

# Auto Biography: Santo Cilauro

*For a bloke with a sense of humour, a car with idiosyncracies as a feature.*

He doesn't do Gino anymore," announces the manager's voice down the phone. He was referring to Santo Cilauro's breakfast radio character Gino Tagliatoni – famous in Melbourne for fluffy dice, a hot Monaro and trademark sign-off, "Way to go, maaate." Gino wasn't invited along for the ride when *The Late Show with the D-Generation* comedy team, which includes Cilauro, left radio to crash on to television. The team went from airwave anarchists to cult viewing status and, in fact, their show is into its second series on the ABC, now as *The Late Show*. But what of the real Cilauro – and the car he drives? "Ask him why his speakers don't work. Or the air-conditioner. Or the heater." His manager warms to the theme. "One night we had to drive from Ballarat to Melbourne, the middle of winter, with no heater."

When you buy an Alfa Romeo, you expect applause for your taste, your eye for style and design. Instead, you get passengers knob-tiddling and switch-flicking, and "howdoya get some heat/cooling/music in this thing?" Frustrated friends tend to reach over and belt

*Cilauro with his '87 Alfa: 'It's a simple car ... easy to drive.'*



you over the head with your own steering wheel lock. Steering wheel lock? Well, yes – Cilauro's not your ordinary Alfa owner, who is more like to be obsessed with blown bulbs in the Tizio lamps than to think of life's banalities – such as car theft. His previous car was a Datsun Stanza, and he embodies what car dealers have known for some time: you can take the man out of the Stanza but you can't take the Stanza out of the man.

His 1987 Alfa Romeo 33 Boxer alerts you to the "Stanza factor" in Cilauro's life. "This car's always full of junk," he apologises, "because we film so many things ourselves on *The Late Show*." There's an old street directory, for instance, that's lost its middle pages. "That section between Maps 189 and 222 – I always just hope I don't have to go there."

Cool Alfa owners don't need a street directory. They just cruise along and turn the stereo up loud – well, as loud as the two little front speakers will go. "That shelf in the back. I can never get it to sit right and every time I get upset, I pull it hard and keep breaking the speaker cords. See that?" Cilauro has a

speaker in each hand. They're certainly missing that connected look. As for problems with the heating system – that's a mystery: "I get stirred about the heater because it's extremely weak, as is the air-conditioner. In summer, all the windows are down and in winter, everyone wears blankets and stuff in my car."

You'd be forgiven for thinking this was not a happy partnership, but think again. "I've never had anything go wrong with it. I told a friend I was thinking of buying an Alfa and he said, 'Remember, Alfa mechanics drive Porsches.' But because I liked the look of the car so much, I just didn't bother worrying about that. And I've been very lucky so far – it's been excellent."

**Buying price:** \$17,000 with the trade-in.

**Owned for:** six years.

**Current value:** \$10,000.

**What made you buy it?:** "Everyone was laughing at me about my Stanza, which was quite an ugly car. To top it off, it was metallic brown and everyone referred to it as the metallic turd. In the end I just refused to drive around in it."

**What irritates you most about it?:** "Alfas are notorious for having their badges stolen. Whenever I have to buy a replacement, I'm sure it's the one that's been stolen. At school they teach you about the cycles of the seasons. They should have a diagram for Alfa badges – this is the man who steals it, this is the man he gives it to, this is the man who sells it back to you ..."

**What do you like most about it?:** "It's a simple car. Straight lines. Easy to drive. I just like it for its simplicity."

**John Mellor**

## A Word About Wine

**Lees:** These, the sediments deposited by newly made wine, are composed of fine particles of grape skin and pulp, and of the dead yeast cells – the latter being the most significant part.

The oenology schools at Roseworthy, UC Davis (in California) and elsewhere used to teach winemakers that the lees were a potential source of bacterial contamination and of undesirable flavour development. As soon as the fermentation had subsided, the wine was racked (pumped or siphoned) off the lees, which were then discarded.

Then someone noticed that the Burgundians, in particular, prized the lees. They left them in their chardonnay, and regularly stirred the lees back into suspension in the wine. There was even a practice of selling lees from an exalted vineyard to "enrich" a lesser wine.

Research indicated that the lees had a two-fold beneficial impact: they played a powerful anti-oxidant role, and, through a complex chemical reaction, added a creamy richness to the texture. So "lees contact" has become an accepted part of the making of the best New World chardonnay – part of the so-called "dirty French" winemaking techniques. The downside is indeed the risk of flavour contamination. Skilled winemaking, and a trained palate, is needed to detect off-characters: if these occur, the wine must be immediately racked off the and (probably) filtered.

**James Halliday**