

Note 46



Origin of the Alfa Romeo 158

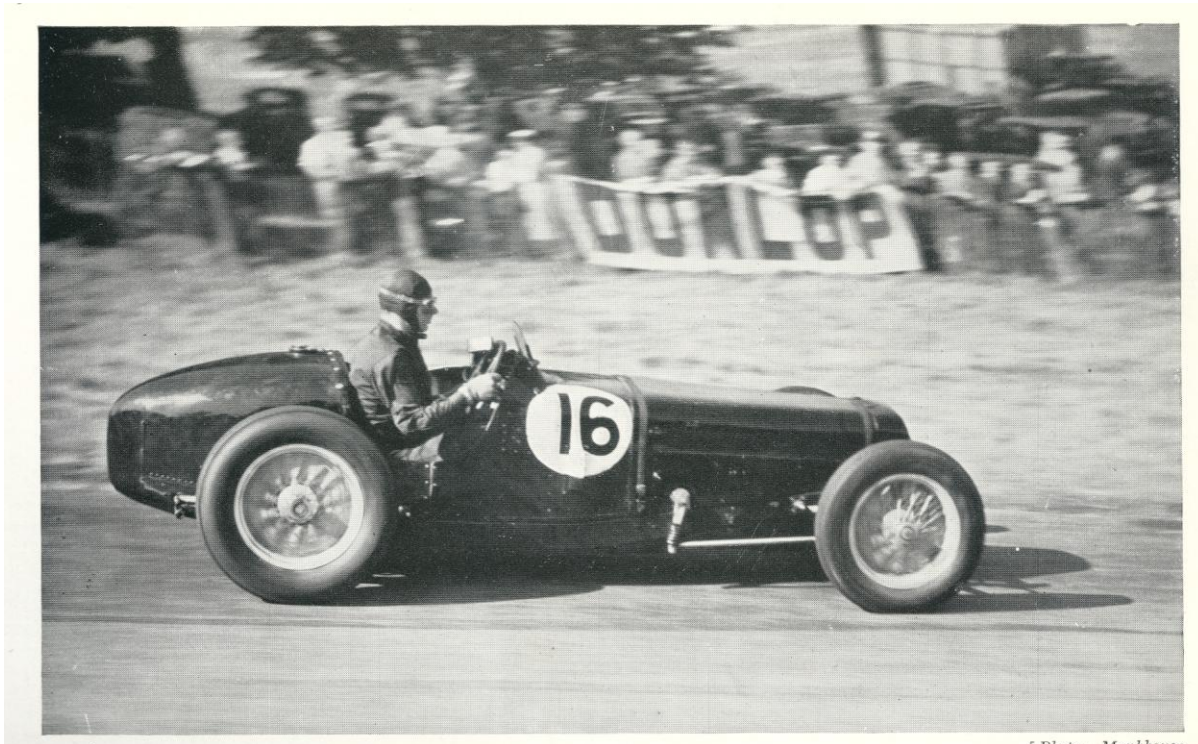


Fig.N46A

1936. Dick Seaman driving the 1927 Delage 15-S-8 rejuvenated by Guilio Ramponi.
DASO 660

What caused Enzo Ferrari to propose to Alfa Romeo in early 1937 the joint project for a new Voiturette which became Tipo 158 (1.5 Litri, 8 Cilindri)? Could it have been the successive victories in 1936 at Pescara (*Coppa Acerbo*, 16th August) and Berne (*Prix de Berne*, 23rd August) in the Voiturette races preceding the Grand Prix races at these circuits of the rejuvenated 1927 Delage driven by Dick Seaman?

This IL8 1,5 L car, basically 9 years old but somewhat updated by Guilio Ramponi, had beaten the latest IL6 Voiturettes of Maserari and ERA and Seaman had lapped in practice at 88-89% of the speeds of the 750 Kg formula Grand Prix cars which took the poles for the main races. (See <http://www.kolumbus.fi/leif.snellman>).

Ferrari would have been well informed of these events, although probably not himself present at Pescara and certainly not at Berne (after 1934 he scarcely ever attended Italian races and none abroad). He might well have thought that what could be done by an IL8 iron-block engine in a rigid-axled chassis could be improved greatly by a miniaturised 8C-35 having an Al-alloy engine in a chassis with all independent suspension. A successful Alfa Romeo Voiturette would be soothing to his pride after 2½ years of German Grand Prix wins only occasionally interrupted by Tazio Nuvolari's virtuosity. There was also the technical possibility of a 2 x IL8 3 L adaptation which might recoup the Grand Prix situation.

Certainly, a year before the 1938 formula cars began racing, it would have been too soon to have anticipated a 1941 1.5 L GP formula, although the existence and performance of the Alfa 158 must have influenced the AIACR consideration of that 2 years later.