



Newsletter

April 2007

Seeing the progress on the Laing's Fulvia restoration at the Garage Meeting made me realize how active our members are in the restoration field. Along with the Laing's Fulvia and mine we also have Gaby Van Oudshoorn who has nearly finished a Series I. Even though Peter has sold the 1600 motor from his Coupe he is re-installing the original 1300 motor and tidying up the bodywork and of course there is his Lambda project. Then we have Dion Tromp who has rescued another Fulvia plus a Beta Spider from the downward spiral by having the bodywork and interior tidied up and the mechanicals brought into good order. Talking of Betas, Laurence is hoping to now find time to rebuild the seized engine of the HPE volumex. We also have Coenrad Spamer preparing his Montecarlo for the track. John Harvey has just finished his Delta Turbo and we are all now hoping that he will start on the Flavia Berlina before it rusts away irretrievably. A disappointment is that Tony White has had to give up on his Aprila project now that he has acquired another Bentley. Hopefully another member will take this over as the bodywork and engine have been completed to a high standard and needs the front suspension to be sorted out and the interior to be trimmed to complete it. Let me know if I have left anyone out.

A previously unknown neighbor stopped by the other day and passed on some old English car magazines that had Lancia related articles. One was a 1994 magazine called Jalopy and it had an article on one of the marketing attempts Lancia UK make to improve their image after the Beta rust debacle. I found it very interesting so have added it below titled "Dedra, not forgotten".

LAST EVENTS

Garage Meeting – The Laing Garage



Another interesting meeting that didn't go as planned as Phil's neighbor Saliem and his son came to speak to Pierre about turbocharging a BMW 2002. Unfortunately Pierre didn't make it but we had a great time talking and reminiscing with Saliem as he is a trained Citroen mechanic and has run his own business maintaining and restoring Citroen's for many years. He looks after the mechanicals whilst his son sorts out the bodywork. They have two Betas' on their premises that they need to move on, so if you are looking for spares or a project car, give Phil a ring for the contact details. After having our fill of tea and cakes we moved into the garage and started stripping the Fulvia's subframe. I had brought along my ball joint pullers so we started by taking off the steering arms. Peter was amazed to see how easy this was as he had only ever done it the old fashioned way of using two hammers. Most of the ball joints were found to be quite rough so Phil intends replacing them. If anyone knows of a modern equivalent that can be used please let Phil know.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Breakfast – River Cafe – 9.30am Sunday 6th May

The River Café is on the Constantia Uitsig Estate just off the Spaanschmat River Road. They have an interesting selection of Breakfasts at reasonable rates. There is no minimum number requirement but booking is essential so please confirm numbers with me by Friday evening.

Jim

LANCIA REGISTER

A long time ago the committee promised to compile a Register of all our Lancias with the aim of tracking the location of all the Lancias in the Cape. Johann was made Registrar and he duly created a spreadsheet and a form to collect the necessary information. Unfortunately the process stalled there as I kept forgetting to add the form to the Newsletter. (Sorry Johann and thanks for being so patient) Well, I have at last remembered so please do not be as tardy as me and complete the form promptly and send it to Johann at the email address below. We will then publish the list on the Clubs website but if for some reason you would prefer not to make your details public state so on the form and your details will not be published. If you cannot find the VIN number ask a committee member for help.

DEDRA, NOT FORGOTTEN



Lancias are no longer sold in RHD form. Heon Stevenson remembers the UK-importer's swan song

At the end of 1993, Lancia pulled out of the British market. The UK sales had declined sharply between 1978 and 1992, and slight increases in 1981 and during the boom of 1985-88 appeared as mere blips in what was less like a downward curve than the trajectory of a well-ballasted lemming. Desperate measures were needed, and in the spring of 1993, Lancia staged an ambitious attempt to revive the marque in Britain. It was called the Lancia Dedra Challenge.

The company invited former owners and enthusiasts to bring interested guests to various decorative locations throughout the country, where they would compare different versions of the Dedra (£11,850 -£17,995) with selected European and Japanese rivals.

At each venue were three groups of three cars, one of which in each group was a Dedra. Invitees and their guests were split into three sets of nine people who, handcuffed to Lancia briefed but otherwise independent Instructors, would take turns at the wheel of a Dedra and two of its rivals. At the end of the Challenge everyone would compare notes and give marks to all of the cars on the scorecards provided. A few might eventually buy Dedras; the rest, armed with Lancia presentation golfing umbrellas and favourable road-test impressions, would spread the word. Or so the theory ran.

It was springtime in the West Country when, as the guest of a long-time Lancia fan, I took up the challenge. When we arrived at the hotel, we were briefed by Lancia's UK marketing director about the day ahead. There was no hard sell. The aim of the exercise, we were told, was to show that the Dedra was not just a car for the enthusiast, but that it could compete on equal terms with other, mainstream, volume-produced saloons. If the Dedra was an individual choice, it was also a rational one. The chosen rivals were a motley collection, which included cars with bigger engines (but higher weight, so that they were no faster), or a similar number of gadgets (but higher prices), or which were similarly priced (but slower, smaller, or less well- equipped)

The briefing ended with a 'heritage' video that summarized Lancia's distinguished technical history without mentioning Beta cross-members or Trevi dashboards. An original pre-war Aprilia and a restored post-war Aurelia GT attracted attention outside.

After a seafood lunch the test began. I was grouped with a couple who had bought a new Gamma in the 1980s, but who had been put off by costly spare parts and a low trade-in value. They were surprised to have been invited along, but, as little had been wrong with the Gamma itself, they were happy to try the Dedra. We were allocated a 1.6 litre to compare with a 2-litre Audi 80 (similar performance) and a 400-series Rover (similar size and price). My companion, Lancia-biased through long association but determined to be objective, was shown the menu for her group, which consisted of a 400-series Volvo followed by Vauxhall Cavalier. She was unable to secure an a la Cart serving of BMW 318, as it had been earmarked for the third group who, by way of compensation, were promised a Toyota Carina later.

Our first trip was in that darling of the cheese and wine set, the Audi 80. The former Gamma owner, first at the wheel, was not impressed. 'It feels floaty,' he said, and as we swung through the bends and the seafood lunch stirred itself, I agreed. The Audi had a solid, slightly remote feel. The rumble from engine, tyres and wind in combination, the gearlever that moved bodily with the engine when the clutch was let in, the substantial plastic sections inside - all much like a VW Passat hire car I had driven. Soften the suspension and sling a few sandbag over the front bumper, and the Passat became an Audi. Only the steering was truly different. The Passat's manual steering, approaching full lock at low speed, had wanted to wind on more, rather than less lock. The Audi lacked this alarming anti-centering effect, but had power assistance that adjusted itself from the Jaguar-like (and feel-less) above 45mph or so, when it turned itself off. With the steering wheel rake-adjusted to a comfortable position I couldn't see the instruments through the rim, and the handbrake, high up on the far side of the console was awkward at best. But the body was solid and well-made so that there were no squeaks or rattles, and the seats were comfortable. And with so much understeer to fight, the much-publicized ProconTen steering column retractor was probably a good idea. No one really disliked the Audi, but then no one really warmed to it, either.

We tried the Dedra next. Would it be better than the others, or would there be much polite, non-committal mumbling at the end of the day? After the Audi, it immediately felt light and lively. The driving position was tall rather than laid back, the controls slightly heavier but more direct, the power steering accurate and consistent with plenty of feel. The clutch, gear lever and accelerator were carefully weighted in relation to each other, so that the Dedra was easy to drive briskly and smoothly which, on initial acquaintance at least, the Audi was not.

The Dedra's interior, unlike the Audi's, felt spacious for the size of car. The door panels, simply designed and trimmed, were stylish and the dashboard did not engulf the driver. Opinions differed on the wood trim: I found it pretentious but admittedly well presented; the others liked it. In the middle of the dash was an 'econometer' whose needle, swinging wildly to left and right, measured inlet manifold vacuum. The Dedra's bad points were torque steer when accelerating through bends and a body that creaked over bumps in a way that suggested flexibility rather than loose trim. Overall, it came across as a car with personality, and we all preferred it to the Audi.

We drove the 400-series Rover last. It was smaller than the Dedra inside, particularly in the back, which was where I started out. It was not a happy experience. The seat, with little legroom or thigh support, and trimmed in a kind of Sunday-supplement good-bad taste style, was so thinly covered that we had no padding at all, and might as well have been sitting on a toll box - particularly when the suspension bottomed out over bumps. The door surround trims were made from sections of grey plastic, reminiscent of those Airfix battleships with hull sections that never quite fitted together properly. One of the door handle trims had unclipped itself and let in a cool breeze, while wind rushed around the door frames.

The Rover wasn't much better from the driver's seat. The engine was noisy and we all commented on the vibrations that came through the pedals, steering column and floor. The steering itself was dead and the clutch had distinct 'half bite' and 'full bite' points about half an inch apart, the latter at the very top of its long travel.

Given Rover's refinement-orientated advertising, - we all did a double-take. Could it really be this bad? Were we - none of us professional road-testers or experts - so amateur that our conclusions were meaningless? Or was the Rover just a below-stairs car that had sneaked up in the elevator when no one was looking? We learned that a 400-series owner in another group had been so surprised by the Dedra, in comparison to her car, that she vowed to change immediately, whatever the cost. So the Dedra stayed in first place, Audi second.

The Dedra came out well in other groups, too, with only the BMW, predictably, faring as well. My companion, relieved not to have been disillusioned about Lancias, placed the Volvo second (solid, but really boring...) and the Cavalier ('I can't tell you why, but I just hated driving it!) last.

We filled in the scorecards and questionnaires over tea and biscuits. This was potentially embarrassing as we were asked, unsurprisingly, for the makes, models and registrations of our current cars. I hoped that Vauxhall/2litre saloon/F would be enough. Fortunately no one asked where on the number plate the F appeared...

According to one unofficial report, the Dedra Challenge, which involved more than 1000 participants nationwide, sold only five cars. Its cost has never been disclosed. Professionally organized and glitch-free on the day, the Challenge must go down in history as a catastrophic failure.

But the Dedra itself, despite its name, turned out not to be a dead duck of a car. Now an orphan in the UK - though common enough in mainland Europe - it is depreciating rapidly. Soon it will enter jalopy territory, where its comprehensive rust-proofing will be warmly appreciated.

For the jalopyist, the Challenge was a rare opportunity to crawl under the barbed-wire fence that divides the world of new car ownership from filler and chicken wire motoring. Yes, the grass is greener there but, as at least one car demonstrated, it isn't always very much greener.

Lancia UK, RIP.

The Baldwin Garage

From the Fulvia side.

Have just sold the last of my Mini spares. Most went through adverts in the Cape Ads but we also did well at the Crankhandle Club Autojumble despite the bad weather. The balance went as a job lot to a dealer of Mini Spares.

It is proving harder to find someone to rewind my Series I generator than I thought. Fortunately we found a stripped down one on Phil's shelf at the Garage Meeting and he has loaned it to me until he is ready to use it on his project car.

Jim

For Sale

Fulvia Petrol Tank – Free to good home - Contact Claude Andre - 072 456 30 22

Aprilia Restoration Project –Contact Tony White

CAPE LANCIA CLUB

Club Website: www.lancia.za.org

2007 Calendar (Provisional)

May 6th - Social Meeting (Sunday)

June 2nd - Garage Meeting (Saturday)

July 15th – Social Meeting (Sunday)

August 4th - Garage Meeting (Saturday)

September 2nd – Social Meeting (Sunday)

October 6th - Garage Meeting (Saturday)

November 4th – Social Meeting (Sunday)

December 1st - Garage Meeting (Saturday)

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