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RALLY LEGENDS

Lancia Fulvia HF 1600

Jealously guarded by Italian collectors, very few works rally cars escape to the UK – but this is one of them

Story by Peter Collins
Photography by Michael Ward





BELOW: Beautifully prepared works 1600 engine develops 160bhp at 7200rpm and is fed by a pair of big 48mm carbs

Professor Antonio Fessia was a brilliant engineer but he had, what we could call in retrospect, a passion for unconventional innovative solutions to automotive problems that left him with the legacy of a number of nonconformist motor cars to his name.

Not for him the engine at the front, gearbox, propshaft and rear-axle set-up that so many manufacturers of the 1950s and 1960s thought perfectly adequate to flog from their shiny showrooms to the motoring masses. No, his creations had to include ideal engineering solutions suited to the particular problems presented by the requirements of each model he was designing.

Fessia had been brought in by new owner Pesenti after the 1955 failure of the original Lancia company under Gianni Lancia. Pesenti was a cement magnate who had his own clear ideas about Lancia's future and he head-hunted Fessia from Fiat to be Technical Director. His first job was to execute the design of a luxury model that was intended to replace the legendary Aurelia. This was the Flaminia and it retained the rear transaxle of its famous forebear.

Fessia was only warming up, however. Next was a facelift of the Appia to be followed by another new car. That car was the Flavia and the first saloons were not much more in concept than a repeat of a stillborn vehicle he had designed in the late 1940s called the Cemsca Caproni.





LEFT: Once the pride of a collection in Italy, the Lancia is still owned by an Italian although he is resident in the UK

Featuring front-wheel drive and a flat-four engine, the layout was launched for Lancia at the Turin show in 1960. Even though it was ten or more years after the original idea, nothing detracted from the fact that the new Flavia was an extremely innovative vehicle.

Only the year before the UK had gasped as the Mini was unveiled and yet here was a full 5-seater saloon opting for the same method of propulsion but with an engine twice the size and enjoying some 14 years of gestation behind it.

However, it had become clear, as the '50s turned into the '60s that the Appia needed complete replacement within a short time, so Fessia set about creating a completely new and modern version.

Fessia's efforts came to fruition at the Geneva show in 1963 when an entirely new car called the Fulvia appeared. It was a boxy small saloon of the same proportions as the previous model but the

shared the same front and rear track with the larger Flavia and I realised the advantage of this only recently – but that is for later. Initial criticisms of too little power were answered by the introduction of the 2C model with dual Solex carburettors and a raised compression ratio. This then became the standard version.

The platform of the car deserved more flamboyant bodywork though and at the 1965 Frankfurt show the Fulvia Coupe took its bow. Most called it elegant, but Henry Manney in *Road and Track* described it as 'clean but rather dull'. Later, it would prove to be anything but.

Initially powered by a 1216cc version of the little V4 – good for 80bhp – the coupe was styled in-house by Pietro Castagnero and was built on a short, 2330mm, wheelbase. The shape of the body was obviously very efficient because it boasted a Cd of just 0.39 when the contemporary E-type Jaguar could only muster 0.45. Its

“In 1963, a group of dedicated and wealthy enthusiasts had set up HF Squadra Corse”

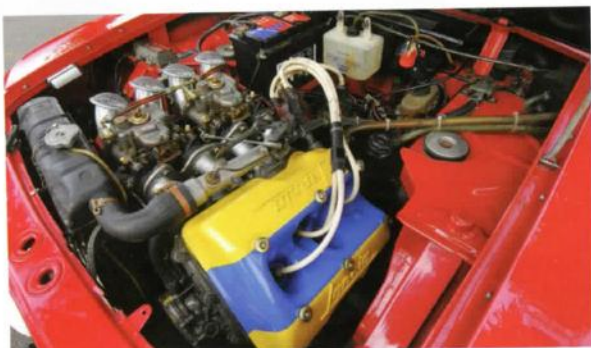
surprise was under the bonnet as, true to form, Fessia had provided it with similar V4 power as the outgoing Appia but with front-wheel drive. The V was very narrow measuring 13 degrees and the capacity was a mere 1091cc with the motor tilted over under the bonnet at 45 degrees. With a single overhead camshaft per bank, 58bhp was developed at 5800rpm. It was the start of the most successful model that Lancia would ever produce and some say that it supported the whole company throughout its constructional period, which covered ten years.

In an effort to rationalise and save on costs, Fessia arranged the underpinnings to make use of some Flavia parts and ideas. The suspension was by transverse leaf at the front and the rear axle was dead with longitudinal leaf springs and Panhard rod. The Fulvia

low height and compact dimensions meant that its handling could best be described as 'handy'.

Coincidentally, Lancia had re-established a competitions department. In 1963, a group of dedicated and wealthy enthusiasts had set up HF (High Fidelity) Squadra Corse. This was an unofficial competition arm of the Torinese company with most work outsourced to Bosato or Facetti, but with some help from the factory.

Flaminias and Flavias were campaigned with varying levels of success until, early in 1965, the outfit became official and moved into premises in the factory under the management of Cesare Fiorio from where a first official entry was made with a Fulvia Coupe on the 1965 Tour de Corse when Cella/Camerana crewed one, minus third gear for



most of the event, into eighth place.

That car had been lightened by 80kg and development led to a further reduction of 20kg with the use of aluminium and plexiglass leading to the introduction of a new model for 1966, the Fulvia HF. Although not yet homologated, the cars debuted on the '66 Monte and this also marked the first appearance with Lancia for a new driver snapped up by Fiorio the previous year. That man was Sandro Munari. His first Fulvia rally was the '66 Fiori (later San Remo) when he retired.

BELOW: Lancia specialists Walkers Garage registered the car in the UK, the yellow numberplate looking rather out of character

That rally also witnessed the Fulvia's first outright win in the hands of Cella/Lombardini but the car flattered to deceive and good results proved elusive. Incremental developments took place again over the winter of '66/'67 resulting in the debut of the 1.3 HF which was endowed with 1298cc, 101bhp and a limited-slip differential.

The *Auto Universum* publication tested the road version of the Rallye 1.3 and was generally delighted. "Lancia may have pared down the weight of this Fulvia coupe but we would not expect them to imperil



their quality standards and, as ever, the workmanship and finish on this car are excellent". Again: "Another item that impressed us, on poor road surfaces, was the excellence of the suspension and damping allowing full performance to be used over the most unlikely surfaces."

Munari finally opened his account on Corsica in '67 with an easy overall win – by five minutes – over Pauli Toivonen, also Fulvia mounted. Such was the pace and severity of the event that out of 98 starters, only 12 cars finished and three of those were Fulvias. Despite this, '68 turned out to be a low point for Squadra Corse

as they lost two members of the team – Cella died in an Alfa Tipo 33 testing accident and Munari's co-driver Lombardini succumbed to road-accident injuries suffered in Yugoslavia on the way to Monte Carlo.

1969 finally saw the reversal of the model's and the team's fortunes. Harry Kallstrom from Sweden replaced the poor Cella and he had to learn the full-throttle, left foot braking style of driving required to hustle a Fulvia quickly. Also, at the end of '68, the ultimate development of the Fulvia first appeared. It was the 1.6 HF. That original 1-litre V4 was now 50 per cent bigger and developing 130bhp. Non-homologation meant the

BELOW: Munari and co-driver Mannucci took this car to three rally wins in 1973; Costa Brava, San Marino and Sicilia



RIGHT: Sandro Munari's office. Interior is minimalistic by modern standards with basic instruments and switches



'69 Monte could only be tackled with 1.3 cars but the concurrent Rallye Mediterranee regulations allowed Groups 4, 5 and 6 and in this Kallstrom scored the 1.6 HF's first win.

1.3 cars still comprised the main HF team in rallies, but a 1.6 took first overall in the slightly bizarre 84 Hour grind around the 'Ring that had replaced the old Liege rally. Then Kallstrom took the RAC Rally late in the year and the die was cast, although Fiorio wanted to concentrate on the European Rally Championship in 1970 rather than the World series.

Throughout 1970 and '71 many battles were won but not the wars and so 1972 was to be the key year in the rally life of the Fulvia. Already, the future, in the shape of the Stratos, loomed and the little jewel of a coupe was into its final events. Despite this, 1972 proved to

The writing was on the wall as the daunting Stratos had already shocked the world on its debut on the Tour de Corse in late '72 so the Fulvias were involved in pretty much a holding pattern whilst the factory got to grips with the new monster it had created for itself.

TOH 23322 was a vital part of this exercise. First and foremost it was driven by Sandro Munari and not only that but he took three wins – in a row – in the car. This was after it had debuted on the Monte with Lampinen at the wheel and, whilst accelerating hard up the steep, twisting climb out of Burzet village, heading for the bleak plateau at the top, the Finn and his Italian co-driver Sodano suffered oil-pump failure with inevitable serious results.

All was well by February 12th as Munari and his familiar co-driver Mario Mannucci took the car to an

“Munari and his familiar co-driver Mario Mannucci took the car to an easy win on the Costa Brava”

be the year the Fulvia took the International Rally Championship and by a clear margin. For '73 Fiorio decreed a return to a defence of the prestigious European series and our car featured here was one of the works cars campaigned by Lancia in a final season that proved the value of the Fulvia to the team right up to its final days.

TOH 23322 (Italian registration), with its five-speed gearbox and 160bhp at 7200rpm, was to ultimate factory specification and came with larger valves, special manifolding and Dellorto 48mm carburettors. Extra ground clearance was provided with stiffer front springs along with a limited-slip diff and more responsive steering. Marketing decisions decreed that the change of emphasis on championships tackled would be the case after a very successful '72 during which the team cars had taken seven wins out of the total of fifteen possible rallies.

easy win on the Costa Brava rally. Three weeks later they contrived to do the same thing on the San Marino rally and, to cap a perfect season-opening sequence, they enjoyed yet another win in the same car just three weeks later on the Rallye di Sicilia.

Coincidentally, I am lucky enough to have gained at least a partial understanding of how all this winning was possible and why the Fulvia was so successful, as I have just returned from navigating a 1600 HF on the five day Classic Rally Association Winter Challenge from Chester to Monte Carlo.

That idea of Fessia's to utilise the track of the Flavia gives the car real stability and the ride over all surfaces is superlative. In the dark of the small hours halfway up a mountain in the middle of nowhere, the car gives you the confidence to use all the power and you know that it will invest every last bit of that and the road-holding to see you through. In truth, it's a good friend. 🇮🇹

