



ARCC UPDATE

February 2009

Alfa News

by George Beston, Cobourg

Another Joint Venture?

After a few months of no news at all, suddenly we have a flurry of reports concerning a “voluntary” arrangement between Fiat and Chrysler Corporation which involves partial ownership of Chrysler by Fiat, the sharing of platforms by Fiat for future fuel-efficient entries by Chrysler, and finally the reintroduction of volume-produced Alfa Romeo vehicles and other Fiat brands into North America.

It's sad that these possibilities co-exist with the worst economic crisis of current times, and a new automobile market that has contracted sharply for the time being, with no letup in sight. With money being extremely tight everywhere, it's hard to imagine anyone coming up with the funds to relaunch Alfa Romeo into North America. Sadly, despite the mirage presented in the newspapers, our dream of Alfas returning to the marketplace here isn't really any further ahead.

This would be a great time for the industry to champion the concept of harmonization to make it viable in the long term. For the sake of efficiency, the world-wide auto industry should develop progressive global safety and emissions standards and then lobby strongly for governments (especially those in the G8 countries) to implement them as harmonized regulations. Under those conditions, vehicles designed and manufactured to the harmonized requirements could be sold or brought into any other market.

This would allow enthusiasts like us to import any conforming vehicle, whether or not the manufacturer chooses to set up sales and distribution networks in our country or location.

My pessimism aside, I've chosen to include the following report on the MiTo recently published in England. This and other first drives or road tests on the MiTo are generally favourable. Some recent releases are indicating that it will have

exceptionally good resale value. If the MiTo ever does come to our market, we will surely not benefit from all the engine choices available overseas. Hopefully the high output gasoline engine will be available, as well as the innovative “DNA” performance adjustment system. Read on!

Fighting the Mini

from carkeys.co.uk, David Finlay, Feb 3, 2009

While the national identities of other cars become increasingly difficult to identify, the Italian nature of the Alfa Romeo MiTo is un-missable, and is even announced by its name: "MiTo" refers half to Milan, where the company's styling centre is based, and half to Torino (or Turin), where the car is built.



The MiTo is a small three-door hatchback, but if you start comparing it with other family cars of that type, you're going down the wrong track. It offers very little in the way of peaceful driving; it's rather cramped in the rear; and although the luggage volume is quite generous at 270 litres, you have to heave anything you want to put in the boot over what must be the highest sill in the sector.

It's more advisable to think of the MiTo as a compact sports model, and if you want a direct rival, then Alfa Romeo would like you to think in terms of MINI. This is a tough assignment, since MINI has become a phenomenon within the motor industry, and the MiTo, being a brand new design, does not have any of the same references to a much-loved older car that MINI does (though if you park one of those beside a classic Mini you'll see that

there is much less resemblance than you think there is).

If the MiTo is to be a true MINI challenger it has to appeal to the emotions of onlookers in a big way, and at the very least it also has to have exceptional driving characteristics. You can decide for yourself if the first part of that sentence rings true; in driving terms the MiTo does not have quite the sharpness of a MINI, but it's certainly a lot of fun.

It's worth mentioning at this point that the only MiTos which have been made available to the press to drive on UK roads so far have been in the range-topping Veloce trim. Mechanically, this makes little difference except that the Veloces are fitted with the largest wheels (17") and lowest-profile tyres (45 section) in the range. The way the suspension has been set up, it seems clear that no MiTo will have what you might call a restful ride, but the Veloce is particularly active over even the smallest bumps.

In return for this sense of urgency (which, in all honesty, seems appropriate for a small Italian sports car) you get absolutely hilarious handling. There is a lot of grip – but not so much that it deadens the driving experience – and a very fine balance which means that even when you're going hard there's no reason for you to feel that either the front or the rear is about to give up and lead you into understeer or oversteer respectively. On really challenging country roads the MiTo is just a blast to drive.

That applies in the case of the two engines I've tried. The MiTo is actually available with five – 95bhp, 120bhp and 155bhp versions of the same 1.4-litre petrol unit and 90bhp 1.3-litre and 120bhp 1.6 diesels. The most powerful of the petrol and diesel variants both work very well, though if I had a choice of the two and my heart ruled my head I would probably go for the petrol, simply on the basis that it sounds better. Noise legislation means that hot Alfa four-cylinder petrol engines are no longer as gut-twisting to listen to as they used to be, but there's still a very satisfying gurgle which acts as a reminder of the glory days.

But the diesel doesn't sound bad, it's (incredibly) slightly cheaper to buy, it's much more economical, and despite that 35bhp disadvantage in maximum power, its superior mid-range ability means that it hardly feels any slower. Swap the balance of power between heart and head and this immediately becomes the one to go for.

Although I've said that the MiTo doesn't give a calm driving experience, I should also point out that all versions have a very useful device called DNA. The letters stand for Dynamic, Normal and All Weather, and they represent the three modes of throttle and

steering response and suspension stiffness. I've not always been impressed by systems like this in the past, but Alfa Romeo has done a very good job here: at the press of a switch you can turn the MiTo from a car which makes excellent work of deserted back roads into one which feels much more suited to towns or motorways or whatever, and then another press immediately makes it ready for more of the fun stuff.

The interior looks quite interesting but some of the materials feel very cheap, and the frameless door windows occasionally rattle alarmingly when the doors are being opened or shut, so there's no great feeling of quality (though in fairness the MiTo is not very expensive, costing between £10,745 for the 95bhp 1.4 Turismo and £14,745 for the 155bhp 1.4 Veloce).



On a more positive note, the MiTo seems to be pretty safe, having been given the full five stars for adult occupant protection by Euro NCAP. It scored three out of five for child protection (losing points mostly for insufficient information on safety features) and just two out of five for pedestrian protection, but it was also one of the most impressive cars in Euro NCAP's first round of whiplash tests conducted late last year, being one of just five out of 25 to be given the maximum "good" rating.

Membership Renewal

Just a reminder – our membership year ends at February. If you haven't already done so, please renew your membership by filling out the form, writing the appropriate cheque and mailing it to the Club's address.

Classic Car Auctions Scottsdale, Arizona

by Tony Adams, Toronto



Photo by Tony Adams

My wife Barbara and I were fortunate to arrange a house rental in the Phoenix, Arizona area for the months of December and January. We left home in the first week of December and thus missed all the winter weather that Ontario has suffered through in December and January. While the weather in the Phoenix area was not tropical, the 70°F to 75°F days have been enjoyable to say the least. It turns out that in January the Phoenix area hosts a number of significant classic car auctions, something I had to see. Four major auction houses hold sales in the Phoenix area: Barrett – Jackson, the largest and oldest auction, RM Auctions, a company based in Ontario that has become a major auction house in Europe and North America, Russo and Steele, a local auction house, and Gooding & Co., an auction house based in California that was holding its second annual auction in Scottsdale. Barrett – Jackson's auction spans a whole week of auctions (over 1000 cars), including evening events and some 300 vendors; the other auctions are generally two day events. I did not intend to attend them all and decided to skip Barrett – Jackson as it receives major TV coverage (see the Speed Channel) and, surprisingly, had no Alfas listed. RM and Gooding both had Alfas listed, so these became my choices.

RM Auctions, January 16, 2009

The RM Auction, which was held at the elegant Arizona Biltmore Hotel, had two Alfas listed: a 1967 Duetto and a 1949, 6C2500 Super Sport Coupe. I was very interested in the Duetto as it had a pre-auction estimate of \$30k to \$40k USD, with no reserve.



Photo by Tony Adams

I went over the Duetto in detail. The body work and paint were excellent with very good panel alignment; the car was fitted with headlight covers but these were secured with non-original nuts and bolts; the interior was generally original with rubber mats. The soft top was not new, but the car also had a tonneau cover. The glove box lock was an all metal type from a later model and did not have the leather pull tab. The crossover air plenum and valve cover were polished but the rest of the engine bay, although clean, was generally original wiring and components. The side mirrors were door mounted and were not original style. The stainless steel bumpers were highly polished, although the fit of the rear bumper uprights was not good as the top of the left one was almost touching the bodywork. I did not bring a flashlight so was unable to check the underside of the car although I was able to confirm that the jacking points were in place and seemed solid. In summary, I thought it a very good example of a Duetto. It would benefit from further detailing and attention to some of the items I had noted to become a most excellent, original example – but I still couldn't see a value of \$30 to \$40 thousand. Little did I know! The bidding opened at \$20k and within 5 seconds hit \$35k, reaching a final selling price of \$42k (excluding buyer's premium) shortly thereafter! A rough currency conversion translates to C\$51,000, so whether I believe that the car is worth that or not, a review of the current insured value of my 1750 Spider is in order!

The second Alfa, the 6C 2500 Super SS, was on display in the parking garage and with the bright sunshine and the resulting deep shadows it was difficult to assess the quality of the car. According to the catalogue, the car had undergone an evaluation and mechanical rebuild by noted UK Alfa specialist JSW in 2005. The exterior of the car was described as "...cosmetically very presentable with an older black exterior finish"...oddly, the car

was blue! The pre auction estimate for the car was \$225k to \$275k; it sold for \$198k.



Photo by Tony Adams

Other cars of note were a 1963 Corvette Grand Sport Roadster race car – one of 5 built with lots of history. Two of the catalogue photos of this car were at Mosport. The bidding opened at \$2 million and rose to \$4.9 million but this amount did not meet the reserve, so it remained unsold. Also unsold was a 1937 Bugatti Type 57SC Atalante Coupe, a beautiful car of the period with a two colour finish of “Patrol Cream and Lemon Oxide”. The bidding got up to \$4.5 million. More down to earth, and yet a beautiful car, was a 1960 Jaguar MK2 3.8 Saloon. It had a lustrous black finish with contrasting biscuit interior. It had a pre-auction estimate of \$70k to \$90k, and sold for \$88k.

Admittance to observe the auction was by the purchase of the catalogue – not cheap at \$100 but this admitted two people and the catalogue is a high quality production featuring 2 or 3 pages of pictures of each car with history and description. A nice book one can pull off the shelf and enjoy at any time.

Gooding & Company, January 17, 2009

The Gooding & Co auction, held at the Scottsdale Fashion Mall, was smaller – just 100 cars. Like the RM Auction there was a mixture of Antiques & Classics, American & European Classics and Sports & Racing Cars. Entry was by catalogue that could be purchased for \$75 and admitted two. The catalogue, like the RM catalogue, was of very high quality with descriptions and photos of all cars – again a book worth keeping.

In the Sports and Racing grouping there was one Alfa, a 1965 Alfa Romeo Giulia TZ-1. This Alfa turned out to be the TZ owned by Fritz Durenberger for many years.



Photo by Tony Adams

The car is a “Stradale” model, very clean and in beautiful shape. The pre-auction estimate was \$550k to \$650k. The bidding opened at \$200k and the car sold for \$400k (excluding buyers’ premium), considerably less than estimate. Did someone get a bargain or was the estimate unrealistic? It was probably well bought, as the reserve had to be less than \$400k.

Other highlights of the sale were a 1937 Talbot Lago T150C SS Tear Drop Coupe that sold for \$3.52 million (pre-auction estimate upon request); a 1960 Ferrari 250 GT California Spider that sold for \$4.95 million; and for you bike fans, a 1977 Ducati 900SS sold for \$27.5k, \$7,500 over estimate. (Above prices include buyer’s premium of 10%).

The Market

Barrett-Jackson and RM Auctions reported decreases in total sales over last year of 28% and 32%, respectively, while Gooding reported a revenue increase of 54% over its first sale held last year. Note that RM had two major sales collapse when bidding failed to reach reserve (the Corvette Grand Sport and the Bugatti Atalante Coupe – see above). The auction houses were generally upbeat about the sales considering the state of the economy. It will be interesting to see the results of future auctions this year and whether the Phoenix sales were a trend. It will be particularly interesting to read the Sports Car Market assessment of these auctions especially with respect to the Alfas that were sold.

So If you find yourself in Arizona around the third week in January, I can highly recommend a couple of days of fine entertainment, sipping champagne and rubbing shoulders with a well heeled crowd. Most of all, just taking in an eclectic mix of fine classic cars – and wishing mightily that you had won the lottery before you came to Phoenix!

Two Well Traveled Alfas

by Mark Willis, Calgary

This whole story starts out with boredom and restlessness. I have owned the same GTV for 10 years now, and there isn't a lot to do with it other than drive and I'm the kind of guy that likes to get his hands dirty. I set out to buy a step nose GTV (105.36 Giulia GT Veloce) for restoration. After a few months looking I made my purchase, a 1967 Red GTV located in NYC.



Photo by Mark Willis

I live in Calgary, ~4,000 km away, but I have family in Ontario and I figured I'd get the car there and sort out the rest later. So I flew to Toronto, borrowed my grandparents' car, drove to my father's farm, borrowed his truck and a neighbour's trailer and then drove to NYC to pick up the car. I brought it back, and put it in the upstairs of the barn until I could figure out how to get the car the rest of the way home.



Photo by Mark Willis

That was August and I knew I would be coming back to Ontario for Christmas. So, I thought "why not drive there from Calgary with my truck and bring the car back with a trailer?" It will be winter but it can't be that bad right? I'd made the drive in

winter before and it was bad ... but I was just getting an irregular storm.

In the mean time back in Calgary, I was surfing the internet for miscellaneous parts I knew I would need for the restoration and came across a 1964 Giulia Sprint GT (105.02) parts car in the Okanogan area of B.C. Not being too interested in a whole parts car, I watched the sale (eBay) go and then contacted the buyer looking for parts. The buyer told me he was going to restore the car and asked if I thought he was crazy. I noticed his email profile on eBay indicated he lived in the UK! I emailed him back and told him he was crazy for shipping this 'hunk of junk' from BC to the UK. He e-mailed me back and told me he actually lives in London Ontario, but what parts was I looking for? Always looking to share costs, my reply email took all of 5 seconds "I'm going from Calgary to the London area at Christmas, do you need it shipped?"

Before long we had struck a deal, I was in the shipping business. A 1964 Red Sprint GT was going from B.C. to Ontario and my 1967 Red Sprint GT Veloce from (now) Ontario to Calgary, Alberta. He had his car delivered to my house in Calgary just before Christmas on a tilt & load truck. It arrived with 3 flat tires and one wheel with no rubber, not exactly an easy car to roll and a long way from running.



Photo by Mark Willis

I picked up the U Haul trailer on the 19th of December, loaded the GT with a cable puller ("come-a-long"), strapped it down and I was ready to go. The trip had to be in Canada since the car I was hauling had no ownership and I'm sure it would have caused some grief with Customs. I planned my route through Canada figuring I could stay with a friend in Winnipeg the first night and the second night with another friend in Wawa.

I set off from Calgary at 5 a.m. on the morning of the 20th of December; it was slow driving at 90-100

km/hr for the morning. Wind was partially behind me and some snow was blowing over the Trans-Canada, but nothing unmanageable. Regina was an absolute mess, ice and accidents all over the place. It took about an hour to get through with a fast food lunch.

The afternoon and evening had a lot of blowing snow, blinding when transports passed me, but at least it's the prairies and you can assume the road is straight in front of you for the whole day. Did I mention it was -35°C outside, without the wind chill? I pushed on and made Winnipeg at 9:30 p.m., had a wonderful dinner at my buddy's place, a shower and a great night's sleep. Not too shabby! I thought "day one down".

The next day (5:00 am start), I didn't get lost on my way out of Winnipeg, but that was where the fun stopped. About an hour out of Winnipeg I hit black ice and fish-tailed the truck terribly. I managed to get it back under control, keeping my cargo safe and my truck out of the ditch, but my confidence was gone. It was still pitch black out. I dropped my speed down to 70 km/hr and drove like that for 30 minutes before I came up behind a sander. I drove behind him at 40 km/hr for another 30 minutes when he rolled to a stop and came back to talk to me. He told me that no one had come out of Ontario for over an hour and he was out of sand. "You're on your own, pal". It was still dark out, so I crawled along at 60-70 until I hit a traffic jam on the Trans-Canada, right at the Ontario border. I sat, looking at that sign for an hour, watching the sun come up. The whole time I was thinking, "What the hell have I got myself into, I should not be here, this is 'way too dangerous'".



Photo by Mark Willis

I remember walking around, looking at the highway, trying to guess how much traction I could get on this skating rink of a road.

Traffic finally started to move, inching up to what had been plugging up the Highway. For those of you that haven't driven this piece of Canada, this is where the Prairies turn into the Canadian Shield so the roads become hilly and there are lots of rock cuts. Not exactly the place you want to be driving

on slippery roads with someone else's new Alfa project on a trailer behind you. So there it was – the one hour delay was caused by a transport truck that had lost traction, jack-knifed, crossed over the yellow line and ploughed into a granite rock face. A perfect thing to see when you're driving confidence is pretty much zero.



Photo by Mark Willis

At least it was light out now and I could make decent judgements whether the road was dry, ice or snow. Mostly packed snow. I drove all day, white knuckled, in 4WD, wanting to make Wawa that night in the worst way. I went as fast as I safely could but only made Nipigon for dinner, still 4 hrs from Wawa. I had dinner at the Husky truck stop and decided to stop there.

Next was the decision of where to sleep, I thought about it for a while. Since all money spent can be equated into Alfa Parts Bucks and a hotel in Nipigon was going to run me \$125, I decided to sleep in my pick-up. I had some Arctic sleeping bags with me from my army days that I had brought for emergency purposes. So it can't be that bad....right? Did I mention it was still -35°C outside without the wind chill? I parked in the big lot with all the other truckers (not that I'm a real trucker) and hunkered down for the night. I won't say it's the worst sleep I've ever had, but it was awful. After 4 hours of falling asleep, waking up cold and re-adjusting myself, I broke down, started my truck and turned on the heater. I woke up again after 3 hrs of 'ok' sleep at 4:30am. Might as well get going and get this !@#\$\$%# trip over. By 4:50 am I was moving again.

Roads were more of the same with patches of ice, packed snow and the odd dry spot. Still driving in 4WD all day, I passed through Wawa at 11 a.m., grabbed a sub and didn't bother stopping to see my old buddy who I hadn't seen in a few years. I caught a few quick glimpses of Lake Superior, but had to stay focused on the road and there was no time for leisurely stops. Every fuel stop I kept re-calculating the distance to Toronto. Can I make it

today...yes...no...yes...no...maybe. I got to Sudbury just after dusk; I think I passed every mine worker going home for the day there. The roads were wet at this point, the weather was finally getting better, but the oncoming traffic headlights hit me even harder with the wet surface of the road. My eyes were killing me, just sore from staring at the road. I fuelled up in Sudbury and a friend advised me not to take Highway 69 south, I'm still not sure if that was the best advice, definitely longer. I went for another 45 minutes and just couldn't go any further. I didn't even make it to North Bay. I stopped at a Canadian Tire in Sturgeon Falls to make a plan. I wandered the isles of Crappy Tire making phone calls to let people know where I ended up.

Next was the decision of where to sleep, I thought about it for a while. Since all money spent can be equated in to Alfa Parts Bucks and a hotel in Sturgeon Falls was going to run me \$125, I decided to sleep in my pick-up....again. At least this time it was only minus 18°C out. So yep, I slept in a Canadian Tire parking lot, in my truck. I must admit, I slept better there, but I think most of it was because I was so tired and feeling a little better knowing that the trip as almost over.

At 4:30 am, I woke up, started my truck, checked over the lights, and packed up the sleeping bag. For those of you who don't know, if you sleep in a vehicle in -18°C for 7 hours with the windows shut, you will emit enough water vapour from your breathing to cover the windows with 0.5 mm of frost, which in this case, takes a full 30 minutes of the vehicle running in the morning for the defroster to remove. At 5:00 am, I'm moving. Things are starting to get better; I see places I've been to more than a few times in my life, cottage country. Hwy 11 was slushy, but I felt like I could drive on any surface at this point. The roads kept getting better and better. I had lunch at the McDonalds south of Barrie on the 400, it was delicious.

Driving through Toronto on the 401 felt like nothing, not a care in the world. I knew if anything went wrong there were two dozen friends or family that I could call for help. But of course I didn't need any; the roads were almost completely dry, just a bit of water here and there. No snow, ice or pushy transports. I was 3 interchanges away from my turn-off in London when conditions started to go south again.

Snow, lots of wet snow. OK, I can handle this. I found my exit, fuelled up one last time and called my shipment's owners neighbour. You see the owner of my cargo had to skip town for a funeral over Christmas, so he put his neighbour in charge. I got my final directions and I was almost there.

There was one change of plans; my owner's driveway hadn't been shovelled for over a week so the car was going into his neighbour's driveway. I was a little concerned, because I specified that I needed something to anchor the car to, in order to pull it off. He was going to leave the winch hanging out of his Land Cruiser which sounded ideal, but now I'm not dropping it there.

The street he lives on was a one-way, with lots of snow. The neighbour's driveway was shovelled out, but only the width of a GTV, not a U-Haul trailer. Five times back and forth in 4WD, low range, a bit of burnt rubber and burnt clutch (two of the worst smells coming off a vehicle you baby) and I had the trailer in. It was at that point that I really looked at the driveway it was supposed to go in. I saw the winch hanging out; there wasn't even enough room to put the car in front of the land cruiser, let alone space to unload without blocking the whole road....nice. I saw the neighbours wife there, no neighbour, turns out he's at work, ok, so I'm unloading it on my own. What can I tether this thing to, to get it off, it won't roll. I looked around for a good 10 minutes. I couldn't see anything strong enough. The car was so immobile, you couldn't even drive backwards fast and hit the brakes, plus the ramps would never work and probably damage something.

I had to face the inevitable, crawl under the trailer with a piece of rope and a come-a-long and do something that would get me yelled at by all the women that know me and called an idiot by most guys. I lay under the car (half under the trailer and half under the car) tied the rope to the cross member of the Alfa and then attached the come-a-long to the back of the trailer and started moving the car while lying underneath. At this point it was around zero Celsius, there was dirty water dripping like crazy off the Alfa, I was a cold bitter mess. I kept telling myself to keep my cool and pay attention to the movement of the Alfa. Are the front wheels still on the wheel tracks? Are the rear wheels on the wheel tracks? Are the rear wheels going to go on the ramps? Is there anything that might pinch me or crush my skull?

I had the rear wheels half way down the ramp when the neighbour's wife came back outside:

"Where are you?"

"I'm down here."

"Down where? Oh My God, what are you doing?"

"I'm getting this car off the trailer so I can leave."

"That's dangerous; do you think we can push it off the rest of the way?"

“Sure, let’s try.”

That was when I realized I was trapped and the only way out from underneath was between the ramps ... after I dug out some more snow. So I crossed my fingers the car wouldn’t decide to roll and made a break for it. The neighbour’s wife and I pushed the car another two feet and the rear wheels were on the ground – in one foot of snow. The rest was easy, just drive forward and let friction do the work. Done, the car landed gently on a nice bed of pure white snow. Too bad I was wet, dirty and agitated!

I got some directions from the neighbour’s wife, and I was on my way to Stratford to reconnect with my wife (who did the sensible thing and travelled to Ontario by air) and then to enjoy my remaining 5 days of holidays before I hit the road again. I was caught in a traffic jam on the way out of London and a snow storm on the way to Stratford... whatever, this sucks, I had to accept it. I desperately need a shower and a tall drink.

Editor’s note: Stay tuned for part two!

75 Experience

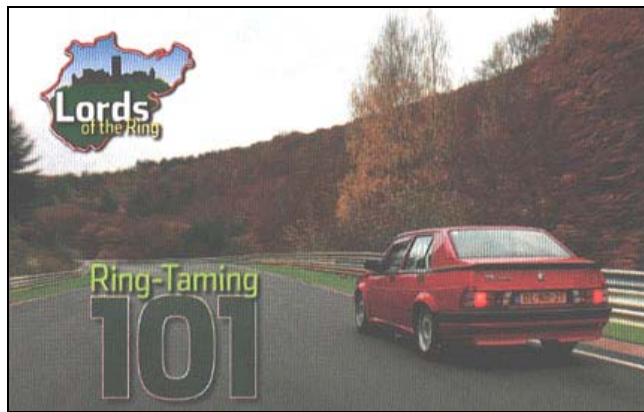
by George Beston, Cobourg

Check out the February 2009 issue of Road and Track for its Nurburgring article and particularly for the companion piece on Ron Simons’ “75Experience”, described as the de facto official Nordschleife driving school. All the cars used are Alfa 75’s (Milanos to those on this side of the pond). The writer advises to get over the boxy looks. “A very capable, lightweight racing machine hides underneath, courtesy of rear-wheel drive, a rear-mounted transaxle and a torquey V-6 that can be massaged to nearly 300 horses, all sounding as Italian as Pavarotti.”

Depending on a student’s skill level, race prepped 75’s are provided with a range of performance from a stock 4 cylinder version to a full racing V6.

The writer describes with some delight his success at blowing off a Mitsu Evo with the full-on V6.

Does anybody want to organize a club outing to the ‘ring?



Upcoming ARCC Events

**Alfa Romeo Club of Edmonton
Ottawa Chapter
Toronto Chapter**

Watch this space! Clubs reps should send 2009 calendars as soon as possible.

Alfa Romeo Club of Canada

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