

CLASSIC DRIVER

The Crazy, Cocaine-Fuelled 80s Tuning Specials

Lead

The 80s saw the personalisation of the motor car enter a new era; 'tuning houses' sprouted across Europe, with aftermarket projects replacing the bespoke work undertaken by experienced coachbuilders in the previous generation.

Gemballa: Tuning, the German Way





One of the scene's progenitors, Uwe Gemballa founded his company in 1981 and started by installing high-end sound systems and leather interiors in honest Volkswagen models. The company soon progressed to working on the offerings of the more prestigious German marques, and in 1985 came the 'Avalanche', based on Porsche's 'flatnose' 911 Turbo.

If you thought the odd buttresses, overladen 'tea-tray' spoiler and almost comically wide wheelarches were extreme, consider some of the items on the options list: a fridge and minibar located behind the front seats, and a built-in safe. Had Tony Montana not met his demise a few years before, this would surely have been his mount in Scarface: Part II.

Uwe Gemballa's downfall was no less violent. Having spent the remainder of the 80s extending his reach to cover other German cars, he continued tuning Porsches until his murder in 2010. He's said to have been embroiled in a large-scale money laundering operation in South Africa, which involved an imported Gemballa Cayenne and the disappearance in transit of a million euros hidden inside the body panels - sounds like something straight out of an Eighties film, eh?

Koenig Special: Building 1,000bhp Ferraris, 30 Years Ago





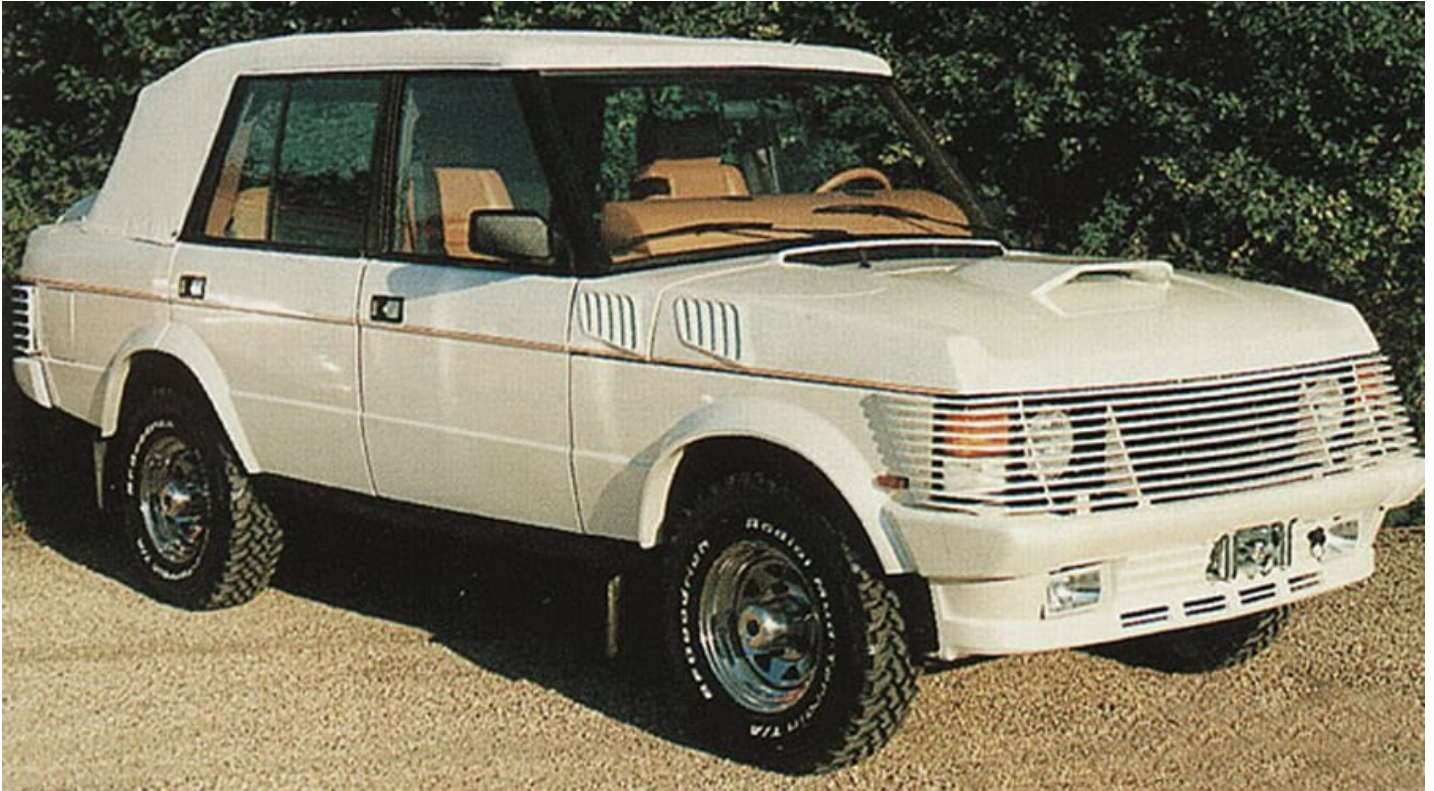
Another German tuner, Koenig Special began tuning Ferraris in the late 1970s and soon expanded its work to give cars from Mercedes, Jaguar and Porsche the typical 1980s 'widebody' treatment. Especially notable projects included a 1,000bhp Ferrari Testarossa, a road-going version of the 962 sports-prototype, and a flatnose 911 Turbo with headlights and tail-lights borrowed from the Porsche 928 and Audi 200, respectively.

Autocostruzione: The Italian Butcher



So, you've just purchased one of the most expensive saloons in the world and, in a possibly cocaine-induced moment of madness, you decide to give it to a relatively unknown Italian coachbuilder to be decapitated. The result? Your Silver Spirit is robbed of its structural rigidity (despite the use of a Golf Cabrio-esque roll bar), and painted Canary Yellow to add insult to injury. With Autocostruzione's owner having been the factory manager for Bizzarrini in the 60s, you'd expect him to have vetoed the request for such unseemly alterations, but if Sir (or Sultan) has the means...

Vantagefield of London: An Alternative Point of Hue





Vantagefield was famous for reconfiguring luxury vehicles for specific uses – the examples here show Series 1 Range Rovers, both adapted for very different customers. The first is the ‘Starlight’, a desert-bound, stretched convertible conversion with a camel-coloured leather interior, ‘sheer’ grille, and a 5.7-litre engine with accompanying air vents. The other is a stretched, six-wheel behemoth built for hunting – although we’re unsure exactly how the transplanted Mercedes headlights and grille would improve your kill count. Maybe you can ask – the company is still in business...

Boschert: The Gullwing That Never Took Off





Boschert's sole offering - the B300 - somehow managed to appear familiar and yet odd at the same time. At the time, other companies were reprising the iconic 300 SL by using W126 SECs, but Boschert chose the W124 300CE (with a nose borrowed from the R129 SL, just to confuse matters further) upon which to base its gullwinged creation. Despite an anticipated production run of 300 cars, very few were made - the majority of which were specified with 'clipped' wings (i.e. conventional doors).

Sbarro: A One-Man War on Ordinariness





With creations at the 'extreme' end of the spectrum, Franco Sbarro's company could be seen as more of a conceptual design studio than a 'tuner' as such. However, one of the more tuner-esque products of the company was the Sbarro Golf Turbo built for a Swiss customer. A hydraulically powered system lifted the back end of the car to reveal the rear-mounted flat-six borrowed from the 911 Turbo, while the resultantly empty front engine bay was filled with a 100-litre fuel tank - supposedly giving the car a 50/50 weight distribution when brimmed. Other creations included the wedge-shaped Challenge fitted with a turbocharged Mercedes V8, and the 'Adventure' activity vehicle based on a humble Citroen C15 van.

B&B: Targa Turbos and .44 Magnums





The Buchmann brothers formed their company to capitalise on the boom of the European stock market - there were plenty of new millionaires, all with money to spend on making their cars that little bit more exclusive. One of the first offerings was a Targa-roofed version of the 911 Turbo, which proved popular since Porsche had neglected to offer one. Thereafter, B&B began to specialise in installing electrical equipment in customers' cars, and a later project saw a Porsche 928 fitted with a T-Bar roof pillar, into which a telephone and stereo control units were integrated. Oh, and don't forget the optional Magnum .44 installed in a compartment beneath the driver's seat; apparently an oft-specified B&B speciality.

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