

CLASSIC DRIVER

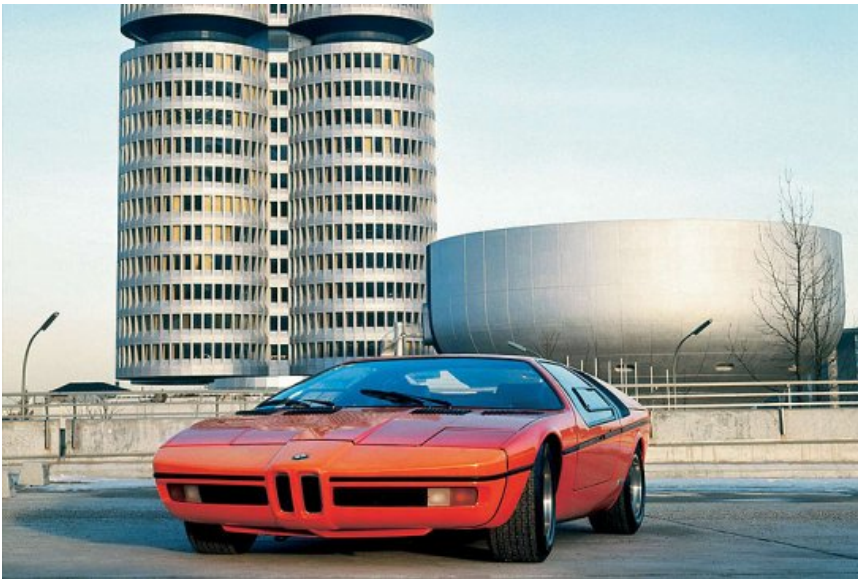
Classic Concepts: 1972 BMW Turbo

Lead

The intergalactic-looking Turbo concept landed at the 1972 Paris Motor Show, but it wasn't all about space-age looks.

Having spent the 1960s recovering from financial troubles, the 1970s saw BMW keen to start a new chapter. The 1972 Paris Motor Show seemed the perfect stage for the Munich marque to show the world that it was thoroughly revitalised, and head designer Paul Bracq set to work.

The new project was to serve not only as a marketing tool, but also as a design study and rolling testbed for new technology systems. The first of these was the car's namesake: the 1990cc inline-4 from the BMW 2002 was furnished with a turbocharger, the first time the company had used one in a motor car. It was a configuration subsequently used (albeit detuned from 200 to 170bhp) in the 2002 Turbo, the first turbocharged European road car to go into production.



A series of summits in the early 1970s had put a greater focus on safety in the automotive industry, and BMW used the Turbo as a guinea pig for several technologies. It featured an integrated rollcage, a collapsible steering column and a radar-based brake distance warning system. Also, the cockpit was orientated towards the driver to prevent him having to stretch to reach the controls (a now-famous BMW characteristic), while deformable structures were used front and rear to absorb impact.



Bracq's creation was as striking as the TGV turbotrain prototype he had penned a few years earlier. As with many of its conceptual counterparts at the time, the Turbo was wedge-shaped and mid-engined, but further drama came courtesy of the gullwing doors and covered rear wheels. However, it also retained a BMW identity thanks to the kidney grille and double badges at the rear. This was crucial when it was revealed to a worldwide audience, which was captivated by its looks but instantly aware of its parentage.





While it ultimately inspired the legendary M1 of 1978 (to date the only supercar to wear the propeller badge), the 1972 Turbo also clearly influenced the Z1 and 8 Series, the latter of which remained in production until 1999. However, despite the later success of its design themes, just two original cars were built. Construction of both was subcontracted to Michelotti, one being the original running car that now features occasionally on the concours circuit, the other a static demonstration car.



The car's arresting looks and advanced technologies might have been absorbed by later BMWs, but that doesn't mean the revolutionary Turbo has been forgotten. It's widely considered to be one of the company's landmark cars, and the traces of it found in the DNA of modern BMWs prove its authority – and provide a fitting 40th anniversary tribute.

Photos: BMW/Jan Baedeker/Nanette Scharf

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Gallery

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