

# Celebrating the landmark Alfasud

By Steve Copley

[Blogs](#) (/category/blogs) | 30 Mar 2021



Share



([https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=Celebrating%20the%20landmark%20Alfasud&url=https://www.classicandsportscar.com/news/works-triumph-tr4-survivor-inside-april-2021-issue-csc&subject=Celebrating%20the%20landmark%20Alfasud&outthissite=true&via=classicandsportscar&title=Celebrating%20the%20landmark%20Alfasud))



([https://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?](https://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=https://www.classicandsportscar.com/news/works-triumph-tr4-survivor-inside-april-2021-issue-csc&t=Celebrating%20the%20landmark%20Alfasud))

For the latest classic car news, features, buyer's guides and classifieds, sign up to the C&SC newsletter here ([https://pages.haymarket.com/classicandsportscar/CLAS\\_SignUp1](https://pages.haymarket.com/classicandsportscar/CLAS_SignUp1))

The Alfasud (<https://classicandsportscar.com/guides/classic-cars-a-to-z/alfa-romeo-alfasud>) , whose half century we're marking in this month's *Classic & Sports Car* (<https://classicandsportscar.com/news/works-triumph-tr4-survivor-inside-april-2021-issue-csc>) , was a vital part of my growing up.

It was first unveiled in a production-ready state at the Turin Car Expo in November 1971 – and instantly acclaimed by all critics. But various labour and organisational problems at its new Naples factory meant it didn't actually reach Italian showrooms until the middle of the following year.

Right-hand-drive cars were further delayed until early 1973, about the time I was blagging and fumbling my way into motoring journalism at *Wheels* magazine in Sydney, Australia.

But even by the time I had my feet securely under an editorial department desk, the much-praised baby Alfa Romeo (<https://classicandsportscar.com/marque/alfa-romeo>) was still many months and miles from our far-flung market.



*From that very adventure, published in the May 1975 edition of Wheels magazine © Wheels*

Indeed, it took another year for Aussie-spec cars to arrive, a fact that for me carried a hidden advantage: by the time I was able to drive an original four-door Sud I'd tried enough different-brand small cars to know that this curvaceous little Italian was a true landmark.

It was pretty, fast, nimble, willing and (although it sounds crazy today for a car with a 62lb ft torque peak) remarkably flexible.

The Aussie price was grievously inflated by tariffs erected to protect Australia's home-grown industry, but the car was still hugely desirable.

I didn't write our first review of the Sud; that job rightly went to our editor and my mentor, Peter Robinson.

My opportunity came the following year, in the middle of 1975, when Alfa Romeo inexplicably launched the next Alfasud model to arrive, the slightly sportier and more powerful Sud ti, in Adelaide.

Don't get me wrong, the South Australian capital is a fine and inviting place in which I've spent happy years of my life, but was also well over 800 miles west of Alfa Australia's HQ in Sydney, where most of the car's buyers would be found.

Mind you, in this odd arrangement lay an opportunity. Alfa Australia needed to get its precious ti to Sydney without delay: would I kindly drive it halfway across the island continent and have it there the day after tomorrow? There's only one answer to a question like that.



*Stability was another of the Alfasud's qualities*

I am sure you'll agree that 854 miles is quite a long way for a solitary driver to take a car in one day, especially when it's an 1186cc normally aspirated baby saloon with just 79bhp on tap.

But Australia back then was one of the few countries where you could do such a thing with relative ease, mainly because the obstacle-count per mile was so much lower than you'd find in Europe.

True, the roads weren't up to European arterial standards (lots of truck-infested, single-lane stuff, spoon drains, cambers, crowns, coarse surfaces, artic-generated ruts and stray animals), but 46 years ago there was one other crucial advantage: you could travel at your chosen speed.

I set off at 4am, expecting to take 15-odd hours and to average about 55mph. Given an 11-gallon tank and a fast-touring consumption of 35mpg, at least two refuelling stops were going to be needed.

This would be a long day, but I reckoned to be home in Sydney by 7:30pm, taking into account a half-hour time-zone shift between central and eastern Australia.

The route was the quickest possible: over the Adelaide Hills to Mount Barker and Murray Bridge, down the Murray River for a bit to Tailem Bend, then more or less due east to Ouyen, before travelling across wide, open, sun-baked plains to Hay and Wagga Wagga, then via Gundagai, Goulburn and north-east over the Blue Mountains to Sydney.

Compared with any route to a UK destination, this looked a straighter line.

*The gearbox ratios helped the little Alfa give its best*

I'd love to recount a few tall tales of the drive, but it happened 45 years ago so I can't.

However, I absolutely do remember my rising delight at the outrageous excellence of this little car.

There was its life-affirming willingness to cruise between 80mph and 90mph (such was the paucity of torque, the exact speed depended on wind direction), and also its unimpeachable stability.

It was one of those cars, very rare at the time, in which you could amuse yourself by resolving to make smaller and smaller wheel corrections as you learned it better, until you hardly moved the wheel at all.



Actually, it wasn't as slow as you might think. True, we subsequently measured its top speed at a modest 102mph, but its 0-62mph acceleration of around 12.5 secs wasn't so bad back then (years later, the first VW Golf GTI (<https://classicandsportscar.com/guides/classic-cars-a-to-z/volkswagen-golf-gti>) didn't break 10), especially since the ti had four closely set gearbox ratios below its 17.5mph/1000rpm fifth, so you could always have the engine giving of its best.

Most importantly, this 79bhp car weighed just 810kg at the kerb: you'd need 120-125bhp to match its performance in one of today's 1200kg supermini behemoths.



*Would this be your choice of wheels for an 800-plus-mile drive?*

My memory is of cruising sweetly at 5000rpm (a bit over 1000rpm short of the redline), with the 1186cc 'four' turning busily, but with none of the buzz and thrash that 'fours' of the time routinely produced.

In fact, I stopped somewhere out on the Hay Plain to buy music cassettes (yes, it was that long ago!), because the cockpit was easily quiet enough for the stereo to convey enough musical detail to make playing them worthwhile.

Even before I'd crossed the border out of South Australia, with less than a fifth of the journey complete, I remember my rising excitement at this little car's surprises – especially the refinement, the steering accuracy, the engine's willingness and its stability – and resolved to reduce the journey time as much as possible.

My plan was to make Sydney in time to make the 20-mile journey to editor Robinson's out-of-town house so he could try this wonderful little car on favourite surrounding roads.

At about 8pm I was outside his front door. Half an hour later he was grinning behind the wheel and echoing my impressions, which crowned the whole experience.

Of course, we gave the car a glowing write-up, mentioning the iffy panel fit, the paint runs and the ill-fitting passenger door, but avoiding tarring and feathering what, dynamically speaking, was a fabulous little car.

That drive was one of the best I've ever had, despite the modesty of the ti's power and performance. But I guess I should have seen, even then, why there are so very few Alfasuds still alive today.

*Images: Tony Baker/Wheels*

[READ MORE](#)

**Buyer's guide: Alfa Romeo Alfasud** (<https://www.classicandsportscar.com/features/buyers-guide-alfa-romeo-alfasud>)

**The Citroën GS: glamour, gadgets and guilt** (<https://www.classicandsportscar.com/features/citroen-gs-glamour-gadgets-and-guilt>)

**Guilty pleasures: Alfa Romeo Alfa 6** (<https://www.classicandsportscar.com/features/guilty-pleasures-alfa-romeo-alfa-6>)

[Blogs](#) (/category/blogs)    [Alfa Romeo](#) (/category/alfa-romeo)

Share



Steve Cropley

Steve Cropley is Group Editor in Chief of Classic & Sports Car

 Follow Steve on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/StyCr>)

## Related Articles



(/features/exotic-life-count-trossis-alfa-romeo-6c-  
2500)

[The exotic life of Count Trossi's Alfa Romeo 6C-2500](/features/exotic-life-count-trossis-alfa-romeo-6c-2500)

**Features** (/category/features) | 29 Jun 2021

Flawed diamond: Alfa Romeo Montreal (/features/flawed-diamond-alfa-romeo-montreal)

Features ((category/features)) | 13 May 2021



(/features/flawed-diamond-alfa-romeo-montreal)



Your classic: Alfa Romeo Spider Veloce (/features/your-classic-alfa-romeo-spider-veloce)

**Features** (/category/features) | 11 May 2021

(/features/your-classic-alfa-romeo-spider-veloce)



Celebrating the Alfasud at 50 (/features/celebrating-alfasud-50)

**Features** (/category/features) | 7 May 2021

(/features/celebrating-alfasud-50)