

Scary

It has long been recognised that Fiat's trendy sportscar could handle more umph, here are three ways of generating the power



Carbs and Cams Marc van Linden

Auto Italia discovered this superb 'Icsunonove' Dallara replica when we attended the annual Classic Car Races held at Zolder in Belgium. Organised by Philippe Bacquaert, this excellent event always has some interesting Italian machinery in attendance.

Marc van Linden is the owner of 'Icsunonove' and he discussed his fascination with Fiat X1/9s with us. "When I was 12, I was not only in love with the baker's daughter, but also with the Fiat X1/9 that had been on the market for just over a year. My love for the baker's girl passed, but not my

other love."

Marc had to wait until he was 22 before he could afford a secondhand X1/9. It succumbed to rust, and five years later he bought a 1974 1300 with just 30,000kms on the clock. Used as second car, Marc still owns his bright yellow X1/9 but



X1/9s



wanted something more exciting, a modified car with higher performance.

"Through my friends in the Fiat Club Belgio I found a suitable donor car with Wilfried Flamand at the Madereel Garage in Ekeren," explained Marc, "It was a 1987 Bertone X1/9, abandoned by an Englishman residing in Belgium, hence the righthand-drive. The interior was in very bad shape but more importantly there was no rust on the body!"

"To many, the ultimate X1/9 is the Dallara version," Marc continued, "there were only 10 racing examples built from 1975 onwards for the Group 5 Silhouette class. That's what my X1/9 had to look like!"

Friends of Marc had traced a Dallara kit in Italy. The body of his car was taken back to bare metal, sand blasted and coated with zinc before the Dallara bodywork was attached. An aluminium fuel tank with dual fillers was installed and anti-roll bars were ordered from Bayless in America. Springs and shock absorbers were made by R-Tec, a specialised race shop, and ventilated discs came from a Fiat Uno Turbo. The wheels were made by Gotti in France as the original Dallara wheels were no longer available.

"It is quite popular for people to fit the

Lancia twin cam or Fiat Uno Turbo power units, giving more reliable horsepower, but personally I don't like any other engine than the one in the X1/9", says Marc.

The race parts came from Alquati in Italy and the list included twin DCNF 40mm Webers, a fast cam and bigger valves.

"'Icsunonove' has already taught me a lot," Marc concluded, "and at the same time, I've made a lot of friends which has given me a lot of satisfaction. Now if I could get some racing satisfaction too, I would be the happiest man in the world - even without the baker's daughter!"





This much-modified car is a million miles away from the early 1300 X1/9 it was based on. The original modifications were carried out by Terry Pettet of Lancia specialists Scheldt and Pettet. Terry used to race a modified Lancia Stratos in the BRSCC Italian Intermarque Championship, so he knows

about powerful rear-engined cars. Although intended as a hillclimb and rally machine, the car was never actually used in competition.

Fitting a Fiat/Lancia twin cam in the back of an X1/9 is not a new idea, but installing a supercharged unit from a Lancia Beta VX is probably unique. It's not the easiest of installations to tackle because some fettling has to be done to mount the engine and gearbox securely without affecting the structural integrity. Terry Pettet obviously put a lot of time and effort into the modifications which have been competently carried out.

The power unit is a Lancia Beta Volumex unit fitted with camshafts from a 2000ie, which apparently provides a power increase. A four-branch exhaust is fitted and the supercharger has been geared to increase boost. Shikan De Silva estimates that power output is about

150bhp, with masses of torque.

Terry Pettet had fitted a straight-cut gearbox and Montecarlo final drive for competition use, but these have since been replaced with standard items for more relaxed road use. Everything is rose jointed and the Leda suspension is fitted with smaller coils. Beta brakes are fitted front and rear.

Shikan repainted the complete car, having first prepared the bodyshell by powder coating. Future modifications include a ported cylinder head and a bigger carburettor to increase power - as if it 150bhp wasn't enough!





ROBERTO GIORDANELLI TRACK TESTS THE TURBOCHARGED 'X1/90' PREPARED BY ASH BOXALL.

You know how different cars bring out different driving styles ... a big lazy automatic has me driving like a Volvo driver, while a Caterham makes me drive like I've just stolen it. The Fiat X1/9 brings out the 'lateral g-force' in me. Corners have to be sliced through on the perfect racing line with millimetre precision.

With an up-front sitting position, the uncluttered view ahead and the low polar moment of inertia are great for pendulum-free left/right flicks. 'Keeping the momentum' is the name of the game. While the standard X1/9 will have trouble picking up speeding tickets, 'driving without due care and attention' is never far away. Never understood that one - whenever I drive like a complete sideways lunatic, I take the greatest possible care and attention. I don't even use my mobile phone.

The original 1,300cc, 73bhp and the later 1,500cc, 85bhp X1/9s have always cried out for more power to lug their 900 odd kilos to the hairdresser's. Ash Boxall of Blond Moto,

Hastings (Tel: 01424 442895) has responded by turning the X1/9 into a wide-bodied crew-cut of a car. This 'purple people eater' has a 1,301cc, 118bhp Uno Turbo engine fitted. The springs are stiffer and 400mm lower, the discs are Tar-Ox grooved, special spacers have been made, the wheels are wide and, in case, you haven't noticed, so is the Blond Moto/Dallara-esque body.

The cockpit is cosy and comfy with a good sitting position and good steering wheel position - all standard except for the boost gauge. Plumbing apart, the standard Turbo engine fitted without too much trouble. The rear boot space is no longer usable as the internal access cover to the engine has been removed in order to get more air-flow around the hot turbo. There is also a bleed valve to fool the ECU and up the boost to a maximum of 1.5 bar, although standard 0.9 bar was what we had on our test day. In fact we had a little less, with the boost gauge reluctant to pass the 0.5 bar mark - never mind, it still goes.

Boost happens over 3,000rpm, which means nearly 60mph in fifth. A dump valve

has been fitted to help keep the turbo spinning when the throttle closes. In the lower gears the power band is wide enough to keep it on the boil. Upping the boost by twiddling the bleed screw is dangerous. The ECU - unaware of the trickery - will not deliver enough fuel at the top-end. Prolonged use of boost with a lean mixture will cause meltdown. There are chips available but the best way to go is an after-market programmable system like Motec. With the boost turned up, this hairy car will do 0-60mph in 6.5 seconds and have a top speed of about 130mph.

The handling is very good, but could be improved with stiffer dampers to match the stiffer springs. That would make the 205/60 tyres mounted to the Alley Cat 8x13 alloys work more efficiently. Initial understeer can turn to mild controllable oversteer and lift-off oversteer can be found at the limit. Its best feature is its ability to change direction quickly despite its slow steering ratio. Its low polar moment of inertia makes multiple directional changes even more impressive. ■



VERDICT

The 'purple crew-cut' is fun but - money no object - would be even better with a 'skin-head': big water radiator, big oil cooler, monster intercooler, 1.5 bar boost with appropriate mapping - a 160bhp X1/9, that would make your hair curl? As already mentioned, some new dampers would be good, and the opportunity could be used to fit adjustable units in order to tune the handling. Ash Boxall's Blond Moto creation works very well. The improved torque was very welcome and raises the question why Fiat never marketed a quick X1/9.