

CLASSIC DRIVER

Bug vs. Zag - the weirdo heroes of the Super Mario generation

Lead

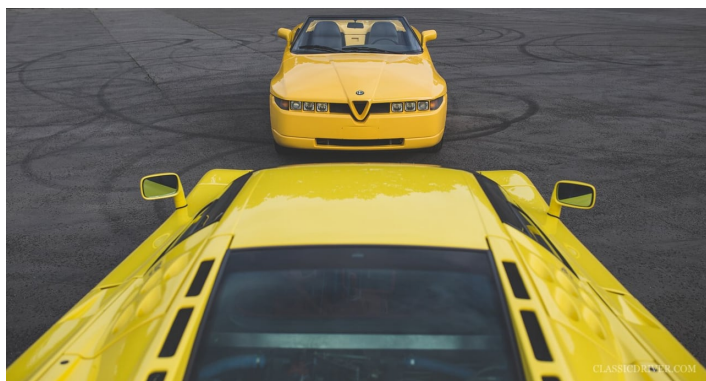
The poster heroes of the '70s and '80s have become the rising stars of recent years, but what's the next hot trend on the horizon? We gathered two bold, brilliant (and strikingly yellow) icons of the Super Mario generation: a Bugatti EB110 SS, and an Alfa Romeo RZ...

A visual challenge



Of course, aesthetics are entirely subjective – but both the [Bugatti EB110 SS](#) and the [Alfa Romeo RZ](#) (Roadster Zagato) are remembered for being the most 'visually challenging' designs of the 1990s. While the stylists of the era were moving back towards more organic shapes, Zagato bucked the trend (there's a surprise...) and stuck to its line-rules, creating a stubby SZ coupé, then an even stubbier-looking convertible version. Meanwhile, the likes of Gandini, Giugiaro, Bertone and Tjaarda all had a go at styling a 'modern Bugatti', before the cousin of the would-be company saviour Romano Artioli devised the EB110 as we know it. Consequently, the supercar had a strong Italian influence – indeed, the EB110 factory was in Modena, not Molsheim – but the final design still carried its fair share of French flair.

Charm in abundance



What both cars lacked in traditional beauty, however, they more than made up for with charm – each had an intrinsically likeable character, even more so when specified in their respective shades of yellow. Only three EB110 Super Sports were ordered in such a colour (famously, Michael Schumacher owned one of the others), while the Zag's zesty hue was one of only three available for the SZ's convertible adaptation, and became a popular choice. On our shoot, the duo's chosen colour schemes seemed quite attractive to a nearby wasp's nest, too.

Yellow perils



After swatting away our inquisitive flying friends, it's time to fire up the odd-jects of their affections. If you're expecting the aural drama to match the visual, then you might be left disappointed. The Alfa's 3.0-litre V6 purrs quietly into life and, more surprisingly, the ignition of the Bugatti's 3.5-litre quad-turbo V12 is equally civil. It's only on the move (and beyond 5,000rpm) that the Bug's alter-ego reveals itself like some sort of yellow Hulk, the 610bhp smashing your back into your bucket seat, and the whistling wastegates howling in your eardrums with every gearchange. So, there's the drama you wanted. Keep the turbos placated with lower revs, however, and the Bug is as docile as you'll ever need it to be – not to mention it has a cossetting cabin, and a clever four-wheel-drive system.

Decapitating the monster



Meanwhile, the Alfa's gloriously smooth V6 acts as a perfect tonic to the jagged styling, filling the air around you with notes stolen from a Pavarotti concerto. What's more, with the gearbox mounted at the rear, the handling is delightfully neutral, despite the loss of rigidity that's to be expected from decapitating 'Il Mostro'. Of course, you'll have to forgive a few other quirks of 1990s small-scale production – the Zag's panel gaps are about as coherent as its overall appearance, while the Bug's air-conditioning loses the battle to the heat of the V12 behind you at low speeds – but ultimately, both are just as usable in the real world as any of their contemporary equivalents. Well, if there are any.

Analogue excellence



As such, both represent an epoch in which driving dynamics were all but mastered in analogue form, before the digital revolution prevailed. Plus, as we've seen recently with Testarossas and 930 Turbos, it's the poster cars that come to define an era – and these were the heroes of the Super Mario generation, likely to find further fortune as the '90s babies become tomorrow's moneyed enthusiasts. Limited production numbers again help their collectability – both are the rarest members of their model families, in turn making them among the scarcest post-War offerings from their respective marques.

Ahead of their time



“Both these cars were ahead of their time. I doubt anyone will ever build a V12, four-wheel-drive, quad-turbo car ever again – the engine was designed from scratch, too, not bought in from somewhere else,” says Max Girardo, the auctioneer who will offer both cars at [RM's London auction on 7 September 2015](#). “Likewise, with the RZ, it was Alfa Romeo and Zagato meeting again but ‘retro’ wasn’t yet popular at that time. These were the last two wacky designs, just when everyone else was calming down – now, everyone likes a wacky car. People say that this era has a real future, and this is about as ‘Nineties’ as it gets.”

Photos: Tom Shaxson for Classic Driver ©2015

Gallery

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