

Driving the Nostalgic Way

Touring In an Alfa Romeo old-timer through the Northern Italian lake district. Through a landscape looking like a movie set. Along meandering mountain roads, past Neo-Gothic castles and through sleepy villages.



By Jan Jacobs

Photography: Andries Jonker, Folkert van der Hoef & nostalgic.eu

The Nostalgic company boasts a fleet of Alfa Romeo models from the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies of the 20th century, and organizes old-timer tours for private groups and companies through various regions of Italy. At the occasion of Alfa Romeo's 100-year-anniversary, Nostalgic organized a press trip through Lago Maggiore, the lake district in the north of Italy.

Fittingly, the first time I get into a Giulietta Spider cabriolet, I feel a hint of nostalgia. This car evokes memories of the movie 'La Dolce Vita' with Marcello Mastroianni and Claudia Cardinale. This car is a symbol of a feeling of freedom and enjoying the good life.

At first it really takes getting used to driving such a small fancy car. Needless to say, the Alfa Romeo old-timers do not have power steering or braking. No safety belts either (Italian law makes an exception for old-timers); there is a poke for the hand brake and the funny side mirrors are very small indeed. Furthermore, its turning circle is larger than that of modern cars, and also, you need to double clutch when you go from third to second gear, for example.

Even though there is a group of us, each pair drives its

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own route. One person is at the wheel and the other gives directions after having consulted the road map. That provides us with the possibility of deciding what we like. While one team may prefer to drive on at high speed, the other may want to stop along the way to take a photo of a beautiful view, castle or cloister, or get out for a refreshment on a terrace. All the time, a Nostalgic team follows the participants unobtrusively with, among others, a semitrailer carrying a reserve old-timer.

From the Alfa Romeo museum in Arese (not far from the Milan Malpensa airport) we drive the first stretch in just such a small, fiery red classic car. Passing Italians wave at us and hoot their horn. They raise their thumbs at us with a big grin. It is obvious that we are driving around in Italian cultural heritage.

During the four-day tour we spend the night at the Grand Hotel Majestic (****) in Pallanza. It's a hotel with a history going back to the Belle Epoque, as witnessed by the Jugendstil motives, the mahogany covered walls, the columns and pillars. The hotel's ambience is



pleasantly informal, and the view from the hotel rooms breathtakingly beautiful: right on the Lago Maggiore with its small fort islands, and across from the lake the lovely Swiss/Italian Alps.

Our point of departure is Grand Hotel Majestic, and from it we drive a different route every day. Along narrow roads, the wind in our hair, the sun on our face, protected by sunglasses. Through the mountains, in the direction of Matterone, 1500 meters up. We wind our way through tiny picturesque villages where time seems to have stood still. It's going downhill that you notice how steep the hills are, but fortunately the brakes of the old-timers work perfectly.

While on our way we see many castles, cloisters and mansions in pastel tints with cast iron balconies, radiating the grandeur of the Belle Epoque. We take a boat to Isola San Giulio, a small island with a Benedictine monastery on it, and a restaurant on the water. Lunch - salad, pasta and fish - is prepared for us using fresh ingredients from the own vegetable garden.

The last day takes us through the rough terrain of the Alps, with lots of hairpin bends, to the Swiss fishing town of Ascona. On the terrace of Castello Seeschloss, an old 13th century castle transformed into a hotel, we enjoy lunch and the view from the other side of Lago Maggiore. It's true, we have been driving through a movie set these last few days.



WHO, WHAT, WHERE

From March till late November, Nostalgic organizes Classic Car Rallies, in Lago Maggiore, Toscane, southern Tirol, and on Sicily. Participants are given original, classic Alfa Romeo cabriolets forty to fifty years old, to drive around in for four days. The Classic Car Rally can be booked by private and business groups - from twelve persons to a maximum of 60 participants. Hotel rooms, lunches, dinners, transfer, and visits to (tourist) attractions are included in the Nostalgic package, plane tickets are not. De Classic Car Rally in Lago Maggiore can be reached via Milan Malpensa airport. Nostalgic has an office in many different countries. In Amsterdam contact Connie Flühme, T. +31 (0)20 421 0106. T+ +31 (0)6 - 514 688 44 More information: www.nostalgic.nl