



# La Carrera Panamericana

## *Giulia ti*

# 2008

by Ulrich Lanius & Wes Ingram  
/Northwest AROC

### 7 podium finishes in 7 days: 6 first places and a second place

One of the most dangerous and exciting races around the world is the running of the historic La Carrera Panamericana across Mexico. Vehicles, communications, medical treatments, and equipment have all become much better and safer since this race was envisioned. Many of the roads have changed but the speed hasn't. It is an amazing challenge for car and driver today, just as it was over 50 years ago. The race began in the 1950s to celebrate the opening of a new Pan-American highway. Mexico invited the most talented drivers and teams with the fastest cars to compete in the 2,000+ mile race. The original version of the racing lasted four years, with Consalvo Sanesi winning his class with an Alfa 1900 (Millenove) in 1954. The race was discontinued for safety reasons after numerous tragic accidents.

In 1988, the lasting enthusiasm for the race helped to get it recreated, but this time with a number of safety considerations. The period cars now can have safety (and performance) enhancements so often they just look like 1940-

1965 cars, but with state of the art inside secrets. They also do a bit better on controlling the race path and crowd control, although not perfect.

This year, a local team out of British Columbia, Ulrich Lanius and Trevor Gordon Smyth, jumped into the race driving a '65 Alfa Romeo Giulia TI. The car was built for this race with the help of some of our local favorites like Daron Walker at Vintage Customs, Wes Ingram at Ingram Enterprises, and Fred Schueddekopp at Autostrada.

Ulrich had, together with a Friend, participated in the 2004 Carrera in an Alfa Romeo 1900 Berlina. This experience, in conjunction with lots of seat time in 105 series Alfas, especially Giulia Sedans, helped with the preparation of the car.

Prepping the car included stripping the shell to bare metal. Work was carried out at Vintage Customs. This involved some rust repair in the usual spots, as well as a number of modifications and reinforcements, including seam welding and the installation of a 6-point roll cage, all carried out by Stephen Robinson.

The engine, an Alfa 2-liter as permitted by





the rules, was prepared by Wes Ingram, built for 92-octane pump gas required by the rules of the event. Using stock Alfa Motronic 10:1 pistons, the engine put out 183hp at 6,500 rpm and 160 lbs.-ft. of torque at 4,800 rpm on the dyno. This was coupled with a GTA close ratio gearbox and a 4.30 ratio limited-slip differential.

Suspension was a custom Alfaholics set-up with 2.25-inch front springs and a 29mm front bar in conjunction with GTA knuckle risers and short GTA steering arms. Shocks were custom-valved Bilsteins - a GTA Nurburgring set-up. Wheels were 6x14 Alfaholics GTA replicas with 185/70-14 Avon CR6ZZ historic tarmac rally tires.

The car was completed just before the event without any development time and only a few weekend drives before being transported to San Antonio, Texas by car transporter—which resulted in a burnt-out clutch and flywheel, which in turn resulted in a stressed-out driver and co-driver driving across Texas in a rental car to buy a second-hand flywheel—but that's another story. The car was driven from San Antonio on its own wheels down to the start in Tuxtla Gutierrez, often late into the night to make up for lost time, making for an adventure before the race even started.

The race course and transits (the driving between timed sections) went for seven days from Tuxtla Gutierrez near the southern most tip of Mexico in the vicinity of the Guatemalan border, across 2000 miles through the heart of the country. The finish line is in the northern border town of Nuevo Laredo. While all the roads on the speed stages are paved, some of them are rough, and some of the roads on the transit stages are gravel or dirt.



Ulrich and Trevor's direct competitors consisted of several Volvos; two well prepared 122S (both from the Pacific Northwest) piloted by John Voss/Alan Peterson and Richard Bailey/Nate Wilson. Another Volvo, a P1800, was driven by former Formula One driver Jo Ramirez. Together with his co-driver Alberto Cruz, he had won the class in the previous year. Other cars in the class included some Porsche 356's, a Datsun 510 and yet another Volvo.

The first leg of the race led through the mountains to Oaxaca—quite a few cars went off the road, as is typical for the event—one nice Sunbeam Tiger being a total write-off. The following day led to Mexico City with a high-speed stage through the city with the fastest cars running over 170mph. At the end of the day, the cars ran on the racetrack in Queretaro where Ulrich and Trevor were able to pass quite a few cars with the Giulia. The next leg led to San Luis Potosi with the bad crash involving three cars - one Studebaker and two Mustangs - all of them no longer in the race. The following day the race led to Aguascalientes. Because of voltage regulator problems, the Giulia ran total loss ignition with the extra weight of two group 24 batteries on board. The next leg went to Zacatecas, an old silver mining town and UNESCO world heritage site - Ulrich had a slow morning being 12 seconds off on the first speed stage, resulting in 2nd place for the day. Ulrich and Trevor made up for it on the last day to Nuevo Laredo—this leg being over 435 miles. On one of the high-speed stages they reached 6900rpm in 5th gear (for a calculated top speed of 149mph). Some of the Studebakers in the event reached over 200mph on this stage - rally-ace Stig Blomquist piloting one of them. On that day, Ulrich and Trevor came in 12th place, the highest placed under 2-liter car, ahead of all the Porsches. Only one Mustang



was running ahead of them. Likely this was made possible in part by the low drag coefficient of the Giulia Sedan - the same or better than a contemporary 911 - and the superior high speed stability of the Giulia chassis which allowed them to run some of the stages without lifting.

During the race, the Alfa ran like a Swiss clock, the only issue being a voltage regulator that went on the blink. "The family car that wins races" had podium finishes every day, six firsts and one second place. In the end Ulrich and Trevor did very well coming in 17th overall out of 100 cars and they came 1st in their class - Historic A+.

The fact that this car, or any car holds together over this 7-day pounding is amazing. To make it better the sanity of the team may not have improved, but it didn't get worse during the drive! Congrats to everybody involved who built, drove, navigated, and supported this very cool effort. ■



Attention Ed Argalas: in case you need incentive to get your Panamericana Giulia ti Viagra Special back to Mexico in 2009, see the above photo and count the trophies, including First In Class.