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### TEST DRIVE

## Italian for Midsize

### 2018 Alfa Romeo Giulia TI RWD

DAN LYONS | text  
Special to the Times Union

After an absence of more than 20 years, the Alfa Romeo brand returned to the States in 2014 with the model 4C. Offered as a hardtop coupe or targa-topped spider, the 4C is a two-seater that dreams of weekend laps on a race course or autocross.

Giulia is something different. Introduced to the states in 2017, it's a more mainstream offering, competing in the midsize sports sedan segment. The 2018 version is offered in three models: Giulia (\$37,995), Ti (\$39,995) and the uber sporty Quadrifoglio (\$73,500).

This test drive took place during the recent, delightful return of our old winter friend, the Polar Vortex. As a result, there was ample opportunity to challenge the climate control system, and enough periodic snow fall to test traction. To my surprise (and seasonal concern), the Giulia tester was equipped with rear-wheel-drive. To



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

**2018 Alfa Romeo Giulia TI RWD**  
MSRP: \$39,995 · As tested: \$50,03

oversimplify, RWD is generally preferred over FWD for sporty handling. (Better weight distribution means better balance, and power to the rears allows the driver to make adjustments while cornering by adding/ subtracting throttle). FWD provides more traction on snowy roads than RWD (the engine's weight is over the drive wheels). A good AWD system can be the best of both worlds: improved balance and grip, on wet or dry roads.

This test drive was conducted not on a sunny day at a SoCal race track, but in a bleak, bone-chilling stint of Albany winter weather. As it turns out, even snow doesn't like a Polar Vortex very much, and the little that fell from the skies during my week, wasn't enough to sideline my driving.

That said, I don't know why anyone considering this car wouldn't add \$2,000 to the bottom line and opt for the available all-wheel-drive on all Giulia models. I drive (and have driven) enough rear-wheel-drive cars over the years to know their limitations in snowy conditions. It can be done (many of us did it for years), but AWD makes winter driving light years less stressful than FWD or (especially) RWD. Chopped up over the length of a typical car loan, the added cost of AWD is easier to digest, and will repay you in far less heartburn

HAVING RECENTLY RETURNED to the North American market, Italian luxury-performance maker Alfa Romeo introduces the Giulia to the midsize sport sedan segment. It's available in all-wheel-drive, and in three trim levels.

every winter. Though not on this car, I've driven other Alfa's equipped with AWD. The company's system has a rear-wheel bias in normal conditions (up to 100 percent), but can push as much as 60 percent of the available torque to the front wheels when needed, for maximum traction. And when roads are clear, you have all the ingredients at your disposal. Fine grip, responsive steering and an even weight distribution make for an agile, fun to drive car.

Alfa's DNA drive mode offers three settings: Normal, Dynamic and Eco. Switching to Dynamic sharpens handling, steering and shift points, and makes twisty roads more enjoyable. However, it also tightens what is already a fairly stiff suspension and induces bobbling, so it's best to switch back to Normal

or Eco when not carving corners.

While the high flying Quadrifoglio packs a 505 horsepower, turbo six-cylinder engine, base and Giulia Ti models share a turbocharged 2.0-liter four, matched with an eight-speed ZF automatic transmission. The 2.0 generates 306 lb.-ft. of torque along with 280 horsepower, which bests class rivals like the Audi A4 (252 h.p.), BMW 330i (248) Mercedes-Benz C300 (241). The company claims a 0-60 time of 5.1 seconds, which puts it near the front of its segment, along with a top speed of 149 mph. It's a lively engine: responsive, and possessor of a pleasant growl when throttled. Fuel economy is respectable — 24 city, 33 highway and 27 combined, according to EPA.

A manual transmission isn't offered. While that's

*Continued on page 4*

The crisp dash display is framed by a Ferrari-esque, flat-bottom steering wheel.

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