



General / 15 June 2018

In the beginning...

In the first of a new series of blogs that will introduce you to the long history of JAS Motorsport, CEO Alessandro Mariani recalls the ultra-successful organisation's first race.

Three cars on fire. Not one, not two, but three! It wasn't the start we were aiming for as a team, but thankfully things got much better pretty quickly during the first 12 months of JAS Motorsport.

The process of creating JAS actually started back in 1993. I'd worked in the Alfa Romeo road car division earlier in my career and Giorgio Pianta, by that time the head of Alfa Corse - the motorsport division - had taken an interest in my career.

I was working as an engineer in F1 with Minardi and Giorgio asked me to come back to Alfa. I declined, but he persisted and in late '94 I agreed to be Alessandro Nannini's Race Engineer for the following season in the DTM. F1 had banned all the interesting driver aids by this stage, but the DTM's Class 1 regulations embraced them, and I was up for the challenge.



Midway through '95, Giorgio asked about my ambitions, and specifically, whether I would like to run a team. I said "yes, but only if the people I'm working with share my philosophy". He told me had three friends who wanted to start a team and that I'd get on with them well.

I met with these friends; Paolo Jasson, Maurizio Ambrogetti and Giorgio Schon and I knew very quickly that while we came from very different backgrounds, we could work together very well and that the variety of skills and contacts they had could make this a very successful business.

On September 1, JAS Motorsport (J for Jasson, A for Ambrogetti, S for Schon) was established and within six weeks we'd hired 65 people, including Stefano Fini and Mads Fischer, who are now in charge of our GT3 and TCR programmes.

I was left to decide the technical and engineering direction of the team while Maurizio, Paolo and Giorgio only offered advice when they realised it could be of benefit to the business. I appreciated this.



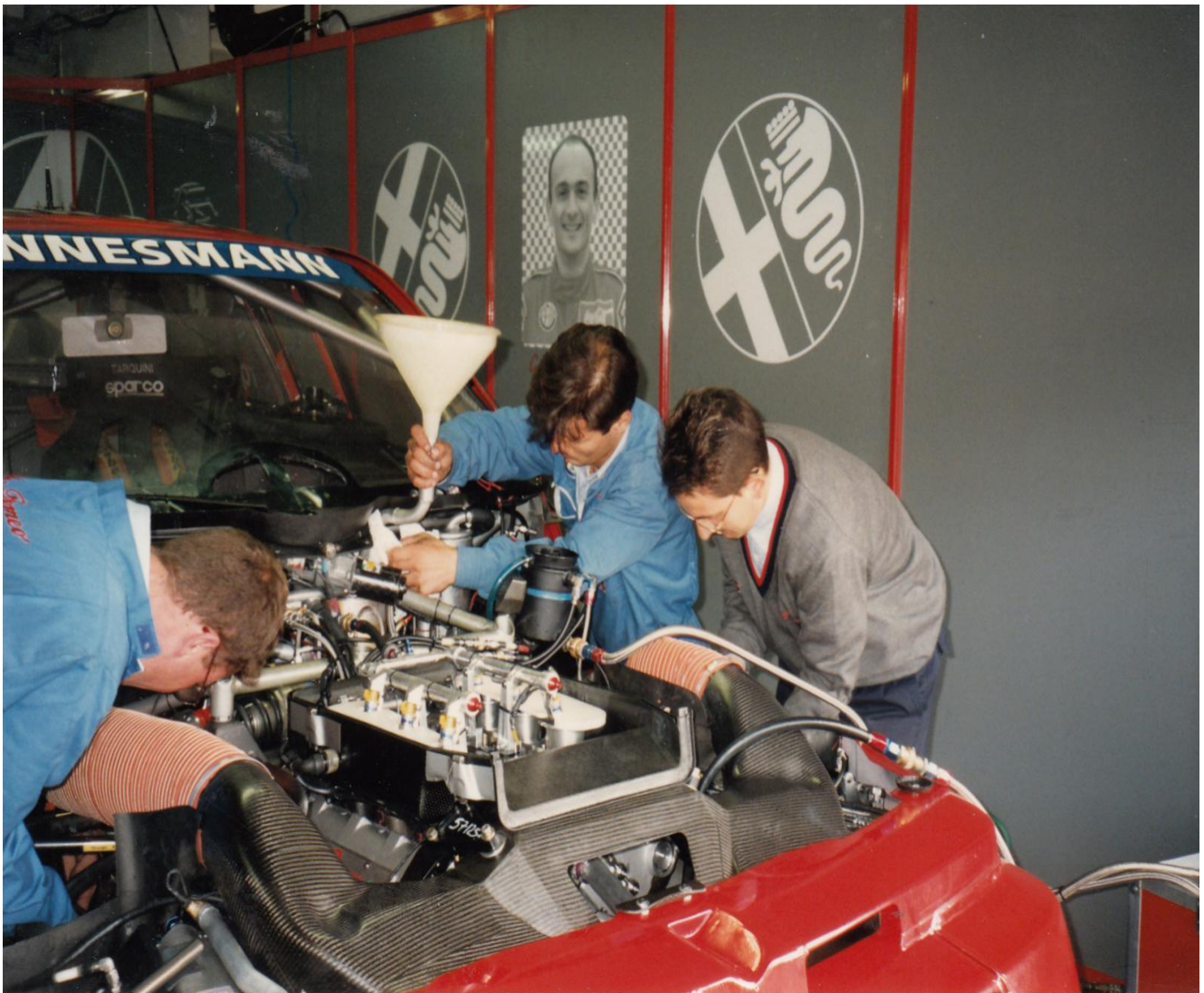
While the 1995 season wasn't finished, Alfa Romeo asked us to lead the development process of the 155 Class 1 car to be raced in the '96 International Touring Car (ITC) Championship, which we did. We had two engine dyno test beds and a gearbox test bed too - amazing!

The gearbox situation was quite funny. The Alfa Romeo gearbox had been problematic in '95 so I suggested we engage XTRAC and develop a new unit together. Being cautious, Alfa Romeo asked us to order 32 units, but the boxes were so strong, we only used eight all year! We still have a tremendous relationship with XTRAC 22 years later.

The completed cars only arrived two weeks before the first race so we had a huge mountain to climb. Nowadays, I wouldn't do it, but I was much younger and 'impossible' wasn't a word I acknowledged. Pianta had put his faith in JAS and this gave me confidence to go and do big things.

Hockenheim. First race. Instant disillusionment through not seeing our cars on the top of the timing screen – something that still frustrates me now. Then came the big disaster when the cars of Gabriele Tarquini, Stefano Modena and Michael Bartels all caught fire during the weekend. We vowed that day to never let something like this happen ever again.

It was a huge setback, but we took a calm mental approach. Gabriele, who had come to see me in December to tell me "I don't want to be here; I should be at Alfa Corse, not your B-team", did not complain and was, in fact, extremely supportive. He had a great relationship with his mechanics and built up their confidence very quickly. He was hugely important in our recovery.



Together, as a team, we rectified the problem. At the next event Gabriele finished in the top five. Two races later, in Helsinki, Michael qualified on the second row, and at the Norisring - only eight weeks after our disaster - Stefano took our first podium.

"Not bad," said Pianta. "But this is nothing. Now you have to win". At Silverstone in the summer, Gabriele did. That unlocked extra sponsorship from Martini and we ran their Rosso colours for the rest of the year as well as getting the new 90-degree V6 Alfa engine, which helped our performance.

It was a big turning point for us. It wouldn't be the last.



J.A.S.

JAS is official partner of Honda since 1998 , initially as works team and then as engineering and Customer Service provider.

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