting and uncomfortable.

Other 155 gripes, such as the poor rearward vision and a driving position that forces the driver to sit too high in the cockpit with his legs in a pincer posture and with insufficient underthigh support, remain. At least the Cloverleaf 4 driver enjoys half leather seats (full leather may be available at a later date), a sporty steering wheel and a Philips RDS radio/cassette with CD player.

Few would argue that this is the most able 155 you can buy, but for a car that shares so much of its mechanical make-up with the Integrale, the results are disappointing. Except, of course, its performance, which is likely to be remembered as one of the star turns of 1993. Yet, rather like the Cavalier Turbo 4x4, it remains a car for people who want to go fast rather than drive fast. While that may be acceptable in the cheaper Vauxhall, Alfa Romeo drivers have a right to expect more. ■



Cloverleaf 4 is easily the most capable of the 155 range but still falls short of the standards set by the Lancia HF Integrale, which donates its mechanicals. Although the **two-litre turbo engine** is detuned to 190bhp, the Cloverleaf 4 is a strong performer. Relatively short gearing results in impressive sprinting ability, but the revs have to be kept up to overcome turbo lag

Cloverleaf 4 is available to special order, and in left-hand drive form only. Driving position is awkward, but **cabin** is spacious and generously equipped. Standard kit includes half leather seats and CD player

Rear seat space is among the best in this class, while the **boot** is deep and capacious

Handling is good up to a point — there's plenty of grip and steering feel — but the Alfa still fails to inspire. Understeer sets in when the tyres run out of grip, forcing the driver to wind on more and more lock