

Air apparent

After lying dormant for 30 years, this ultra-rare, aerodynamically streamlined Lancia Spider was brought back to life by a painstaking decade-long restoration

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FOLLOWING THE end of the Second World War, Italy's car industry entered a renaissance. After all the destruction during hostilities, new ideas came from research carried out by the military, and they revolutionised the car world. The great new frontier was aerodynamics: most of the automotive engineers of the period were arriving from aviation, and streamlining was the new keyword.

In Turin, Battista 'Pinin' Farina, thanks to his pre-war creations, was already a well-known name in coachbuilding. Not far away, Lancia, after many years spent producing military trucks and armoured vehicles, was back producing upmarket cars. And at the Turin Show of April 1950, Lancia presented its new Aurelia. As was the tradition of the company, the new car – a sedan with the internal code B10 – was joined by a chassis-only version, for external coachbuilders to body. In this form it was known as the B50 or, if the body to be installed was large and heavy, B51.

Lancia's main clients were Pinin Farina (which built the convertible), Stabilimenti Farina (the coupé) and Carrozzeria Viotti (to produce the station wagon). While the engine, a 60° 1.8-litre V6, was advanced, it was not powerful, with an output of 56bhp. So, in 1952, after 584 chassis had been produced, a new 2.0-litre engine was offered with 70bhp, or tuned to 90bhp with twin carburettors. Thus equipped, new chassis-only cars were coded B52 and, for the heavier bodies, B53; 98 and 86 were produced respectively.

That's the background of the car in these pictures: a PF 200 Spider, with bodywork designed to make the most of newfangled streamlining theories, and the 90bhp version of Lancia's 2.0-litre V6, underpinned by the Aurelia chassis with its modern, all-independent coil-sprung suspension.

Chassis B52/1052, with engine B21 3761, is listed in the Lancia archive – a register that contains all the Aurelia production numbers –

as having entered production on Tuesday 1 July 1952, with all work (including a test drive of the bare rolling chassis) completed at the Lancia factory by Friday of the same week. Pinin Farina's archive, damaged by a fire, does not report the early history of this car nor any of its sisters, but Lancia's archive reports the steering box number (7549), the front suspension number (7269) and the differential number (7067), plus the 'chassis' number (526).

This last number needs some clarification: for cars built by Lancia or by outside coachbuilders under the control of Lancia, it identified the bodyshell or, for B50s through B56s, the bare platform. What we today call the 'chassis number' was mentioned as such (*numero di telaio*) in the official papers given to each car, but in the production records Lancia called it *numero di vendita*, or 'sales number', which makes little sense even in Italian and makes the life of the historian yet more complicated.

We don't have the Pinin Farina body number, which usually was written on various panels in chalk and has been lost. Unfortunately there is nothing more from the period, because in the Lancia warehouse, the chassis specifics and the lists of the chassis numbers delivered to the coachbuilder were lost. PF 200 no B52/1052 is one of the last produced of a very small series of cars, all handmade and with small differences between them.

It is impossible today to know exactly how many were built, but it is believed that seven were constructed over two years: three convertibles and four coupés. The first convertible is chassis B52/1004 (today still in Italy) followed by B52/1051 (owned until some years ago by a Mr Iggy Franciamore of New York, USA), and this car, B52/1052, probably the last of the series – and quite possibly the 1953 Salone di Torino car.

A main difference between the early cars and those that followed is the front air intake, which changed from round to oval. However, in such a small production series, individually customised to appeal to potential clients or to fulfil the wishes of the customer, it's natural that each car should look different from the

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next. Chassis no 1052 presents several unique touches, such as the chrome gills behind the doors, small front bumpers underneath the headlamps and a nose badge that reads 'pf200C'. There is also a two-position windscreen and a unique style of soft-top, while the doors lack wind-up windows.

Pinin Farina showed this car at a few events, with minor modifications made between appearances, but by the autumn of 1953 it was with its first private owner. The proof is in the Concorso d'Eleganza di Stresa, held in September 1953, where the car appeared with a private customer Milano 215522 numberplate – and won a Grand Prize. How do we know for sure? Because a placard, commemorating the win, is still mounted on the dashboard. But from that point, the history of the car disappears until the '60s – in California.

'I bought it in 1968 from a friend, who'd bought it a few years before from another American guy,' says the current owner. 'I was living in Michigan and working at Ford, and I liked the uniqueness of the shape, even if I was more a Jaguar guy. The idea was to keep it for a while, but I'd never thought of keeping it for so many years.'

After a period of use the car was laid-up for the following 30 years. 'I simply had other priorities but I didn't want to part from the car even when, in 1996, I retired and moved to Florida. So I took it with me,' he says. →



Clockwise from top
From this angle and out on the open road, the Lancia's dainty streamlined shape is shown to best effect; this engine came from a car originally built for Kjell Qvale; exhausts exit via twin sets of triple pipes above the bumper.

1953 LANCIA AURELIA PF 200 SPIDER

ENGINE 1991cc V6, OHC per bank, two Weber 32 DR7 SP carburetors
POWER 90bhp @ 5000rpm TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual transaxle,
rear-wheel drive STEERING Worm and roller SUSPENSION Front: sliding
pillars, coil springs, telescopic dampers. Rear: lower wishbones, coil
springs, lever-arm dampers BRAKES Drums WEIGHT 1480kg (chassis only)
PERFORMANCE Top speed 100mph (est)



In 2003 he asked Tom Palisi to restore it. The task was not easy, because the car had incurred a degree of dilapidation during its long slumber, and 'because build tolerances were so tight', says Palisi. He dismantled everything, and the body was acid-dipped before being repainted, though corrosion was not a major issue. The colour chosen for the repaint was a very deep red, much better than the paler shade it replaced, but rather different from the original light grey.

Meanwhile, the front and rear axles, brakes, suspension and so on were sent to specialist Luciano Sanzogni of Sarasota, Florida, for rebuilding. Though the car was complete, almost everything needed a total overhaul – and the original engine was beyond recovery. All of the North American Lancia community was consulted and an original Aurelia block was sought. Eventually the original block from another PF (the 200 Coupé originally bought by San Francisco's Lancia importer Kjell Qvale) was bought and rebuilt.

The carburetors presented a challenge, because they are shorter than standard thanks to the offset air filter, unique to the PF: the

originals wouldn't have allowed the hood to close properly. To remanufacture the small trim pieces, all one-off irreplaceable items, an aviation machinist was hired; he fabricated the unique exhaust too. Whatever was possible to save was restored and reinstated, while the interior was totally reupholstered, following the colours and patterns of a few small pieces of the original material found in the car while it was being dismantled. The Autovox radio was restored using parts from another, and the owner found a set of new/old-stock diamond-patterned Pirelli trunk mats.

The process took ten years and the car was finished in 2013, presented at the Concours d'Elegance of America at St Johns, and won both first-in-class and The Art that Moves Us award. A year later came a class award at the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance.

'I'd love to keep it,' says the owner, 'but due to my age, I can't drive it any more. That is the reason why I'll put it up for sale in August, with the hope of finding her a better barn to rest in between classic car events.' *Cont.*

The Lancia will be offered for sale by RM Auctions at Monterey, USA, on 15-16 August, www.rmauctions.com.

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