

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Timeless Classics: Lamborghini Countach LP400 'Periscopio'](#)

Lead

Compare the earliest production Lamborghini Countach – the LP400 ‘Periscopio’ – to the final 25th Anniversary model, and you’d scarcely believe the two cars were related, such is the former’s uncluttered and pure design...

What's in a name?

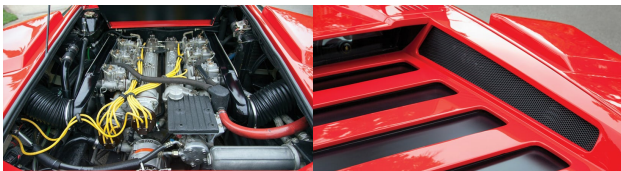


‘Countach.’ Allegedly this was the first word – simply an exclamation of astonishment in the local Piedmontese dialect – uttered by Nuccio Bertone on first seeing the Countach LP500 prototype, styled by his then-young designer, Marcello Gandini. While this tale’s truth-value might be disputed, the point remains valid: what must this dramatic, wedge-shaped supercar have looked like in 1971? Bonkers, we’d bet.

Three years later, following a mechanical overhaul, endless tweaks and a tireless test programme led by legendary test driver (no, not [that one](#)) Bob Wallace, a production-ready Countach LP400, remaining thankfully faithful to the original prototype, emerged at the [1974 Geneva Motor Show](#). Suffice to say, the orders flooded in.

Sitting on a lightweight and extremely strong tubular space-frame chassis, the striking alloy bodywork comprised numerous vents and distinctive side NACA ducts in order to cool not only the engine and the brakes, but the cabin, too. Those scissor doors – responsible for catching the imagination of just about every schoolboy at the time – weren’t just cosmetic, either. The car was so wide that, with conventional doors, occupants would have been trapped inside in all but the widest of spaces.

Conventionally unconventional



The LP400 moved the game on from the [Miura](#) mechanically, too. In a bid to satisfy Ferruccio Lamborghini’s wish for less cabin noise, its 4.0-litre, 375HP V12 engine was mounted longitudinally (‘LP’ denoting ‘Longitudinale Posteriore’), unlike the Miura’s transversely mounted unit. The gearbox was unusually positioned ‘twixt driver and passenger, improving gearbox connection and vehicle balance and, without the later models’ comically wide wheels, flares and spoilers, the LP400 was the quickest Countach of them all, reportedly capable of nudging 200mph.

Just 150 (or so) ‘Periscopos’ were built, so named because of the small periscopic mirror installed in the original prototype’s roof to aid the frankly appalling rear visibility. Though the mirror was done away with (it beggars belief as to why), the rooftop tunnel remained on the early LP400s, and is one of our favourite design touches on the whole car.

Pick of the bunch



The immaculate Rosso car pictured here is one of a handful of right-hand-drive LP400s, and is presented in remarkably original condition. With four owners from new, under 58,000km showing on the odometer and a fully documented history, it's set to go under the gavel at RM Auctions' Paris sale on 4 February 2015. The estimate is yet to be revealed.

We've seen for ourselves [the increased interest in this special Lamborghini over the last year](#), and we can hardly say we're surprised. Perhaps the most dramatic-looking car ever designed, extremely rare and increasingly collectable, the LP400 'Periscopio' is the pick of the bunch. Heralding a new era in space-age supercar design, it left a near unrivalled legacy. Countach!

Gallery

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