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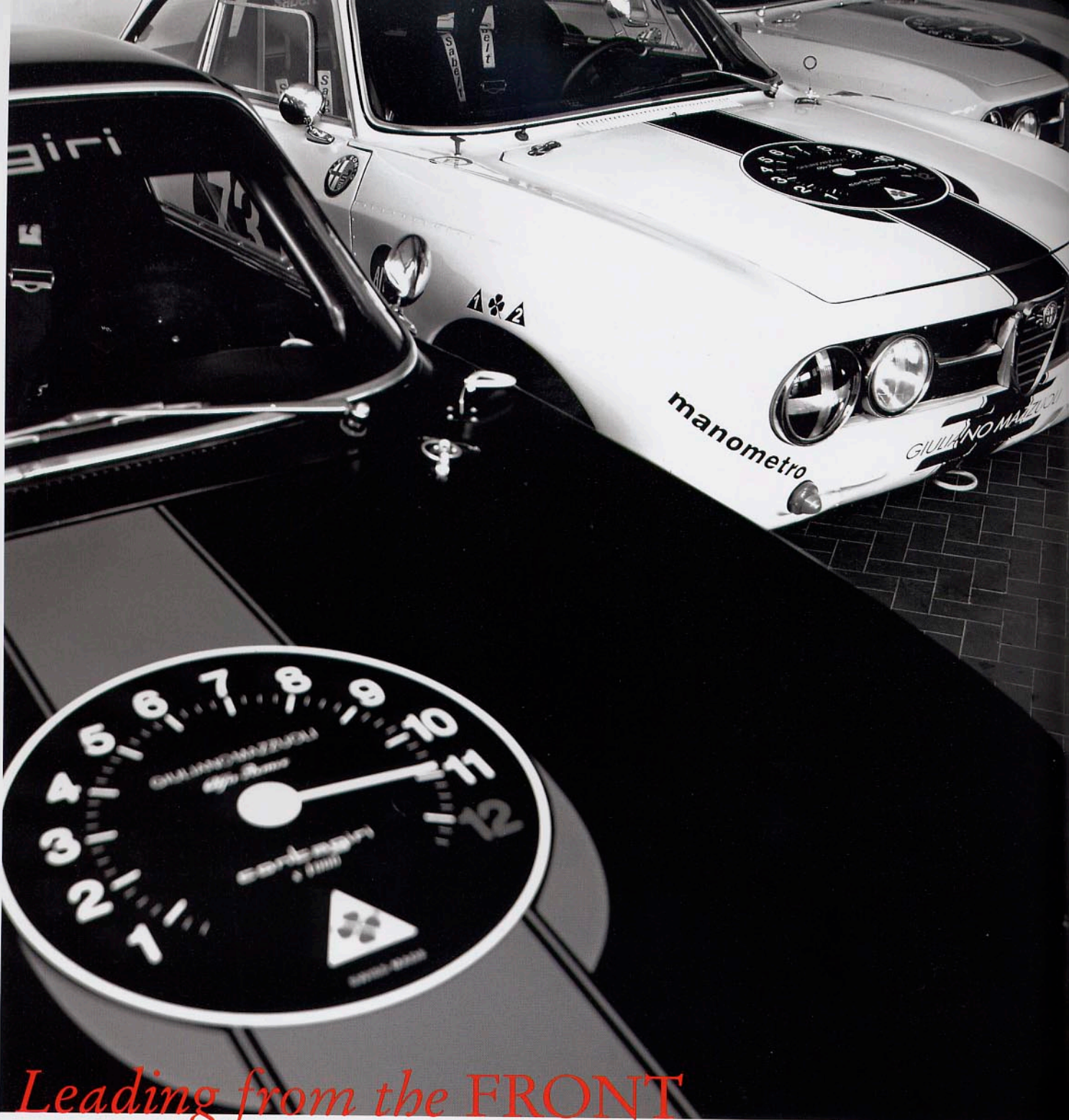
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Giuliano Mazzuoli's watch designs are inspired by a love for Alfa Romeo race cars. Page 28



Leading from the FRONT

WHEN ALFA ROMEO DECIDED TO COMMISSION A WATCH, THEY TURNED TO ITALIAN DESIGNER AND ONE-TIME ALFA RACING DRIVER GIULIANO MAZZUOLI

WORDS: ROBIN SWITHINBANK PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMIE BEEDEN

Like many others who bear the label of creative genius, Giuliano Mazzuoli never sits still. He's constantly fidgeting. Leaping up out of his chair to get something one moment and rolling another Marlboro Red restlessly between his fingers the next. Veering off at tangents as we talk through his broad experiences of life as an Alfa Romeo racing driver, businessman and designer, and unpacking pens,

watches, diaries and presentation cases all over the table until it looks as if someone's spilled the contents of a large box all over it. Wonderful chaos.

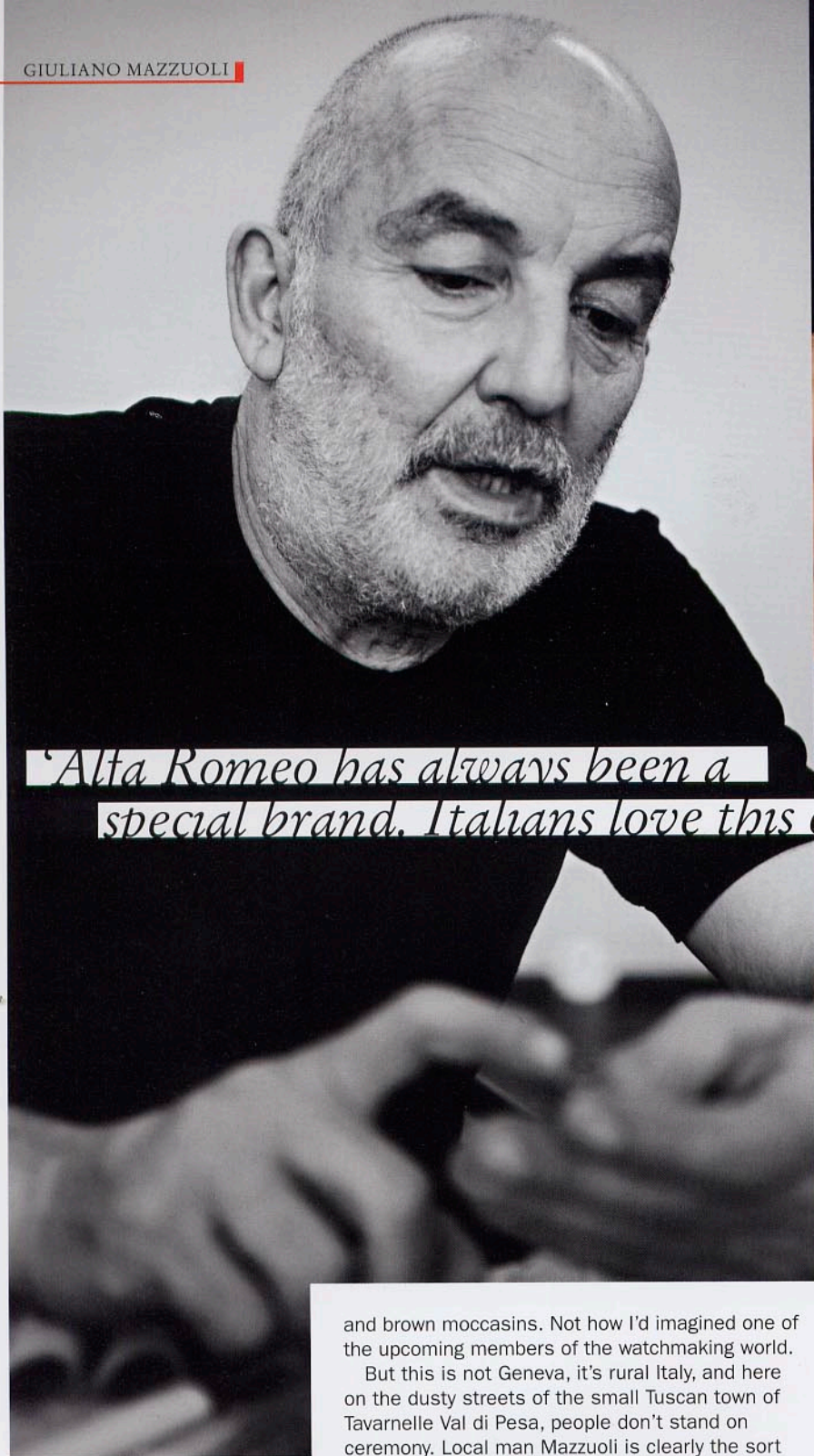
Despite this, he's not what I'd expected. Earlier, when we first met, I mistook him for a mechanic. The man I observed fiddling impatiently with the lock on his garage door, lit cigarette in one hand, was casually decked out in blue jeans, plain black T-shirt ▽

Opposite page:
Giuliano Mazzuoli has
six Alfa Romeo GTAs in
his collection. Each is
liveried with Contagiri
branding, the watch
inspired by the GTA's
rev counter. This page:
his 1968 GTA Junior is
one of only 20 models
in existence, and one
of only three with a
full history. Despite
its estimated value
of £80,000, he often
turns down offers from
would-be buyers

GIULIANO MAZZUOLI

*'When I told the Swiss about my
plan, they told me I was crazy'*





'Alfa Romeo has always been a special brand. Italians love this car.'



and brown moccasins. Not how I'd imagined one of the upcoming members of the watchmaking world.

But this is not Geneva, it's rural Italy, and here on the dusty streets of the small Tuscan town of Tavarnelle Val di Pesa, people don't stand on ceremony. Local man Mazzuoli is clearly the sort who doesn't mind getting his hands dirty.

Generations of Mazzuolis have lived here in the hills of the Chianti region, 35 kilometres from the famed renaissance city of Florence. Giuliano took on the family business when he was just 18, following his father's untimely death.

The Mazzuoli concern was initially a printing business, but under his headship it has become a luxury stationer, trading under the name 3.6.5, producing stylish notebooks and diaries endorsed by New York's Museum of Modern Art, and pens such as the Moka (the one that looks like Bialetti's eponymous coffee maker) that grace the jacket pockets of the rich and famous.

Four years ago, Mazzuoli designed his first watch, and now, with the launch of a watch in association with Alfa Romeo, his star is firmly in the ascendancy.

It was Alfa who approached Mazzuoli about a wristwatch. Back in 2004, he launched his first timepiece, the Manometro. He came up with the concept when he spotted a pressure gauge in his workshop (Manometro is Italian for pressure gauge).

Within 24 hours he was wearing a dummy model on his wrist, a watch case that mimicked the object that inspired him, complete with a dial printed off his computer and hands he superglued on himself. 'The process of drawing up plans for a prototype would have taken too long,' he says in his deep rustic tones, apparently unaware of how neatly he slots into the national stereotype.

The production model, itself a faithful recreation of Mazzuoli's hastily assembled original, catapulted the Italian into the premier league of designers and soon drew the attention of the prominent and the powerful, among them Lapo Elkann, one of Alfa's marketing gurus. The pair soon met.

'He told me they were relaunching Alfa Romeo, and asked me if I'd like to design an Alfa watch,' he explains. 'It was a very emotional question, particularly because of my past as an Alfa Romeo racing driver. We shook hands, I left the office, went down to the car park, got into my car, and a few minutes later I called him back and said, "I've got the inspiration for the watch."'

What sparked Mazzuoli's imagination was his car's rev counter. But it wasn't the rev counter in front of him he thought of as he sat in his car. His mind cast back to the mid-Sixties, and to the

Mazzuoli is passionate about his products. His pen collection takes its cues from objects such as workshop tools or, in the case of the Moka, from Bialetti's iconic coffee maker. 'There's almost no design involved in my pens,' he opines. 'I literally turn an existing object into something else.'

instrument panel of the Alfa Romeo GTAs that dominated the European Touring Car Championship from 1965-72, cars he had raced as a young man. In an instant, the Contagiri was born.

'I focused mainly on the old emotions of the GTAs I used to race,' he says. 'My aim was to create a faithful representation of the rev counter from the car.' One of the challenges in achieving this was the removal of the crown, which in the vast majority of mechanical watches is charged with the essential tasks of winding the movement and setting the time.

'When I told the Swiss what I planned to do, they thought I was crazy,' he goes on. 'We wanted to transfer all the functions of the crown to the bezel.' Anyone with experience of watchmaking will tell you this is more a conundrum than a challenge, but with a combination of what Mazzuoli describes as 'ignorance and recklessness', he pressed on.

It was worth it. 'The solution was a gearbox function, and a gear lever on the side. The watch has two gears – one to wind the movement, the other to set the time,' he explains. It's clever. Very clever. To Mazzuoli, the end product is a tribute to the GTAs he cherishes. To me, the Contagiri (which is Italian for rev counter) is that rarest of things – a genuinely original idea made flesh.

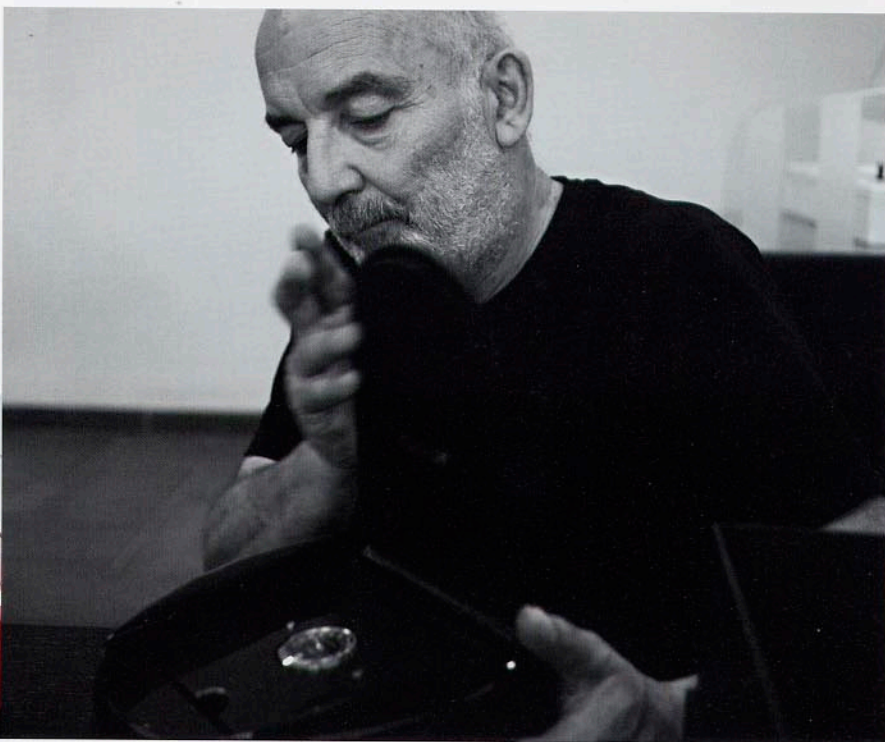
Not surprisingly, Alfa loved it ('they were jumping up and down,' says Mazzuoli). At first, the plan had been to create an Alfa watch, with no association to one particular model, but the design was so groundbreaking that the decision was taken to produce an additional special limited-edition in a run of 500+1 to be made available first to owners of Alfa's new supercar, the equally mesmerising 8C Competizione.

Back at the garage, Mazzuoli is still getting his hands dirty. Seven cars are kept here, and he's busily removing the covers to reveal a rare collection of six mint-condition Alfa GTAs. One of them, Mazzuoli's favourite, is a 1968 GTA Junior. 'I used to race cars like this one. At the time, it was the best in its class.'

Last of the seven to be unveiled is his 8C – number 46 (the year of his birth), delivered to him earlier this summer. Sitting at the wheel, his silvery beard shimmering elegantly in the evening sunlight, Mazzuoli looks as if the car was assembled around him. 'When people see a Ferrari or a Lamborghini, they say, "there goes a Ferrari, there goes a Lamborghini." When they see this car, they say, "there goes an 8C." To Italians, Alfa Romeo has always been a special brand, and they love this car.'

As we prepare to leave, I go to shake his hand, but he draws me into an embrace. 'I hope you've enjoyed your day,' he says. 'And seen a little of how we do things here in Italy.' ■

Below left: Mazzuoli at the wheel of his Alfa Romeo GTA Junior. The number 46 refers to the year he was born – all cars in his collection carry numbers of significant dates in his life. Below right: almost as much thought has gone into the presentation of the Contagiri as into the watch itself



The Giuliano Mazzuoli Contagiri

Launched in association with Alfa Romeo, the Contagiri comes in four designs – the standard Contagiri; the Alfa Romeo; the 8C; and a special run of 25 white-dialled Paul Newman pieces that will be auctioned for the legendary actor's charity, *Hole in the Wall*.

All four are based on the same movement. The first sign of this movement is the dial, which has a single retrograde hand. This sweeps around 270 degrees of the dial and then snaps back every 12 hours.

The second is the absence of a crown to wind the watch and set the

time. This has been replaced by a gearbox mechanism, operated via a lever on the side of the case. Pull it down 15 degrees and the logo in the window at 6 o'clock will be replaced by a '1', symbolising first gear. Rotating the bezel anticlockwise in this position will wind the watch. Pull the lever down another 15 degrees and a '2' will appear in the window. Rotating the bezel now will enable the wearer to set the time.

Prices start from £13,500.

Find UK stockists at

www.giulianomazzuoli.com

