

Fall-Winter 2017 - Number 72

FIAT CLUB
AMERICA

RIGAMBI

A Magazine for FIAT Enthusiasts Published by FIAT Club America



Photo by Brett Melancon



LEMONS RALLY & GENTLEMEN RACERS





THE TERRIBLE IDEA

"Drive a classic FIAT Spider cross country," I thought. "It will be fun." Well, we did and it was. A while back, I had mentioned to Andy Truscott how much fun it would be to enter a classic FIAT Spider into the famously taxing, in many ways, Lemons Rally. I expected a response along the lines of "you're crazy," but much to my surprise Andy said, "Ok, let's do it!", closely followed by "...and you're crazy." This would be the very first of many surprises to come on this particular adventure.

Let's face it, entering a classic FIAT Spider into the Lemons Rally goes against rationality. We all know that the cars are wonderful and well suited to the casual weekend drives we all make, with some owners even commuting 80-odd miles a day, but drive one the thousands of miles needed to get to and then participate in the Rally, all within the space of two weeks? We needed to find the perfect vehicle.

Our original plan centered around a 1978 FIAT Spider 1800 that I already owned and wanted to modify into a Spider-Truck, the "PininPickup," but that is a story for another day. This donor was a total beater and ran well, so it seemed to be a good start to a bad idea. Andy and I pitched it to my employers at Auto Ricambi, and to our pleasant surprise they were hugely supportive of the endeavor and wanted to hear more. They soon signed off on the plan and set aside a budget for the inevitable parts we would require. They did have one condition however: Instead of using my beater Spider that was a running, driving car, we would enter a non-running, sunbaked Pininfarina Azzurra from the Dallas area. "Sure! That can work."

Before we go any further, I need to point out that in no way do I, Andy or anyone at Auto Ricambi feel that FIAT Spiders are lemons. On the contrary in fact, we know that they are great cars. How many of us have heard the same tired joke, "Do ya know what FIAT stands for?" Of course, the inevitable punchline is not true, as most of FIAT's reputation for lack of reliability has typically resulted from deferred or poor maintenance. You could say that, as a team, we decided to take the worst example of a FIAT Spider we could find that was still viable and spend four to five long days wrenching to prove that these cars are not, in fact, lemons. They are strong cars that can be put to arduous use likely to tax a modern car, let alone one that was manufactured decades ago and largely based on a 60s design – albeit a modern one for that time!

So did we succeed? Well, unless you've been on the moon for the past several weeks, you likely know the answer. Either way, keep reading and see what happened.



THE BRUTALLY HOT BUILD

After rejecting my beater Spider, it didn't take Csaba long at all to find a worthier candidate for our project. "Worthy" is a loose term as this particular Spider was a 1984 Pininfarina Azzurra that had not been on the road since 1994, since which it had been unceasingly exposed to the elements of northern Texas. Once the Spider delivered to the Auto Ricambi's global headquarters in Colleyville, Texas, near Dallas, we managed to con – uh, I mean solicit – the help of a dream team of volunteers to assist with the build. The plan was for us all to converge on Colleyville, so we could scavenge the parts bin for spares and get as much work done in as little time possible. Our hope was that this would be a great way to showcase the high-quality parts that Auto Ricambi sells its customers every day and to demonstrate that we truly believe in our products. After several 100+ degree days and a trip to the ER, we still had not made the Spider roadworthy, but we were getting close.

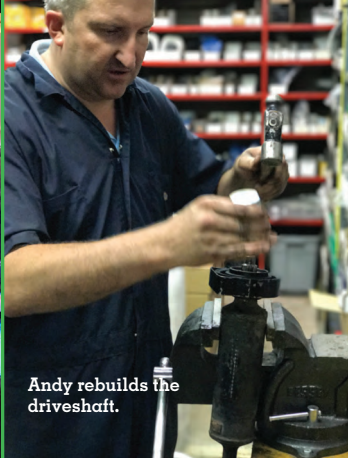
The core team consisted of myself, Andy (who lives in Houston), Csaba, and Ramzi, along with AJ Bennett and the legendary Bradley Artigue from Atlanta. More people helped out as the project progressed, and we even convinced Mike Rutenberg from Gulf Coast FCA to make the trek from Houston to lend a hand. Each person who agreed to help brought something unique to the table and allowed us to get a whole lot done in a very short amount of time.

The first big decision was to determine if the fuel injection system was salvageable. These systems are wonderful when working, but after so many years sitting in the Texas sun, we had our doubts with this particular one, having set in said sun since 1994. And from all appearances it had not been driven since then as well. The seller claimed that the motor did not have compression with no idea as to why, so we had our work cut out for us indeed. Bradley had been kind enough to join our team and shared his vast FI knowledge to quickly determine that the system could not be saved, at least not within our time and budget constraints. 🐾





AJ Welded like a pro!



Andy rebuilds the driveshaft.



The brain trust decided what to do with the Fuel Injection.

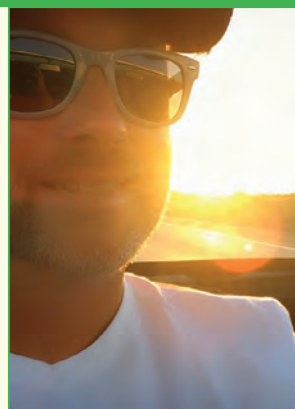


Brett prepares for a really long drive

The decision was then made to go with a trusty carburetor. This would eliminate many points of failure and provide an easy-to-service solution for the long journey ahead. Once all the front seals and gaskets, except the head, were replaced and the new carburetor, fuel tank, electronic fuel pump, and fuel lines were all installed, the time had come to see if this monkey could swim (old Hungarian saying, look it up). After several attempts to start the Spider, we finally got it going and filled the shop with smoke and foul smells. Our first fear was that the engine had much more blow by than would be ideal, but it cleared up as the rings reset themselves for the first time since the late 80s. With that, we continued our work.

AJ demonstrated his awesome welding skills, patching the two small rusty areas and welding up a couple of suspicious cracks in the shock towers. In true Lemons style, he used the old license plate to patch the small hole in the passenger side floor. AJ worked hard showing why he is such a great addition to the Auto Ricambi team and really made the car worthy of bolting on the new parts. Being at the Auto Ricambi Intergalactic HQ meant we had instant access to its vast inventory, although it quickly became clear that this Azzurra would take more time than we initially anticipated. The heat and the extra work required to bring this car back from the dead made some of us wonder if it was such a good idea after all. Of course it really was not a good idea, it was a terrible idea. But we realized that was NOT the point of a Lemons Rally and so we soldiered on.

I'm sure you've all seen those reality shows in which a wreck of a car is transformed into a concourse ready show winner in under an hour by a crack team armed with sketch pads, an arsenal of tools and very sparkly teeth. This was not like that. It was a constant state of parts flying around the shop and "bleep bleep" words spilling over in moments of frustration. While one of us worked on the fuel system, others were chipping away at the cooling and electrical needs. 'A' arms were rebuilt at least once (Note: remember to put the pivot bolt in the arm before pressing in the bushings!) Regardless, it was loads of fun. As a team, we identified all the



New and classic Spiders, it is what Auto Ricambi does best!

major points of failure and addressed each one with an off-the-shelf solution. All the suspension components, the cooling system, the tires, the brakes, the interior, the driveshaft, and of course the fuel system were replaced. Much progress had been made, and all with only one trip to the emergency room: Ramzi suffered a laceration to the head that would have been much worse had he not been wearing his quality Auto Ricambi hat!

After several days of hard labor in brutal Texas heat, we had a car that kind of ran and had still not been driven, but we did have working rally lights and extremely loud horns. How else to prove the 95A alternator upgrade? Over the next few weeks, members of the team spent any available time they had working on the car to finish up last-minute details. It was not until Andy's second trip up from Houston that the car finally ran under its own power. To say that was a big day is an understatement, as it was so exciting and gratifying for our team. We drove a glorious five-mile tour around Colleyville, the Azzurra resplendent with its black-painted hood, trunk, wheel arches, rally lights blazing, and engine roaring through the 38/38 DGEV carburetor. Fitting in some carpet to keep out the worst of the road noise, liberating better seats from another car and installing an array of toggle switches to keep the additional ancillary devices under control –and we were finally done!

Next stop, the Lemons Rally in Monterey, California! Although we would have to get there first...



CALIFORNIA OR BUSTED

With the Rally Spider somewhat roadworthy – and registered – the next challenge would be getting to California for the start of the actual Rally. At this point, the car had only been driven an easy five miles or so. We discussed having the Spider shipped to the start though this did not seem in keeping with Lemons style. I suggested instead that I come back in from Tennessee and just drive the car out to the West Coast. It was only about 1,700 miles, give or take, and could serve as our official shakedown run for the Rally. So I drove Auto Ricambi's wonderful new FIAT 124 Spider Abarth to Colleyville to trade for the equally wonderful (in a different way) Pininfarina Azzurra Rally car. For whatever reason, I thought the Spider would be all ready to go, but once I arrived it was clear that some eleventh-hour prep work remained. I started early the next morning, and by noon most of the lingering tasks were finished up. We were ready for a road trip now!

Somewhat hesitantly, I exchanged the keys to the new Spider for the key to the classic. Notice I said "key," as it was the only key in existence that would start this particular Spider. This simple yet daunting fact would soon provide me and Andy with many opportunities for banter along the road, with THE key often disappearing in a heartbeat. Before long, I had set off to my first stopover: Tucumcari, New Mexico, over seven hours away. It would be my first visit to see my good friend and fellow FIAT Club America member, Larry Smith, since he had moved from Knoxville to Tucumcari in June to purchase the Motel Safari on Historic Route 66. He had decided to leave his stifling corporate job and follow his passion to be part of the preservation efforts on 66. The Motel Safari, built in 1959, had been beautifully restored and updated by its previous owners, and Larry had jumped at the chance to be its next steward

and make his own mark. Funny thing is that I had found the blog post on Route 66 World noting the motel was for sale just shortly after Larry had made the decision to find a 66 business, so it was especially gratifying to see him doing something he loved. On our past road trips together, we had always stayed at the Blue Swallow Motel in Tucumcari, but I must say that I was really impressed with the Safari's mid-century modern decor, squeaky clean rooms and "the best beds on the Mother Road!"

The road between Colleyville and Tucumcari had been fairly uneventful, and the newly prepared Spider was eating up the miles with ease. The biggest challenge I faced at this point was a non-working fuel gauge paired with our smallish fuel tanks that only gave me about 225 miles or so before I'd start to get nervous. This required many stops throughout the trip – over 30 in total – with some very close calls out west where the stations are not as plentiful. I was quite proud as I rolled into Tucumcari, happy that the first leg of the trip was going so well. But then with a cursory glance under the hood, I noticed that the nice, new 95-amp alternator we'd fitted had lost a bottom mounting bolt somewhere along the way across Texas. This was not a huge problem as the car was still charging well, and there was a NAPA located next door to the Motel Safari. So with the purchase of one bolt, two quarts of oil (just in case) and, fittingly enough, a Big Larry flashlight, I was soon finishing off my time in Tucumcari.

After a hearty breakfast at the local diner, Kix on 66, I bid farewell to my friend and continued my westward journey. I made every effort to get off the interstate and jump on Route 66 whenever possible. My plan was to make it to Holbrook, Arizona, for a stay at the famous Wigwam Motel, but unfortunately they were booked solid. So I continued on to the next motel I saw, the Sahara Inn. This stop was not as nice as the Motel Safari 🐾

NAVAJO TACOS & DONKEYS IN OATMAN, ARIZONA!

Oatman, Arizona, is one of my favorite Route 66 food stops for one reason: Navajo Tacos at the Olive Oatman Restaurant. The town itself is a very unusual one, more of a ghost town than a town really, but it has a character all its own and is known for the wild burros that freely roam the downtown streets, much to the amusement of tourists. The burros were quite friendly as always and didn't seem to mind the Spider much as I cruised through town, though one did put his head all the way into the car as I was almost out of town. I think he may have been disappointed to discover that the Spider did not have cool air blowing inside!



The "wild" donkeys are actually very friendly.





Fuel was hard to find in some parts of the trip



The temps were very hot at times



The Pacific Ocean was a welcome sight!

by a long shot, but it was getting late and, what the heck, I love these old roadside motels regardless. I hit the road early the next morning and enjoyed the sunrise over 66 as I made my way to my next planned stop: Seligman, Arizona. Along the way, I made a quick detour to one of my favorite roadside attractions, Two Guns, and managed to catch a few others as well. Part of the experience of being on the open road in a classic car is taking the time to stop and enjoy this great country and take in the local flavors. I did just this when I pulled into Seligman and had my traditional road trip treat, a peanut butter and chocolate shake at Delgadillo's Snow Cap. I had been there several times before and on the window where patrons are encouraged to plaster cards and stickers, I was even able to locate a photo of the FIAT Multipla we had driven on my very first Route 66 trip back in 2009 with Larry and my son, Blake!

The Seligman stop was a much-needed break, and I enjoyed the iconic 66 town so much that I forgot to top off on fuel. Remember my earlier comment about only getting about 225 miles to the tank? Well, I had traveled over 200 miles on the current tank, and it was 25 or so miles to the next fuel stop in the middle of nowhere, Grand Canyon Caverns & Inn. If you have ever driven this stretch of the Mother Road, you will know

that it is a particularly lonely piece of road with little in the way of facilities, just old roadside attractions and a few reservations along the way. Kingman was the next large town, so my hope was only to get a few gallons at the Cavern Inn at \$5.95 per gallon, and then top off on down the road. I literally coasted in to the Cavern Inn and managed to get enough gas there to reach my goal. This constant search for fuel became a regular activity along the 7,300-plus miles of driving that was only just beginning!

After that initial close call with fuel, I enjoyed the incredible drive through Sitgreaves Pass and eased in to my next stop at Oatman, an old gold rush town and another 66 favorite. I did not realize this at the time, but the fuel pump wiring for the Spider was getting really hot and starting to break down. This led to the one and only mechanical failure in the thousands of miles in the Spider, as the fuel pump wiring melted in a smoky scene on the side of I-40 outside of Needles, California. The air temperature was well over



The one and only breakdown in the desert outside of Needles, CA.



So much talent has touched this Spider.

Spea
from
They
start
their f



Chris and Brookie were very hospitable and it was fun having a drink and a tour.

100 degrees, and I knew I had to make a quick fix, as the sun was getting low and I was out of cell service range. AAA could not save me out here. I was able to rig a patch on the fuel pump wiring and was then back on my way to Barstow, my planned stop for the night. Once I'd checked in at the Route 66 Motel, known for its round beds, I was able to properly patch the wiring for the fuel pump, Lemons Rally-style with a toggle switch mounted in the rear wing antenna hole that could control the power to the pump. Further inspection later led to the discovery that the wiring harness that ran through the car along the driver side door sill had gently rubbed through and shorted out along the fuel pump power wire. This was replaced by the California Service Team – more on them later!



Barstow was a welcome stop for rest and recharging, and I was able to start off bright and early the next morning. My goal was to make it to the west coast by lunchtime and have a little time to dip my toes into the frigid waters of the Pacific Ocean in Santa Cruz. I was also hoping to visit with longtime friends, Chris Obert and Brookie Coob. Brookie had turned part of their property into an amazing guest room that had me wishing I could stay there for the night. They graciously gave me a tour of Obert's huge FIAT parts inventory, and I enjoyed seeing some of their current projects. We shared a meal and drinks at a local dive, and it was great. I have always loved Santa Cruz, and now I have some reasons to love it more. Next, I was off to meet my co-pilot, Andy Truscott, and his wife, Susan, along with her sister, Katie Minor, who would drive our support vehicle. Andy and Susan had flown in from Houston and rented a house in Santa Cruz through Airbnb that served as the perfect place to stage our impending adventure prior to the start of the Rally.

We had allowed for an extra day to permit the anticipated repairs and adjustments to the Spider which would be required after the shakedown run from Texas to California. The car had performed well, but there were a few things we wanted to work on prior to the Rally (especially the fuel pump power which Andy tutted and shook his head on many times). Our friends and fellow FIAT nuts Kelly Dicker and Mikey kindly offered to help us out at Kelly's shop, Wine Country Motors, in Napa Valley. There is nothing quite like a bunch of FIAT guys getting together to work on a car. The 1.5 hour drive up to Napa was great, with Andy and I getting used to cruising along together. Our time at Wine Country Motors was a lot of fun, and we were able to address several small but necessary matters with the Spider prior to the Rally. These two guys came in to help us out on their day off, and we cannot thank them enough for their time and dedication to our Lemons Rally entry. The fuel pump had a dedicated wire run for it, with a toggle switch on the dash, and an inertia switch running it's relay. This was done to supplement a mechanical pump which was also fitted. Once the Spider was all ready to go, we applied the Auto Ricambi livery decals as a finishing touch. This made the Spider really stand out in the crowd of Lemons with which we would soon be sharing the road. - Story to be Continued in the next issue of RICAMBI!

LEMONS RALLY STORY WILL BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE



Nothing like the open road!

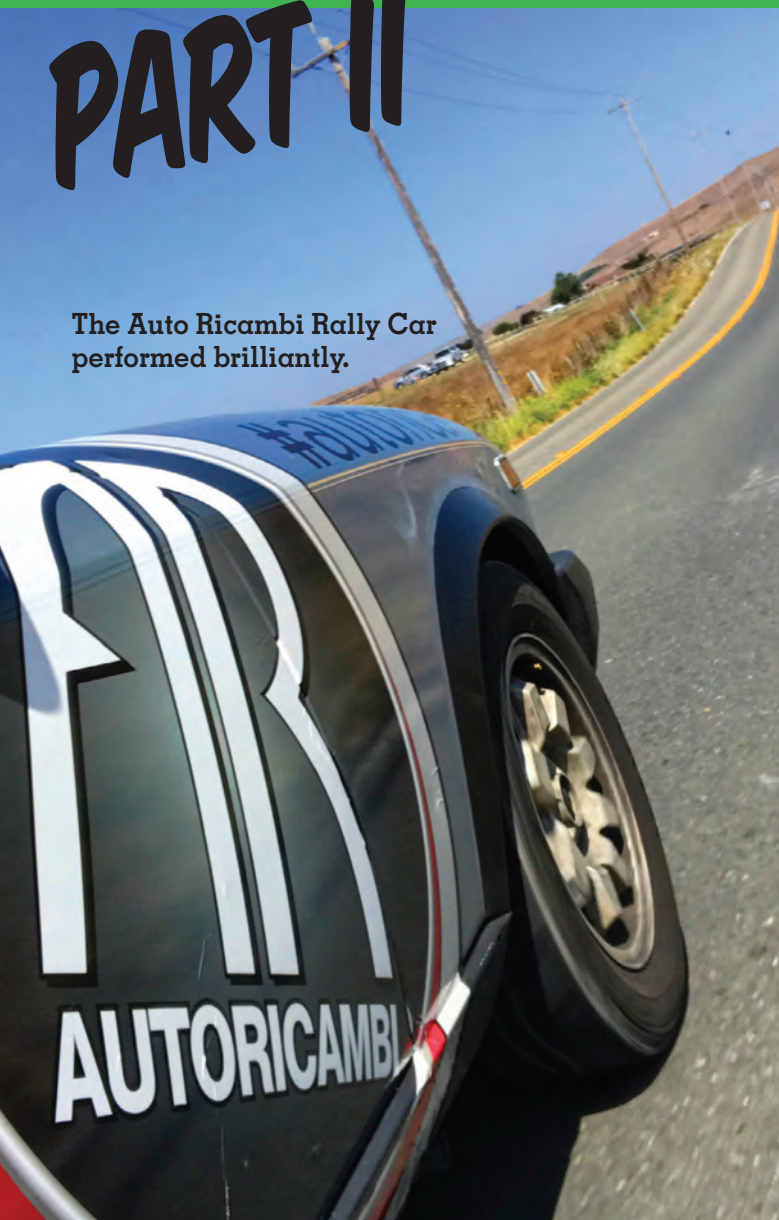


by Brett Melanson
East Tennessee

LEMONS RALLY & GENTLEMEN RACERS

PART II

The Auto Ricambi Rally Car
performed brilliantly.



The gentleman attire worked well
for us and #teamautoricambi.

LEMONS RALLY FOR GENTLEMEN

As you may have already guessed by now, this rally would not be an ordinary one by any stretch. Our unusual Italian entry was enough to earn us some initial “hooptie” points and attention at the starting field, but the navy blue sports jackets and ascots Andy had provided for our attire pushed it over the edge. We would be known as “The Gentlemen Racers” and even promote a hashtag, #autoricambigentlemenracers, to prove it. The whole Gentlemen Racers idea was a brilliant one, all due to Andy. The look was a great icebreaker for the first day of the event, and it allowed us to really take this oddball event and make it our own.

Now, the whole deal with the Lemons Rally is that multiple teams each take a car that under normal circumstances should no longer be running, make it roadworthy once again and then attempt to drive it through a grueling schedule and itinerary of stops. The Lemons Rallies are known for being particularly arduous. While being road based, they are still exceptionally long. Combine those long distances with vehicles no longer in their prime, and the recipe is set for long days, made even longer by unforeseen breakdowns and repairs.

This particular rally was oriented around the Monterey Car Week and provided two course options for accruing points: a hard, longer course with more checkpoints – and an easier, more direct course with fewer checkpoints and easier roads. Not only did Team Auto Ricambi’s Gentlemen Racers select the harder, longer course, we also made a point to double back and hit parts of the easier course when time allowed. This proved to be a fun way to tackle the rally and rack up some extra points, even if the organizers chose not to record them (more on that later). It also gave us the chance to tackle some even harder roads as the two routes tended to be separated by a mountainous spine.

As each team drove the rally, they were required to take photos of the team mascot at each checkpoint and hashtag the name of the stop for points. This was a great way of automating the checkpoints, and we had fun with our mascot, Leo, managing to get him into all sorts of interesting situations along the way. Incidentally, he was christened Leo as a) he’s a lion and b) while we were stripping down the car we discovered that one of the original assembly team had signed under the cowl his name, Leo! It was those kinds of little touches that really showed the personal approach to our cars. Through a series of coincidences, Ramzi even managed to track down the son of a gentleman named Leo who used to work on the assembly line at Pininfarina. We like to think that we had one of his cars!

The rally routes provided amazing sights, cool roadside attractions and a fantastic array of natural scenery, both coastal and inland. At one point, we even got to drive through an ancient redwood tree! Bumping into fellow rally

participants was fun too, and we quickly earned a reputation for speeding along in the Spider and, as we passed the others, blowing our signature horn, a two-tone air horn that could operate in two modes – the more typical single blast and also a hi/lo alternating series of blasts reminiscent of 1970s Italian police horns. Andy and I rolled into our first stop for the night, Crescent City, California, late and very tired, having managed to complete the first day without any major dramas.

Day Two of the Lemons Rally started early as we set our sights on Bremerton, Oregon. This was a really long day of driving, and we made many fuel stops and consumed large amounts of Monster energy drinks and beef jerky to stay alert. Leo provided us with some distractions along the way as we tried to find new and unusual ways to check in at the hashtag stops. Team AR managed to make friends with many of the other Lemons Rally participants, and we always enjoyed seeing them at the scheduled stops. It is astonishing that some of the participating cars were even drivable, but they continued on just as we did. Our friends in the Mini Clubman had constant mechanical issues, generally involving a solitary SU downdraft carburetor, but they never stopped and always completed each day’s leg. We tried to convince them that Webers were the way forward but to no avail! I found myself admiring the drive and determination of the other teams as they struggled. Although we did not have any of the mechanical struggles that they were experiencing, fatigue was definitely a factor. The mutual respect among the teams was what made the event so much fun. Here we were driving cars not to be trusted to travel a hundred miles, let alone thousands, and we were all having a great time beating those odds. Andy and I would highly recommend this experience to anyone who finds this kind of challenge appealing!

Day Three began brutally early at the stroke of 4:00am. Our plan was to catch the ferry out of Bremerton into Seattle and then head to the Canadian border for additional points. This not only added about four to five hours of driving to the already long day but also required that we get up at this insanely early hour. The ferry ride was nice though, and seeing Seattle in the pre-dawn light was definitely special. We were not the only team who did this – and the sight of 20-plus rough-and-ready vehicles disembarking in downtown Seattle and heading to the Pacific Coast Highway was fantastic! As we collected our extra points at the border, we questioned the sanity of our decision as we turned southward toward our stop for the night in Bend, Oregon. It was an incredibly long drive from this point, over seven hours not including stops, but we soldiered on, collecting points, hashtagging Leo and being continually amazed by the sheer beauty and splendor of the American landscape. We successfully completed the day’s leg of the trip and even managed to arrive at our Bend accommodations earlier than expected.

Day Four kicked off early as usual and it was cold. Really cold. One of our goals was to never put the top up, and the 40-degree weather was proving to be a challenge as we had bypassed heat on our Spider. With the top down and loosening the shifter gaiter, however, there was a pleasant stream of warm air coming in from the transmission tunnel as air was pulled through from under the car. With the top up, the lower pressure of the cabin meant air would not have been pulled through in the same way. So oxymoronically, with the top down, we were warmer! It also meant that keeping to a reasonable speed was essential in keeping the “heater” working well.

On one long stretch of road, we were making particularly good time when we caught the attention of an Oregon State Patrol. As the troopers were not used to observing such elegance as our Pininfarina Azzurra, at 6:00 in the morning no less, we were able to use our charming personalities and scintillating wit to avoid a ticket. The conversation finished up with some tourism tips for scenic spots and a friendly reminder to behave as multiple troopers would be aware of our presence as we made our way to the California state line. The scenery in Oregon was absolutely breathtaking, and our stop at the Stonehenge Replica was one of my favorite experiences of the entire rally. Despite being so long a route, it was easily one of the most scenic and amazing days as well. We made every effort possible to stop at cool locations and experience as many of the sights as we could.

As the rally had progressed, I began noticing that we were not getting awarded all the points we had collected as we hashtagged the stops. I asked one of the organizers about it, and he assured me that they would fix the issue. When I reminded him a couple of days later, he became annoyed and said he was deducting ten points because I had asked again! We realized at that point the rally would not be strictly about points, but more so about finishing strong.

Our first big stop in California was in the town of Weed. Yes, there is a town called Weed, California. Our task there was to hashtag Leo and acquire a t-shirt that said “I Love Weed” to

be used in a challenge later in the event. Never having been a user of marijuana, this was a little awkward for me, but I managed to work it out so we got the points and then some by fitting Leo with a matching shirt. Coming down out of Northern California, the temperature gradient was incredible. Having started the day at a frigid 35 degrees, we were now in the mid-to-high 90s – and our oh-so efficient heater system was now reading at 160 degrees. And it couldn’t be turned off unless we raised the roof. We made a note for future reference: change the heater core rather than looping it out as a potential failure point!

Our goal for the day was the final stop in Santa Cruz. I was looking forward to this as it would mark the success of a challenging adventure. Santa Cruz was a cool town to explore, and we completed the final challenges along the boardwalk which awarded our team even more points. After a great dinner and evening of fun with other participants, we retired to our hotel for one last night.

The fifth and final day had us finishing the rally in seaside California for the Concours de Lemons. Andy and I were both thoroughly exhausted. We had traveled well over 2,000 miles in a classic Pininfarina Azzurra, with the top always down, and had managed to complete a grueling rally while proving that Spiders are indeed reliable cars. The parts acquired from Auto Ricambi performed flawlessly and took this neglected Spider from the forgotten field to the Concours de Lemons show field. What an amazing journey it had been!

As we pulled into the final stop of the rally, we were greeted by others who had participated in the adventure and by folks attending the planned show. In case you don’t know, Lemons is quite a big deal and draws people from all over. I saw a few automotive celebrities, and our Spider attracted plenty of attention, gaining us a spot in the October edition of Octane Magazine, as well as winning an award for the “Best Italian” entry. Even though we had been cheated out of some hard-earned points along the way, I’d say Andy and I had a good run, finished strong and can always take pride in the fact we “Won Class Concours at Monterey!”



That time Andy talked his way out of a speeding ticket.



Santa Cruz is fun!

Leo was subjected to all sorts of adventures.



We didn't really smoke the pipes but it added to the effect.

TENNESSEE BOUND

Now that the Lemons Rally and Concours de Lemons were over, it was time to point the Auto Ricambi Rally Spider eastbound and head back home to Tennessee – over 2,600 miles from where I stood. Andy had to head back to the real world of gainful employment, and once again I would be driving solo in a classic Spider that had proven itself above and beyond expectations thus far, but could at any point decide to become a challenge. I was good though. I had confidence in the Spider and was looking forward to the trip that would cross a large part of the United States in about three days. My goal was to be home in time to visit with friends who were leaving the day I was scheduled to return, so there was pressure to not get lost or distracted by potentially cool stops. I said goodbyes to my trusty co-pilot Andy, along with Susan and Katie, and then pointed the Spider homeward. The weather was great, and my goal was to continue with the top down all of the way home.

Once I had cleared my way through West Coast congestion, I began making good time. I had my first fuel scare for the trip home and somehow managed to pump ten gallons into a 9.5-gallon tank! This would happen a few more times as I found the stops along I-70 to be less plentiful than they had been along I-40 and Route 66. My goal was to make it to Las Vegas for the first night of the journey and I did. Those of you who know me know that I hate Las Vegas. This was simply a stop for rest and food – no Vegas shenanigans for me. I rolled into town rather late and found what I thought would be a nice place to stay. Unfortunately, my unlucky streak with Vegas continued as there were problems with the room and bed, so I was happy to leave early the next morning and continue my journey home.

As I was leaving Las Vegas, I realized just how blessed I was to be taking this trip and seeing so much of the U.S. I had experienced an amazing Lemons Rally, yet the trip was still far from over. I looked forward to the road ahead with excitement as I drove into the desert once again. The car was running amazingly well, and as I traveled across the beautiful state of Utah, I continued to be amazed by the diverse beauty of our great country as my route took me through deserts, forests and mountains. The landscape would be so dramatic and then

change in an instant to something else. iPhone photos did little justice to what I was seeing as I sped along with the top down, easily keeping pace with traffic. I applied plenty of sunscreen and wore a good hat, yet still managed to come home browner than I have ever been in my life!

You'll recall that one of the things we did to make the Rally Spider more reliable was to remove the dried-up fuel injection system that had been sitting idle for almost 30 years. The carburetor did fine for the most part, but when I started making the climb into Colorado, the altitude made the ascent challenging for the Spider. As I made my way to my stopover for the night in Vail, I noticed the lack of power that the thinner air produced. Contemplating a quick retune of the mixture screw on the carb, I knew I'd be getting back down to lower altitudes tomorrow so decided to let her stay where she was. I also noticed that simply carrying my bag into the hotel made me a little more winded than normal. The scenery more than made up for all that though and was amazing as always. I enjoyed a much-needed rest that night at a seasonal town near Vail.

The next morning I started out early for what ended up being the longest day of the journey. I left the hotel at around 6:30am and drove until about 3:30am the next morning solo! I inadvertently timed the trip through Denver right at morning rush hour, so it was not a fun way to start the day. I pushed onward listening to Spotify and Pandora for hours on end and enjoyed an occasional call from my wife Beth to see how I was doing. This happened to be the day of the total eclipse, and I was able to enjoy a partial eclipse as I made my way through Kansas. I stopped somewhere in the middle of nowhere, found a place to sit and was once again utterly amazed by God's creation. Traveling in a classic convertible with the top down is something I would recommend to anyone.

My initial plan for this last full day of driving had been to find a place on the east side of St. Louis. One thing I had not counted on however was that everyone traveling to watch the eclipse had the exact same idea. As I continued east, I quickly realized that there were no vacancies... anywhere. I figured perhaps if I kept driving, it would get better, but it didn't. At about 3:30am I finally decided that I had to pull over and get some rest. I found 🐱



a church parking lot and slept in the Spider until sunrise. It was not as bad as you might imagine, but it was no Motel 6 either.

The silver lining in this scenario, of course, is that driving so far the day before meant that I was way closer to home as the new day began. Due to my unplanned marathon behind the wheel, I would be home hours earlier than originally planned. Passing through the fifteenth state on my journey and into Tennessee, I knew I was about to conclude the trip of a lifetime in this Pininfarina Azzurra. The remaining hours flew by, and I arrived home in plenty of time to see my friends before they left.

In retrospect, I can fully appreciate all that had to happen to make this trip even possible. So much planning, so much time and, yes, so much money. Auto Ricambi did something that impresses me to this day: They took a car that many view as unreliable – a FIAT – and made it wholly reliable with simple bolt-on parts from the Auto Ricambi inventory, with attention to detail and skills possessed by most home mechanics. This classic Spider began its epic journey as a long neglected, sunbaked clunker that had not been driven a mile in over 20 years, and it overcame all odds to emerge as a testament to the engineering and passion that has made these cars great. Auto Ricambi, with help from a confident team of impassioned gear-heads, proved that a Spider, no matter its condition, can indeed be made reliable and roadworthy with the available parts that they stock. They had faith that this rally would prove exactly what they have known all along, that Pininfarina Azzurras, and FIAT Spiders in general, are truly great cars – and definitely not Lemons.

SUMMARY OF WORK PERFORMED

- New baffled fuel tank, sending unit and filler hose
- Replacement soft fuel lines
- Low facet pressure fuel pump (installed in trunk)
- Relayed power to fuel pump
- Inertia switch on fuel pump relay power
- Dash mount toggle switch on fuel pump relay power
- Fuel pump relay power, from ignition switched power on fuse box
- OEM BCD mechanical fuel pump installed
- Fuel injection system removed
- Single plane intake manifold installed with new gaskets
- 38/38 synchronous carburetor installed
- New fuel injection fuel filter retained
- Additional inline under-hood clear-walled fuel filter added
- New engine front seals
- Valve covers gaskets replaced
- New exhaust manifold gasket
- New OEM grade A Arm bushings
- New Italian A arms and ball joints
- New Italian tie rod ends
- New front sway bar bushings
- AR exclusive progressive rate lowering springs
- New KYB low pressure gas shocks all round
- New universal joints on driveshaft
- New giubo (flex joint)
- New driveshaft center support
- Replaced transmission oil – GL1
- Replaced differential oil – GL5
- Replaced engine oil – Rotella T4
- Replaced coolant – Prestone 50/50
- High performance aluminum radiator and fan
- New silicone hoses
- Replacement custom front seats
- Cibie 8" rally lights
- Hella 6" fog lights
- Custom lamp brackets (to fit around stock bumpers)
- LED H4 headlamp bulb replacements
- 5 Tires – 195/60R-14 Falken Azenis RT615K
- Rebuilt 1895 1/2 Pininfarina front brake calipers and pads
- New rear calipers, pads and hoses
- New brake master cylinder
- 95 amp alternator
- New Yellow Optima Battery



The AR Rally Spider was sold on BringaTrailer.com and the new owner said he is keeping the rally graphics on the car.

