

DRIVE TASTEFULLY



PETROLICIOUS

ALPINE PEAKS



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When we think about the best driving roads in Europe we tend to pick a squiggle in the Alps. Dark gray snakes of tarmac striped with snowmelt that climb into the clouds in a rapid succession of switchbacks and esses. As the peak gets closer, the curves become narrower and the cliffs steeper. The European Alps are plainly outstanding driving playgrounds, and there are few cars better suited for this sort of fun than an Alpine.

In the early 1950s, using modified light-weight Renault 4CVs, the Frenchman Jean Rédélé earned class wins in some major racing events, including the Mille Miglia, Le Mans, and the Coupe des Alpes. In 1954, encouraged by the consequent demand for his car and tuning setups, Rédélé created the Alpine company in Dieppe. A year earlier, right after crossing the English Channel, Sunbeam had introduced a sports coupe called the Sunbeam Alpine. Although this naming issue would cause problems for the French company throughout its history, it did little to slow down development, and soon enough the Alpine A106 was ready.

Designed by Giovanni Michelotti, it featured a fiberglass body set over a very stiff tube chassis. The car's successor, the A108, came in a 2+2 form with a Dauphine Gordini engine measuring less than 1000cc. By 1962, the car's mechanicals were beginning to show their age, but with Alpine working closely with Renault, there were always options for new projects.

When Renault released the R8 in 1962, Rédélé promptly pulled parts off the car to improve on the Dauphine-based A108. The new R8-based car was called the A110 Berlinette, and it would become the definitive Alpine. By 1974, these little devils could be fitted with 1800cc four-cylinders that developed nearly 200hp in racing guises, making them excellent choices for the hillclimb and rally enthusiast crowd. From the start, Alpine cars were known for being agile, lightweight builds that found their element in hairpin turns, and top drivers of the day competed with Alpines at

the highest levels of international rallying in the 1970s. In addition to its prowess off-road, the company was almost equally adept at circuit racing, with an outright victory at the 1978 24 Hours of Le Mans to back up that claim.

Aristotle wrote that there is a plurality of components in just about everything. This philosophy was revised by Gestalt, and is simplified as: "The whole is more than the sum of its parts." Jürgen Clauss, founder of AlpineLab, a platform for purists and lovers of A110s who want to drive, preserve, or restore them, totally agrees with the philosophy.

Still, the owner of these two white Alpine A110s is also aware that each part is interesting in its own right, both from a design and technical point of view. This consideration for the smallest building block is reflected in the way he approaches his restoration jobs, his favorite hobby: Jürgen treats everything like a jewel between tiny tweezers, and he assembles them together with the care of an artist chiseling something very beautiful into something very brittle.

For every car he's restored, its condition upon arrival has always dictated the approach taken with the restoration—not all restorations need to be the ground-up type. Jürgen is adamantly against too much customization, but he doesn't want to make every car come out like it was just born either. As Jürgen says, the factory did an amazing design job that cannot get any better with our efforts. The best we can do is celebrate the original cars by

keeping them faithful to their history. As he points to the new A110, he tells me there are plenty of people already taking care of modernization.

The charming and ultra-rare 1964 A110 Berlinette 1100 Tour de France parked next to the latest Alpine sports car is much closer to his heart. A synthesis of beauty and purpose, this special factory-made model is prepared for rallying and features lightweight fiberglass bodywork and bumpers, extra lights, twin fuel tanks for endurance events, a heated windscreen, plexiglass side windows, sport seats, revised rear suspension geometry, and a cooling system mounted up front that is typically found on more powerful works racers.

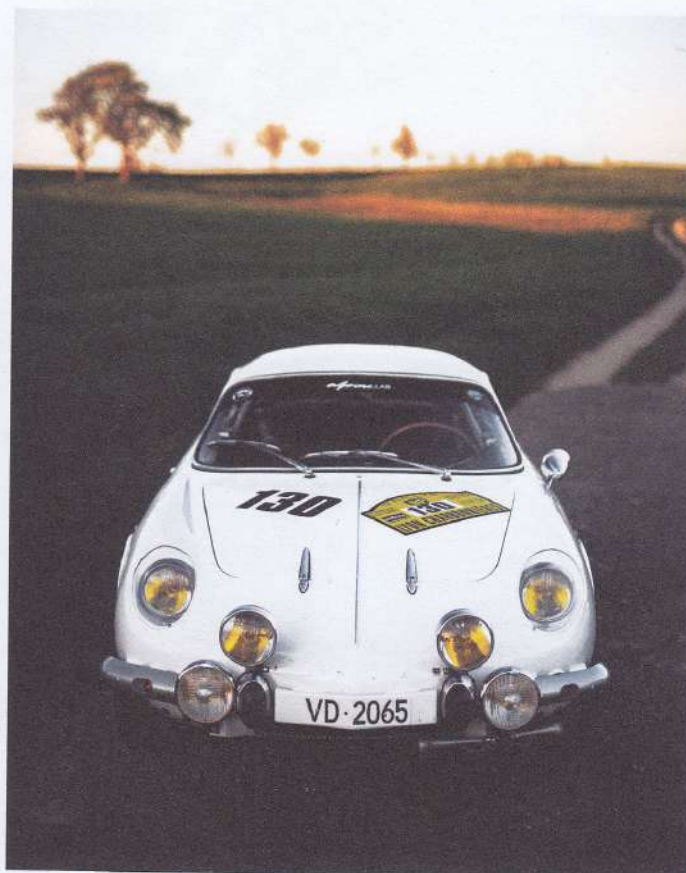
Jürgen is quick to tell me how the car drives completely differently from a standard A110 of the era. Due to its narrow 15" wheels, this little white sleigh has a limited footprint on the road, and though the compact chassis doesn't help the A110 find stability at top speed, it makes it suitably nimble on the mountain roads where the car thrives, flitting between tight apexes. The steering ratio is short and precise, and the wheel can be controlled with just two fingers, should you prefer your Scandinavian flicks more nonchalant.

"This car might be considered some kind of an underdog in the Alpine scene," Jürgen continues, "mostly because of its unspectacular appearance. Only a few know how special and unique this early version really is."

The white Tour de France is the favorite in Jürgen's Berlinette collection for this



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reason. He found it nearly untouched in Switzerland a few years ago, and has been enjoying the opportunity to add to its history ever since. The original owner and driver of the car was André Wicky, a racer active in motorsports from the late '50s until the late '70s. In 1969, he created his own team, the Wicky Racing Team, eventually placing seventeenth at the 1971 24 Hours of Le Mans with a Porsche 908.

In 1965 Wicky ordered his A110 Tour de France with all the racing options available, though he specced it without an engine. Due to Wicky's friendly relationship with tuner Bernard Collomb in Nice, Jürgen supposes that Collomb installed the motor that resides in the Alpine today: a slightly bigger and more powerful 1296cc Gordini inline-four. With Claude Haldi as co-pilot, Wicky competed in the 1966 Lyon-Charbonnières-Stuttgart-Solitude rally, with the A110 earning them a respectable fifth place in their class.

Two more Alpines finished first and second overall.

"The Alpine look and overall style are unique. Owning and driving one presupposes more affinity to the brand compared to owning cars from other manufacturers: You have to totally identify with this car to get the most from it. You have to live with its limitations and its—sometimes—charming French oddities, which of course can lead you to memorable driving experiences."

People often call Jürgen a perfectionist, but as he remarks, perfection is something you cannot really achieve in this business: "You can always do a better restoration, and sometimes you can even be more accurate and precise than the factory was fifty years ago; the A110 was not as well-developed as the 911, for example. The A110 was not designed to pursue an ideal of perfection in that sense. It's an improvisation rather

1. The new Alpine A110 updates the lineage but keeps the core identity intact
2. This Tour de France example of the original A110 is a cornerstone of Jürgen's Alpine collection for good reason

than a precisely engineered car with parts that were only made for one application. This is a matter of fact, and one of the main reasons to love this fantastic machine."

The A110 has never been mainstream: a different car back then, and a unique one in its current form. Intriguing, equal parts resourceful and innovative, and easy to love once you've acquired the first taste, the A110 is still a pillar of French sports car ingenuity.











