

Trofeo Series at Whittakers 2006 – David Frith

Around thirty Alfas were entered into the Whittakers Classic meeting at Manfield on 11 & 12th November. This included twenty two registered Trofeo Series competitors, with Don Bradley and Arthur Vowles making welcome returns to the track. Arthur returning from overseas, Don from a considerable period of refurbishment on his car.

Saturday started out damp, but a good Manawatu wind blew the rain away, and then dried the circuit out, so conditions were good for racing. The grassed area used for the pits in years past was so wet that it could not be used. The Alfa contingent therefore commandeered a convenient expanse of tarmac in the pits. Signs stating "Alfa Ghetto – Enter at your own risk" appeared, so all the clan had a reasonable pit area to use.

The grids at this meeting were huge, with 40 odd cars involved.

The start grids were "split", with the latter half of the grid being sent off 10 seconds or so after the first. That makes for a lot of cars on the track, particularly at the first corner.

Race 1 included our GTA class cars. Don Bradley's rebuilt, and immaculately prepared car was on the pace immediately, catching and passing Eddie Beresford's rapid blue and white, 16 valve Alfasud. Bruce Stewart, whose car was also initially quick, succumbed to cylinder head problems. Some surgery seems to be on the agenda? Arthur Vowles was circulating well, and was even two-wheeling it on the odd corner judging from the photos!

Race 2 saw the Veloce class cars running, with Ron Stirk and his trusty sprint making a return to the Trofeo Series. Peter Dommett in the gold & black Alfetta, consolidated on his solid start to the season with a class win, with Paul Weatherly, Ron and Keith Howie in the superbly prepared 105 GTV "Blackadder" not far behind.

Race 7 was the opportunity for the Trofeo and Ti classes to get on track. Ken Garlick and Simon Mills were both very quick on the day, having their cars well set up for the circuit. My 33 was just a little slower, with the ever improving Warwick Grady not far behind. In the Ti (Standard) class Max van Maanen (33) managed to stay ahead of Tina Glennie (sprint) and Keith Elliot's Sud.

Simon Mills ended that race with an unfortunate DNF, his right rear wheel and Glenn Watson's left front guard contacted. The guard was "re-contoured", tearing the valve out of one of Simon's wheels and flattening the tyre. Ken Garlick inheriting the Trofeo class win and a second place in class for me..

Race 16, the European Challenge was the second points-scoring race for the Trofeo Series, and all the Alfas were included. The first racing start was black flagged on lap 2 after a multi-car accident on turn one / Coke corner.

As I came around that corner, I could see Keith Howie's formerly immaculate "Blackadder" stopped across the track, with severe frontal damage. Simon Mills' Sud stopped trackside with both front and rear damage, and Gary Haar's Lancia, also with bad frontal damage. A potentially very nasty incident.

Fortunately no-one was injured, and after the track was cleared, racing re-commenced with "Fast Eddie" Beresford taking the overall win, and GTA class points. Willy Oxley, Ron Dykmans and Tony Olisoff behind. Ron Stirk picked up the Veloce class win ahead of Peter Dommett.

Ken Garlick in his Trofeo class 33 had been ahead of Simon Mills on the track when the incident occurred, and stayed out of trouble, taking maximum class points for the day. I arrived at the checkered flag a few seconds behind Ken, who assured me that he had just been cruising. (Yeah right!)

Max van Maanen led the Ti (Standard) class cars home, from Tina Glennie, and Keith Elliott. Max is starting to really get to grips with the 33 1.7 QV, and is putting some great efforts in on the radial tyres and standard suspension.

Sunday dawned wet and unpleasant. The races on Sunday didn't count for series points, and being so wet, not all drivers competed. The racing varied from exciting to time spectacular, with the highlight being Willy Oxley performing a high speed spin coming onto the Manfield front straight.

Willy was trying to overtake Mark Rantin. The car looped around quickly, in front of Mark, then heading in towards the concrete wall inside the track and rotating in spectacular fashion. Fortunately he only touched the rear of the car relatively lightly on the median barrier opposite the start line.

The spin covered a long distance, at quite a speed. When the car stopped spinning, Willy calmly slipped it into gear and rejoined the race. One very cool customer is our Willy!!

The unfortunate damage to some cars aside, a good time was had by all present. The Alfa group has to be the friendliest, most sociable and helpful bunch of racers anywhere. While there is real competition on the track, there was great camaraderie and club spirit in the pits with competitors regularly helping each other out. Great to see.

Next stop for the series is on 2nd and 3rd December at Taupo. This will be on the small circuit there and is always a relaxed, pleasant and popular event. Admission is likely to be free, and any non-racing Alfisti wanting to have a look at the races, around the pits, or wanting to have a chat about racing will be very welcome indeed.