

Belgium Grand Prix - Spa 1925

The once underestimated Alfa team was now dominant in the eyes of the public with the P2, which was even more powerful than it had been the year before.

Ettore Bugatti's philosophy of manufacturing series production racing cars took his attention from participation in Grand Prix competitions. The Type 35 Grand Prix car of the previous year, now delivered with mud guards, became the car of choice for the privateer in road racing events. The works team realized it had a winner for road racing in the T35 and focused its competitive efforts in this area.

Mercedes saw no reason to incur the expense of developing an entirely new GP car for their 2-liter engine just for one season, so they turned their attention to the development of the Porsche-designed S series of sports cars for road racing.

Sunbeam was still in the fray, continuing development of their venerable and increasingly powerful straight-six, although the Wolverhampton works was also focusing on road racing, going after the Bentleys with their new three-liter version of the GP twin cam.

At Delage Lory set about creating five completely new cars. The basic architecture of Planchon's U-12 was kept, while the internals were reworked

for supercharging. Lory's solution was as interesting as the engine itself. Bore was brought down slightly from 51.3 to 51.15, while the stroke stayed at 80mm, reducing displacement to 1973cc from 1984 of the 1924 2LCU. Two Roots, superchargers were installed, one for each bank of cylinders. One Zenith carb was mounted on each blower. The power increased to 205hp at 6500rpm. A new five speed gear box was mounted, replacing the previous four speed. The chassis came in for modifications to handle the increased power, and the brakes were likewise attended to

The new Delage bodies were beautifully reshaped from last years model. The hoods of the new cars were a mass of louvers, in an attempt to address their old nemesis, overheating.

While Fiat's engineering department was focused on the development of the wet sleeve aero engine, Bordino did go racing in 1925, but not in Europe. On April 19th, at the Board track of Culver City, California, Bordino captured a 25 mile race driving a 2-liter 805. His winning lap average was 133.0mph. For comparison, Pete de Paolo, who went on to win Indy in May in his Duesenberg, won another 25 miler that day at 135.0mph.

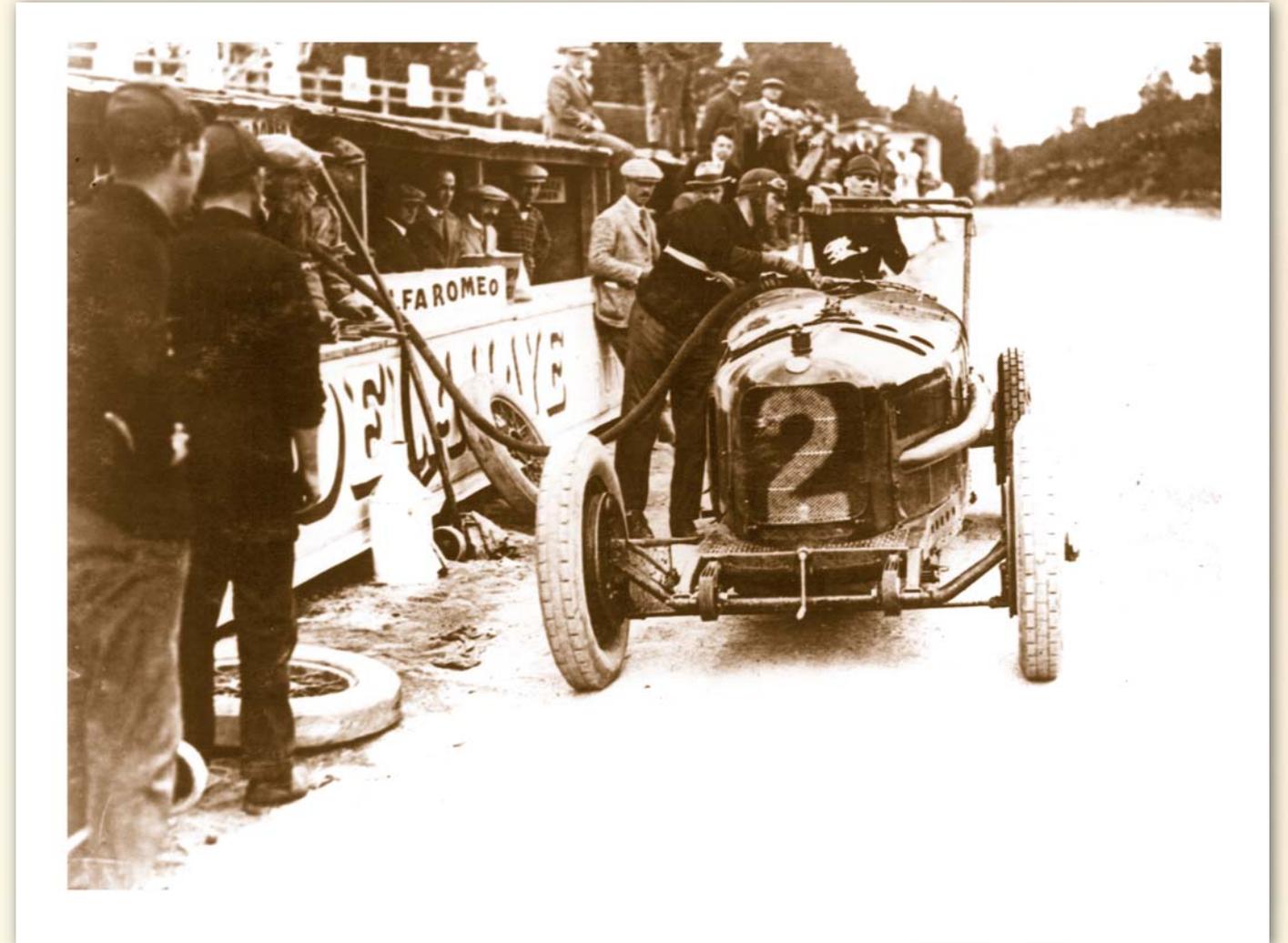
Jano had a trick up his sleeve for the 1925 season. Over the winter he applied his concentration to a problem that had confronted all early racing

teams; inconsistent fuel quality. This was a little understood area of research because the petro-chemical companies were busy trying to develop gasoline refining methods for the internal combustion engine in general and hadn't focused on the mystery elixirs used in racing. Jano began working closely with Stefano Somazzi, a Swiss chemical engineer with Shell Italiana in Genoa.

Alfa's racing department became Somazzi's laboratory as he and Jano pursued their goal of a stable fuel for racing. Somazzi's association with Alfa's racing department established him as the foremost authority on the development of racing fuels. With his firm's support, in 1932 he developed Shell Dynamin which set the standard for quality in high performance fuels.

The competition year opened with the GP of Belgium at the new circuit of Spa. Though changed much from its original layout it is the only GP track which even today incorporates the earliest of racing traditions; the use of public roads as part of the course. Although the two hour

GP races of today would only qualify as sprints in relation to this 500 mile race, the Belgians might have preferred a sprint of a couple of hours that day in 1925.



*The Driver and his mechanic as pit crew. Ascari & Marinoni at work.
Looking out from the Alfa pit is Jano, Rimini & Nicola Romeo with impressive moustache*

Alfa arrived with three P2s laid out like Ascari's precautionary design at Lyon the year before. Each car had a truncated tail with a spare tire mounted to it. The drivers were Ascari, Campari, and a new team member, Count Gastone Brilli-Peri. Brilli-Peri had enjoyed considerable success aboard Diattos, Steyrs and Fiats of the time in the gentlemen's amateur class.

Alfa's only opposition were from the Delages of Thomas, Divo, Benoist and Wagner-whose departure from the Alfa team had made room for Brilli-Peri. These excellent V-12's had been so competitive in normally aspirated form that they posed a true threat supercharged.



Rene Thomas getting some power down.



The Delage team was the Belgian crowd's favorite and foreseen by many as the certain victors. From the start of the race it looked as though the Delage might deliver a French victory. Thomas, Divo, Benoist and Wagner set a blistering pace, but it was short-lived. The Alfa team lapped the

new Spa course with remarkable regularity, as the Delage team progressively disappeared from the track. By mid-race the Alfa's were motoring around the new track by themselves.

At the time the retirement of the Delages was attributed to "plug trouble" and "ruptured fuel tanks". It was later learned that a blower pressure release problem had sidelined the French team. The intake valves had remained open, contacting the pistons, and ventilated the blocks. Lory had evidently miscalculated the internal dynamics created by the blowers.

Delage's engineering oversight unfortunately left the Belgian crowd to enjoy the landscape around the new track until Ascari or Campari came



flashing by. Brilli-Peri had retired with a broken spring, demonstrating that this new course still had quite a rustic character.

The rustic atmosphere was intensified by the jeers and catcalls of the Belgian crowd, growing impatient at the prospect of a six-hour match between two Alfas. Jano, in a sharp break with his usual formal demeanor, had Ascari and Campari brought into the pits where he invited them to have a sit-down lunch, while the cars were cleaned and polished for the finish.



Giuseppe Campari leasurly hastening to second place.

