

MOTORING



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A love letter to the Alfa Romeo 4C

Thinking about the things you love is not a bad way to spend an afternoon. Nor is writing about them. I needed 1619 words.



THE best things in life are those we somehow cannot explain. Maybe. I am not sure. I am not an expert in the human psyche. But bear with me as I try to dissertate a little bit about this idea and make the connection with the car you see in the pictures.

I sometimes find myself wandering about subjects that are beyond my understanding. These are usually more interesting than the ones I have been able to wrap my mind around. In the last few weeks, I have been thinking about two things: love and beauty. This may or may not have had anything to do with the fact I bought an Alfa Romeo 4C. But it most likely does.

Those two concepts (I am not even sure that's what I should be calling them) are surely in the top 10 of the most talked about subjects in all our lives. But that doesn't necessarily mean we can actually explain them with any real accuracy.

I have read some incredible attempts at describing both love and beauty.

I have certainly felt love, I have seen it in others, and I have witnessed it in various forms. And beauty, well, it is all around us if we just know where to look for it.

Nevertheless, I wouldn't know how to describe them either, in my own words, to an alien that had just landed from a galaxy far away - even if it spoke English or Portuguese, which, I have to say, would be quite something. Given time, I could show it, but my vocabulary, I am afraid, would not be enough to explain to the green creature what love or beauty really are.

What I can say is that without love and without beauty we would not be humans, would we? I mean, no other animal can feel or see them. And although there are some other elements that make us so, to me, these two are the most, well, beautiful.

Let's talk about the Alfa Romeo 4C then. I was there in Frankfurt when Alfa showed the 4C concept in 2011 and I fell in love with it. Now, you may think I say

this a lot and that for someone as obsessed with cars as I have always been, loving a car is a by-product of that obsession.

Except that is not exactly the case. There are many cars I love. I love them for the way they look, the way they drive, the noise they make or what they make me feel as a driver every time I sit behind the wheel. But it's the same kind of love I have for The Beatles' song *In My Life*, or Jacques-Louis David's painting *Oath of the Horatii*. Important and interesting as they are to me, they are not overpowering.

The 4C though... I didn't just love it when I saw it. I fell in love with it. It was just a concept, but it made me feel things no other car had until then. Or since. Things I cannot really explain - and, as I mentioned before, I am really into those. I am thinking it has something to do with beauty, because the 4C is the most beautiful object I have ever seen.

The production model was launched in 2015, and in 2016 I drove one for the first time. I then drove a few others during the last 10 years, which means me and the 4C have, all included, a 15-year, almost continuous history. Depending on any given perspective, 15 years can be a lot, or it can be nothing. The relativity of time is fascinating.

I have owned dozens of cars and driven and written about hundreds more. Logically, I have enjoyed some more than others, but always for one, or sometimes several unambiguous reasons - all of them objective. I can justify those reasons to myself and to others. Basically, I know the words to explain why I feel what I feel towards any car.

Not so much the Alfa Romeo 4C. There is something more here and it's not a rational thing. This car does things to my mind and my heart no other car ever did.

The 4C was built on a carbon fibre chassis with an

SMC (Sheet Moulding Compound) body. Damage one of the two, or both, and it is likely more expensive to fix them than it is to buy another car. That should be a big no-no to begin with. Also, it is as impractical as a car can be, with a tiny boot behind the engine that gets so hot you can boil an egg in there after a spirited drive. Weekend road-trip? Not happening, sorry. Besides, it is stiff. Very, very stiff. Drive it for more than an hour and a half and you will be making friends with the nearest chiropractor. There is no power steering - really, in a car whose production ran from 2015 to 2020. It's

noisy but not in a musical way; it's too low to overcome speed bumps without scratching its front lip and it has no creature comforts whatsoever.

It is, therefore, a car with many issues. And yet... it is the most fascinating car I have ever come across. Why? I couldn't say. But I spent the last 15 years without one and always felt like something was missing. There was a hole in my life I knew could only be filled with the 4C. And no, I am not crazy. I know the 4C is 'just' a car. (Except it isn't).

So, why not buy one before? That is a difficult question. Because I love it so much. Because my inability to explain that love is, I believe, a beautiful thing and I did not want to risk it. I feared that having it and possibly losing it for whatever reason - and in that case, likely forever - might prove harder than never owning one in the first place. Fear, more than anything, kept me from it. I am not so sure about the whole *better to have loved and lost...*

Then something happened. At the end of January, I found out my daughter is leaving for Italy in September to pursue her dream of being a professional dancer. She is only 15 years old, but the truth is, she may never come back to me, to our house, to our daily life as a family. In fact, if all goes

"The Alfa Romeo 4C is the most fascinating object on four wheels ever created. And yes, I may be, quite possibly, alone in that assertion. But no matter. I love it"



Alfa Romeo IAA Frankfurt 2011



corner. I decided I wanted to wait no more. I never did something as brave in my life as the decision my daughter had just taken, and this one surely is not it, but I had lived with these thoughts in my head for too long to do nothing. And, for the first time, I felt I had to do it.

For the love and the beauty in the incomprehensible, I would have a 4C in my life. I knew exactly which one I wanted and I went ahead and bought it.

I am now writing this text sitting in my car (on the passenger seat, obviously; there is no room for one person and a computer on the driver's side), and I know it's still early days and things can change, but the signs look promising. We are quietly getting reacquainted and that is a process that

well, she will never come back. What happiness. And what tragedy.

When they posted the printed results of the audition on the wall and she screamed "I got in", I was flooded with a mix of emotions difficult to convey. I laughed and I cried and everything in between. I felt as human as I have ever felt in

my life, if that makes any sense. It was a profoundly beautiful moment for the three of us. But in that moment, me and my wife also knew our lives would never be the same again.

We flew back the next day, on a Sunday. On Monday, it just so happened it was my birthday. Forty-one. Middle age around the

takes time. But there is so much love here, me and the 4C have an obligation to make it work.

Time for closing arguments, I guess. What I really want to say is this: if there is love and if there is beauty in your life, and you know where and how to find it, don't waste another day. Don't think twice and don't look back. Yes, it's easier to talk about these words and these ideas when a person is involved. Or a whole family. Less so when it's a car.

I really hope I was able

to pass the message that this text is, however, not about a car. The mystery of why we love someone or something and the absolute wonderment of the beauty that surrounds us need not be restricted. It should be infinite.

It can be different things to different people and that, in itself, is absolutely beautiful. Is the love I have for my daughter the same love I have for my 4C? No, absolutely not - how could it be? And yes, yes, it is. Get it? Me neither.

2026 was the year I decided it was time to take that giant leap and see how a 4C and me would get along, 15 years after our first acquaintance - my daughter's age coincidentally. I now hope it's for the rest of our lives. And if this text served no purpose other than making you think there might be something similar going on with you, some hole that needs any kind of 4C to fill it - and make you want to go for it - well, my work here is done.



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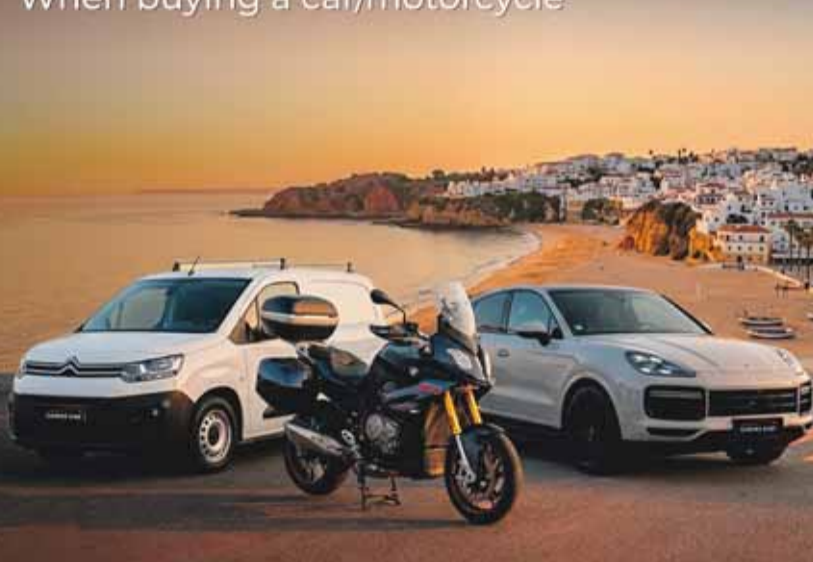
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