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European First Drive: 2005 Studio Torino RK Spyder

The Sound and Fury of a Supercar, With Styling That Only Whispers

By Nick Kurczewski [Email](#)

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It is amazing what empty Italian country roads and a 420-horsepower roadster can do to a person. Two hours earlier, and seemingly ages before my first behind-the-wheel encounter of the 2005 Studio Torino RK Spyder, I sat slumped in my airplane seat, head spinning and stomach churning from a bout of insomnia coupled to a red-eye flight into Turin, Italy. Feeling greener than Kermit the Frog on the Teacup ride, I met Alfredo Stola — founder of Studio Torino — at the airport. I flashed a sorry excuse for a smile, checked my watch and began counting the hours till bedtime.

Wake-Up Call

Another empty two-lane highway, a jab of the gas pedal and every brain cell is focused upon the jolt of acceleration, the roar of the engine behind me and the Italian countryside flashing past. It is not the first time I feel dizzy that day, but it is the first time the feeling is not followed by a mad scramble for the air sickness bag.

The Studio Torino RK Spyder is based heavily on the [Porsche Boxster](#), with subtly tweaked visuals and an awesome 420-horsepower supercharged Porsche flat-six mounted behind the driver and passenger, snug in the place the Boxster's 2.7- or 3.2-liter flat-sixes call home. This 3.8-liter engine comes from the new [911](#) and has been modified by the renowned Porsche tuning firm of Ruf, based in Pfaffenhausen, Germany.

The engine features a centrifugal compressor that delivers a maximum boost of 0.5 bar. A Ruf-designed intake manifold is coupled with modified injectors, less restrictive catalytic converters, and a reprogrammed electronic engine management system. The engine is slotted into the svelte Boxster body with such skill that it looks like it came from the factory. Not that you'll catch much of a glimpse of the engine. The highly caffeinated RK Spyder, like the regular-brew Boxster, has a fixed engine cover.

When handed the keys I'm in no mood to break out wrenches and screwdrivers. Instead, once on the road I click down a gear or two on the sweet shifting six-speed manual transmission, for no real reason other than to revel in spiking the rev needle round the tachometer to the horsepower peak of 7,000 rpm and to listen to that snarling technical wizardry at work.

A Curious Blend

The Stola name might sound familiar. This is because the engineering and design firm has, for decades, assisted major auto manufacturers in the creation of incredible show cars. Maybach's stunning Exelero coupe — the 2005 concept car that makes the already dull Maybach luxo-sedans look even drearier — was the final project Alfredo Stola had his hands on before selling the company begun by his grandfather 86 years ago.

Studio Torino was founded January 1, 2005, though Alfredo Stola points out that there is no factory, production line or design office. All the work is farmed out to what Stola humbly refers to as "the best there is," during a test-drive that included a visit to his beautiful home outside of Turin.

Over a much needed (on my part) espresso, Stola explains that his desire to build a made-to-order sports car led him to three key decisions. The first was to use the midengine Porsche Boxster — a car he considers to be dynamically excellent — as the base. This is not the first time a Boxster has received the Stola touch. The Stola S 82 convertible from 2001 and 2003 GTS coupe — in vintage Gulf Oil blue and orange livery — were show cars created to prove the engineering prowess of the company. Next on the list was the decision to use Ruf as an engineering partner. The German firm is renowned for building high-quality, brutally quick Porsches that are capable of outperforming most anything street-legal this side of a Formula One car. The last decision was to develop a new body for the Boxster using automotive artisans in and around Turin. We have no problem with handmade things — Faberge eggs and the dashboard on a Rolls-Royce are two fine examples we'd proudly mount above the mantle. However, the problem with the hand-hammered RK Spyder is that for a screaming supercar, it's still a bit too...well...Boxster, both inside and out.

Split Personalities

From a performance — and acoustic — standpoint, the supercharged RK Spyder is worth its 190,000 euros (\$231,000) price tag. The problem is, as Albert Einstein once pointed out, there is no such thing as a perpetual motion machine. It is when stationary that the car's cost is harder to justify.

Walking around the glossy black roadster, Alfredo Stola points out that the left front fender is the only body panel that is stock Boxster. He goes into detail regarding the hand-finishing, the fine cutlines and the subtle reprofiling of taillights along with red swaths of paint, meant to evoke the paintjob of the 1954 Porsche 550 Spyder that won the grueling Carrera Panamericana road race.

The quality is definitely there, from seductive Toora 19-inch three-piece alloy wheels, billet-aluminum third brake light, muffler tips and fuel cap, and lowered windshield with cut-down side windows to match. At 43.9 inches tall, the car sits 6 inches lower than a standard Boxster, while the front and rear bumpers add 3 inches to the length, now at 173.8 inches. Did we forget to mention that there is no top? Yes, when it rains your options are either drive faster or master the art of steering, shifting and holding an umbrella.

Despite all the details, from 20 paces it would take an expert to identify the RK Spyder as anything but a very sinister-looking Boxster. Perhaps that's the point? Behind the wheel, gripped tightly by the deep red Poltrona Frau leather seats, the interior presents a similar story. Yes, it is roomy, the gauges are well positioned and the supple leather is specially made to resist heat buildup from the sun. The leather makes for a nice conversation over champagne at the country club, but everything short of the high-tech hide is there in the standard Boxster's cockpit. Never mind that the sub-\$50-grand Boxster throws in a convertible top, too.

Just when I think I've got the RK Spyder figured out, the incredibly precise steering, crushingly effective Brembo four-piston-caliper brakes and Fulda Carat Exlero tires (235/35ZR-19 front/ 265/30ZR-19 rear) deliver a thrilling driving experience that begs for a track day before I reach 4th gear.

Public roads are simply no match for the car's potential. The RK Spyder tips the scales at 3,086 pounds, with the increase in horsepower equating to about 7.3 pounds per horsepower. For comparison, a Boxster S makes do with 10.5 pounds per hp, and a [Ferrari F430](#) has roughly 6.6 pounds per pony. We can't vouch for the RK Spyder's claimed 178-mph top speed, though the estimated 0-to-60-mph time of 4.5 seconds seems, if anything, a tad conservative.

Those [49] Who Get It

According to Studio Torino, only 49 RK Spydere will be produced and, as is expected in this price range, items such as paint, leather and even engine spec are highly customizable. Normally aspirated, supercharged and turbocharged models will be available. As a purchase, the car ranks up there with a custom-tailored suit — that seats two. As a driving experience, the RK Spyder assaults your senses without biting your hand when speed limits or traffic jams get in the way. In-town cruising is not a problem, the car remains as docile as you like.

But as four-wheeled sculpture, the RK Spyder does not rank high on the pulse-quickenning scale like a Ferrari F430, [Lamborghini Gallardo](#) or [Bentley Continental GT](#). Then again, regular Ruf-engineered cars have always placed the emphasis on what is under the car's skin. Whether those subtle styling messages are transferable to a topless roadster is up to 49 thick-walleted car enthusiasts to decide. Add Americans in the mix, too, since a Ruf VIN means that the car is legal Stateside and the Ruf Auto Centre in Dallas, Texas, will gladly take your order. A coupe will likely follow once the Spyder sells out.

[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

Larger air dams, new headlamp units, and a centrally located Studio Torino badge made out of aluminum enliven the front end. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

Swaths of red are meant to mimic the paint job of the Porsche 550 Spyder that won the 1954 Carrera Panamericana road race. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

Despite going sans top, the car features twin rollover hoops in case things go belly up. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

The RK Spyder ranges from about \$204,000 to \$231,000. Engines are 3.8-liter flat-sixes that are normally aspirated, turbocharged or supercharged by Ruf. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

A plaque on the dash indicates that our test model is the first of 49 RK Spyders to come. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

American enthusiasts who want to see this name in their garage can rejoice. The car is available in the States, sold through Ruf's Dallas, Texas, sales office. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

Deep red leather, attractive sport pedals and a comfortable driving position. Still, overall, a bit too Boxster-y for the money. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

Cut-down side windows are an attractive match to the chopped windshield. The RK Spyder sits low, at 43.9 inches in height. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

Fuel costs aren't pretty, but the RK Spyder's gas cap definitely is. How much weight is saved by drilling it? Who cares? It looks fantastic! (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)

A third brake light crafted out of billet aluminum is another surprising, though subtle, touch. (Photo by Nick Kurczewski)



[\(Enlarge photo\)](#)