Alfa Romeo Giulia, latest rear wheel drive model – Road Test

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Alfa Romeo returns to form with the Giulia Sports Saloon...

Test-driven by David Miles (Miles Better news Agency)

£2,000 contribution for retail customers buying a new 67 plate model...

The once famous Italian thoroughbred automotive brand of Alfa Romeo has suffered decades of falling sales in the UK due to indifferent models, reliability and body-rot issues. In recent years the brand has been rebuilding its tarnished reputation bringing to market a

wider range of stylish and better built models.

Part of FCA (Fiat Chrysler Automobiles), today's Alfa range stretches from the small MiTo to the mid-sized Giulietta hatchbacks and now the Giulia larger sports four door saloon. The line-up also includes the flagship 4C Coupé/Spider sports cars and the Stelvio mid-sized Crossover is shortly to become available.

The Giulia is a mid-sized four door, five seater sports saloon and an alternative to the now commonplace Audi A4, BMW 3 Series, Mercedes C-Class and Jaguar XE models. You could add to this list the Lexus IS, Infiniti Q50 and top spec VW Passat models. Today in the UK the majority of these models are sold or leased into the company car market.

Where the Giulia appeals are that it will be a niche choice by customers who remember or know about Alfa Romeos sporting heritage.



The Giulia name was first used by Alfa in 1962 and was duly replaced by the 156, 157 and 159 ranges, but adopting a heritage theme to boost its appeal, the Giulia name is back and with a change to rear wheel drive.

The all-new Giulia has UK prices starting at £29,875 and rising to £38,260. But there is a mad-house Quadrifoglio 2.9 litre V6 Bi-Turbo 510 hp variant available at an eye-watering £61,595.

Just announced by Alfa, until the end of September 2017, retail customers get a £2,000 contribution if they book a test drive and place an order in the new 67 plate registration

month. In addition to that offer the Giulia (except the entry level and Quadrifoglio variants) is also available in the Fiat Chrysler Scrappage Scheme. If you swap-in your old EU 1 to 4 petrol or diesel engine car before the end of September 2017 there is a trade-in bonus of £3,250. The scrappage scheme is only available to retail customers and is not available in conjunction with any other current finance offer.

The mainstream engines are 2.0 litre 200 and 280 hp turbo-petrol units as well as 2.2 litre JTDM-2 150 and 180 hp turbodiesel units. All engines, including the 510 hp unit, are strangely only available in the UK with an eight speed automatic gearbox although other markets offer a six speed manual gearbox option.

Depending on the all-aluminium engine chosen there are Giulia, Super, Tecnica, Speciale and Veloce spec levels plus the manic Quadrifoglio, informally known as QV and a 191 mph rival to the BMW M3.

The Giulia, with its all-new rear wheel drive layout, gives the four door saloon, with its coupé roofline side profile, short overhangs, a long bonnet, muscular haunches and the longest wheelbase in its segment, a no-nonsense ground-hugging bold stance on the road. At the front is the iconic Alfa Romeo badge over the traditional V-shaped grille, flanked by sleek lights with large under-bumper honeycomb air grilles and the signature offset number plate.

Returning to Alfa's sporting pedigree it benefits from the careful management of weights and materials to obtain a perfect 50:50 weight distribution across its axles, while the four-arm Alfa Link rear suspension (with a patented solution for toe adjustment) and the new double-wishbone set-up at the front has been tuned to maximise dynamic handling and ride comfort characteristics. The new steering is fast=acting and accurate thanks to the constant caster/castor-angle trail during in cornering.

To obtain an optimum weight-to-power ratio and torsional rigidity, the Giulia utilises a mix of high-strength and ultra-lightweight materials including carbon fibre for the driveshaft,

aluminium composite and plastic materials for the rear crossmember, and aluminium for the doors, wings, petrol and diesel engines, brakes and suspension – including the front and rear subframes.

Standard equipment on the entry-level Giulia trim level includes an eight-speed automatic transmission, 16-inch alloy wheels, daytime running lights, LED rear lamp clusters, dual-zone climate control, cruise control with speed limiter, Connect infotainment system and new AlfaTM DNA driving mode selector. In terms of safety features, Forward Collision Warning, Autonomous Emergency Brake with pedestrian detection, Integrated Braking System and Lane Departure Warning are all standard.





As you move up through the mainstream spec levels the additional equipment changes includes 17 or 18-inch alloy wheels, leather and fabric seats, steering wheel paddle shifters,

upgraded interior trim, red or black painted brake callipers, Bi-Xenon headlights, powered and heated sports seats, sports bumpers, black gloss window surround and rear sports diffuser with dual exhausts. Generally the interior is roomy enough in its class, well laid out with a nod to its sporting nature and only the infotainment and touchscreen display and operation are decidedly behind what is normal now for the premium German brands.

My test version was the 2.0 litre turbo-petrol 200 hp Super priced at £31,575. Whilst sales to higher mileage company car users will probably mean the 2.0 litre turbodiesel engine could be the best-seller overall, there is a general move away from diesel powered cars. Although sales numbers are not being disclosed, being a niche brand, there is the likelyhood that the Giulia will be bought more by Alfa enthusiasts and their traditional lower mileages mean the 2.0 litre petrol engine will be a sensible choice, as will the Super specification.

The return to rear wheel drive will be applauded by previous Alfa owners and enthusiasts, perhaps returning to the rejuvenated brand. Almost the first thing I noticed driving the Giulia for just the first few yards was the fast-acting and responsive steering. It really is sharp and gives the sports saloon the agility it needs to impress in this competitive sector of premium branded models. The DNA driving mode selector allows for fine-tuning to meet the driver’s individual needs. It allows the steering weight and throttle responses to be adjusted as well as Advanced Efficiency, Natural and Dynamic modes. The Eco mode is best used for open road cruising speeds whilst Natural and Dynamic come into their own for medium to fast country road driving.

There is an impressive handling balance from the sports saloon with its 50:50 weight distribution and rear wheel drive which moves from predictable and slight front end understeer during fast cornering, through to minor oversteer coming out of corners under power. Also noticeable were the impressive brakes which provided lots of bite

and confidence in the car’s sporting ability. Ride comfort was generally good as well, composed on motorways and only marginally unsettled over poorer side road surfaces.

The 2.0 litre, 200 hp turbo-petrol engine is fast, with a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 6.6 seconds but it was not quite as 'pokey' as similar units from Audi or BMW. Top speed is 146 mph. With 330 Nm (243 lb.ft) of torque from a low, for a petrol engine, 1,750 rpm there was ample response throughout the low to mid range, and only under really hard acceleration did the aluminium unit start to sound stressed. The eight speed automatic gearbox with manual mode can be operated if required by large racing style gear shifter levers mounted on the steering column, again bring that sporting edge to the saloon.

Officially this model has a Combined Cycle fuel consumption figure of 47.9 mpg but on my week long driving period with my usual mix of urban, rural and motorway driving the figure was a disappointing 32.8 mpg, which given the sports performance is realistic but just too far away from the official figure. The CO2 emissions are 138 g/km so VED road tax is £200 First Year rate and then £140 Standard rate. Company car drivers will pay 26% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is Group 24E.

VERDICT

With Alfa Romeo's up and down past with questionable quality unreliable models, it is a brand trying to resurrect its sporting greatness. But it still going to be a leap of faith for potential conquest customers to move out of their usual German mid-sized sports saloon and into the Giulia, although this latest Alfa deserves their attention. Perhaps due to the fact that it is a niche model, and I haven't seen many on the road to date, exclusivity could be a reason to own/drive an Alfa Romeo at least once in one's lifetime.

For: Lots of sports styling kerb appeal, sports design interior, high specification, comfortable seats, compliant ride, sharp handling, well matched engine/auto gearbox, Alfa Romeo's improving reputation for producing better quality cars.

Against: The brand's past more recent history for producing poor quality unreliable cars, no manual gearbox for the UK market, dated and fiddly to use infotainment/touchscreen system, real-life fuel economy too far away from the official Combined Cycle figure.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Alfa Romeo Giulia Saloon, 2.0 turbo-petrol, 200 hp, Super.

Price: £31,575.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder, turbocharged petrol, 200 hp, 330 Nm (243 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, eight speed auto, rear wheel drive.

Performance: 146 mph, 0–62 mph 6.6 seconds.

Fuel consumption and emissions: Combined Cycle 47.9 mpg (32.8 mpg on test), CO2 138 g/km, VED road tax £200/£140, BiK company car tax 26%.

Insurance Group: 24E.

Warranty: Three years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,643 mm (15.23 ft), W 1,850 mm (6.07 ft), H 1,436 mm (4.71 ft), boot 480 litres (16.95 cu.ft), four doors/five seats.