

CLASSIC DRIVER

[The art of aerodynamics: 10 streamlined legends from the Classic Driver Market](#)

Lead

Airflow-optimised cars date back to the 1920s. Although it was initially racing cars that inspired the art of aerodynamics (bar a few notable exceptions), the resulting principles eventually filtered down to road machines – and soon there were wind tunnels at HQs from Stuttgart to Detroit...

The importance of aerodynamic efficiency in automotive design was initially appreciated by only a few. Naturally, these included aeronautical engineers such as Hans Ledwinka and Paul Jaray – the pair behind the first mass-produced, aerodynamically-focused road car, the Tatra 77 – as well as automotive artistes such as Giuseppe Figoni. The latter, the creative half of French coachbuilder [Figoni et Falaschi](#), realised beauty often went hand-in-hand with aerodynamic efficiency. His design for the [Talbot-Lago T23 Teardrop Coupé](#) is a perfect example of stunning aesthetics moulded by the forces of nature; his work on the Le Mans-winning [Alfa Romeo 8C 2300](#) of 1932 proved the value of his intuition with measurable competition results.



Later that decade in Munich, [BMW](#) began to adopt the key principles for the development of its racing cars, installing a wind tunnel at its new Artistic Design facility. The result gave rise to modifications to its [328](#) racing cars such as the 'trouser crease' and 'kamm-tail', and resulted in an outright win at the 1940 Mille Miglia. Post-War, the [Porsche 356](#) exhibited a streamlined shape (no doubt influenced by the philosophies that Mr Porsche 'borrowed' from the Tatra 77 while penning the [VW Beetle](#)), leading to a drag co-efficient of 0.31. The 1960s saw [Alfa Romeo](#) become one of the first manufacturers to incorporate the kamm-tail in mass-production models, and the 1970s saw the super-lithe [Citroën SM](#) achieve a drag coefficient of 0.26 – one that even the wedgy [Lamborghini Diablo](#) (0.31) of the 1990s couldn't better.

Early, aerodynamically pioneering machines rarely appear on the market today, such is their rarity. But below we've selected ten cars that strove for airflow excellence among their peers – whether for the road, the track, or simply as a tribute to the unobtainable.

Gallery

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