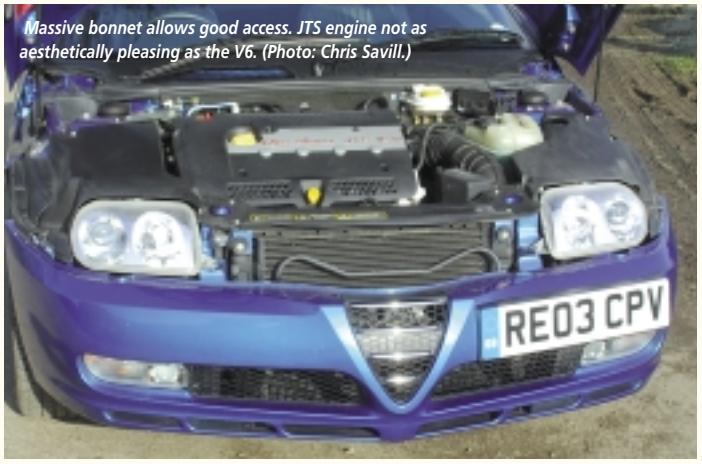


Massive bonnet allows good access. JTS engine not as aesthetically pleasing as the V6. (Photo: Chris Savill.)


Final series Spider interior. (Photo: Alfa Romeo.)

fuel injection light but if the immobiliser light is on you will normally find the car will not start.

Immobiliser

This is a complicated system offering around four billion combinations and the code is changed each time the key is used so it's never the same twice. This makes the cars harder to steal (thieves will commonly break into your house for the keys first) and causes few problems in normal operation. However if you buy a car without the brown "master" key and the battery goes flat you may need to buy a new ECU and locks, which could cost £1,000.

If you do have the Master key, don't use it as an every day key – some reports claim the key is only good for 50 starts and once these have been exhausted it would have to be replaced. Alfa Romeo deny this. Cars should be supplied with four keys in total – one Master key, two red every days keys with black remote controls for the central locking, and one "service" key that only operates the doors and ignition. In theory this is so you can leave things in the boot or glovebox without worrying about them getting stolen while the car is in for service. As the boot release is in the glovebox and the battery and some relays are in the boot this doesn't really work in practice.

There is an emergency starting procedure if the immobiliser develops a fault, involving the use of the immobiliser code. However this will be of limited use if you are stranded as the codes were not released to dealers or owners (at the behest of the insurance industry). The codes can be obtained from Alfa UK for UK supplied cars but not for personal imports so do ask sellers about this. There are no other obvious drawbacks with personal imports and prices are generally similar to official UK cars.

Servicing

Cars with a full dealer service history are always preferable and once out of warranty a non-franchised specialist is just as good as a dealer for servicing and maintenance. Don't forget that services should be done at the earlier of 12,000 miles or 12 months and get progressively more expensive between 12,000 and 72,000 miles. The 84,000 mile service is effectively just an oil change the same as the 12,000 mile service, so it should not be expensive. Spark Plugs must be changed at 60,000 miles or five years and there are eight of them on the two litre cars (as opposed to six on the V6 cars).



Autodelta's J10 Evo 2.0 Turbo was actually a phase 1 car with the addition of the chrome surround grille. It offered 220bhp and 218 lb.ft of fun. (Photo: Chris Savill.)

Engines and Gearboxes

There are widely reported failures of cambelts on Twin Spark engines at various mileages before 72,000 (the recommended replacement mileage). Very low mileage engines are just as likely to suffer as average mileage engines. If you are looking at a car that had its belt changed but sounds rattly on start up from cold, the chances are the Variator wasn't replaced. This variator controls the variable valve timing so although a failed variator will not stop the car it will affect performance and fuel economy. Special tools are available for mechanics wanting to try changing the cambelts at home but I would only recommend it to people who have changed cambelts on other cars before and are comfortable with how to do it.

As with most fuel injected cars nowadays, the electronic engine management system is governed by the amount of air entering the engine. More air = more fuel = more performance. The air allowed into the engine is governed by the Air Flow Meter and these are renowned for failure. There are various different types for different engines so first of all make sure you source the correct one for the engine number on the car. Secondly, although the AFM is a good place to start when trying to solve erratic idle speed or constant stalling there are other causes as well, some of which cost nothing more than a minute of your time to attempt. Contact the GTV/Spider Registrar for more details if you do have running problems because it would be very frustrating to shell out lots of money for a new AFM only to find it does not cure whatever problem you have!

Gear linkages also wear out with age, although it should be possible to get the car into second and



V6 engine, as seen on this limited edition GTV Cup, nicer to look at. (Photo: Chris Savill.)



Final series Spider looking fresh and fun. (Photo: Alfa Romeo)