

A112

The Autobianchi A-112 has a tuned four-cylinder in-line engine with a side camshaft, 903 cubic centimetres of displacement and 44 horsepower of maximum output.

It takes 13.7 seconds to go from 0 to 100 kilometres an hour.

From which one deduces that the engine may have more power than the manufacturer declares — perhaps 47 horsepower.

It has a 4-speed manual gearbox that pushes it to nearly 140 kilometres an hour, but past 100 it drinks outrageously, and super is at 1,510 lire a litre.

Which is why Aldo has decided that tomorrow we shall get up early and go back to the main road.

It is 7 p.m. now; we are sitting on a bench in the park, and I have just finished going round every stand of the Venice Biennale.

Since ten o'clock this morning Aldo has been waiting for me here; he has read the newspaper from the first page to the last and has found a way to avoid spending a fortune on fuel — he looks very pleased with himself.

Outrageous consumption is not the A112's only problem: the 47 horsepower generate a vibration that lulls the passenger to sleep and numbs the driver's arms.

For this reason, during the journey along the main road, we stop every 100 km for a coffee, an unfiltered Gitanes and a quick read of the local papers.

We choose bars that look aristocratic but cheap.

Every bar has its terrace with ashtrays, its dialect and its history.

Aldo tells me everything he knows about these places.

It seems to us that having a history makes the existence of this endless series of villages with absurd names more acceptable.

Ca' Sabbioni, Fiesso, Selvazzano Dentro, Oppeano, Trevenzuolo, Goito, Acquanegra, Pizzighettone...

Noble houses intermarried, giving rise to envies and wars; apparitions of alleged madonnas struck by lightning; lands invaded by the Krauts, retaken by Garibaldi's men, occupied by the partisans.

Villages that housed mastodontic factories, theatres of Napoleonic wars, headquarters of merchants, traffickers, fugitives, Istrian exiles.

Aldo goes on telling me why what surrounds us exists; I am watching the world build itself around me through the little quarter-light window with its curious triangular shape. Everything mixes together in my head while I let myself be rocked by the 47 horsepower, galloping through a dream.

In the future I shall always avoid the motorways of life.
Thank you, Aldo.

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