

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Finding the forgotten Lamborghini Countach L150 prototype in Japan

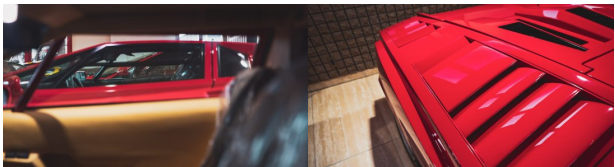
### Lead

In the Mid-1980s, Lamborghini started working on an evolution model of the aging Countach supercar. Now author and photographer Ken Saito has stumbled upon the forgotten L150 prototype in the garage of the Japanese supercar collector Minoru Miura.

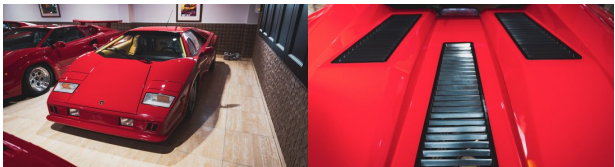


In the mid-late 1980s Lamborghini were developing an evolution for the Countach, aimed at modernising the Countach as well as bridging it closer to its successor. Known as the 'Restyling' prototype, it later given the official 'L150' project codename. The L150 project can trace its roots back to 1984 when a Lamborghini engineer, Giulio Alfieri, started toying with the idea of a more modern Countach.

Alfieri's imagining of a contemporary Countach was a full three years before Lamborghini started development of the Countach Evolution and experimented with the idea of using carbon fibre. What makes the L150 so unique is that it has no Countach badging or identification, the VIN is unique to the L150. Almost as if Lamborghini saw the whole project as being something completely separate to the existing Countach. Where Countach VINs would look something like this ZA9CXXXXXXX, the L150 simply says 'Lamborghini L150'. One of the aims of the Restyling project was to address some of the Countach's many shortfalls such as improving comfort, engine cooling, and modernising the styling.



One of the most noticeable differences were the replacement of the NACA ducts from the 5000QV by the larger air vents on the side which could open and close depending on the temperature, much like the vents used on the Murcielago almost two decades later. Some other changes included replacing the manual two-piece side window for an electrically operated single piece side window. New scoops behind the window and on the fenders were added for extra cooling. The chassis had to be redesigned to accommodate new radiators and oil cooler.



Lamborghini's owner and CEO at the time, Patrick Mimran, wanted a completed prototype to be able to assess the car. However, the L150 project never saw the green light for production. The project was scrapped in favor of what we now know as the Countach 25th Anniversary. The reasoning for this was simple; cost. Whereas the L150 would've required a complete redevelopment of the chassis in Countach's final years, the 25th Anniversary was a more efficient way of modernising the Countach. As these things go, Mimran ended up giving the L150 as a parting present to himself before stepping down as CEO in 1987.

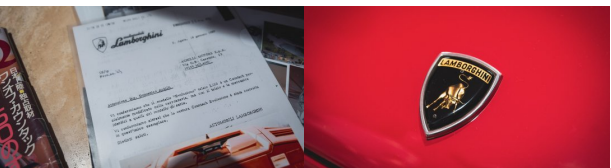


The car was then bought by Auto Palace, a supercar dealership in Japan for an alleged ¥400 million (\$2.6 million in 1989, \$5.3 million in 2020). They then advertised it for ¥1 billion (\$6.6 million in 1989, \$13.4 million in 2020) at the height of Japan's bubble economy. It was then bought by one of Japan's biggest car collectors, Minoru Miura who said he paid ¥100 million for it (\$660,000 in 1989, \$1.3 million in 2020). Mr Miura, who yes does in fact own a Lamborghini Miura, has been an avid Lamborghini collector from the beginning. His first supercar was a Countach LP400 back in the 70s, so both the brand and the Countach have a special place in his heart.



While many might know him from his Ferrari-centric car collection which includes no less than a Enzo painted in Rosso Barchetta to match his Rosso Barchetta F50, a one-off LaFerrari, a yellow F40, a F40 LM, and a 275GTB, his love for Lamborghini is still going strong. Mr Miura owns the only Reventon in Japan and is believed to be the only

When the opportunity came up to acquire the L150 from the Japanese dealership, Mr Miura jumped at the chance. He's owned the prototype car since 1989 and plans to keep it for much longer. He said the car is listed in his will, in the event anything should happen to him, the car will be auctioned off with proceeds going to help unfortunate children. As it's a one-off there's no way to gauge the true value of the car today but it certainly won't be chump change.



Mr Miura hasn't touched the L150, it's as is from when it left the factory in 1987. As such it hasn't needed any restoration work. This is very much a collector's example and has only covered a total of 83 miles in over three decades. Mr Miura hasn't even taken the seal off the cigarette lighter. The car spent most of its life stored away in his collection. When the L150 first arrived in Japan, Mr Miura shared it with some Japanese auto magazines causing quite a stir at the time but hasn't made any public appearances since then.





Being a true collector, Mr Miura has kept all the documentation and materials related to the L150. There's a signed letter confirming its authenticity as a true one-off prototype from Lamborghini as well as the original print ad (yes, that's how long ago it was) of the car being advertised for 1 billion yen by Auto Palace. Mr Miura was quite proud to have this car in his collection, boasting "not even Lamborghini's museum have this". Since the Evoluzione was destroyed, this is the last remaining 'evolution' prototype of the Countach left.



I've known Mr Miura for a few years now and he's never been one to seek out exposure. He's always been adamant about posting his collection online, instead he's happy to share his cars with those who are passionate about cars in person. Perhaps he felt the L150 was at risk of falling down into the depths of automotive history and be forgotten. Mr Miura feels the L150 was an important part of Lamborghini's history, he likened it to the Reventon as a sort of "middle ground" between the Countach and Diablo. Even though it didn't reach production, it gave way for the 25th Anniversary. History could've been very different if Lamborghini decided to go with the the L150 project instead of the 25th Anniversary, on which Horacio Pagani was involved with.

What was even better was Mr Miura had the L150 parked next to his 25th Anniversary Countach so it was easy to spot the differences from the single piece window compared to the two-piece in the 25th, the location of the door lock on the top of the door, how the window curved into the body to allow airflow into the new vents, and the addition of an aerial. Perhaps Mr Miura just wanted to reminisce on this car 30 years since he bought it, from a time when Japan's supercar scene was literally on another level and when many of these one-offs and prototypes ended up in the country. There's no doubt there are still many yet to be discovered.

*Text and Photos: Ken Saito © 2021*

### Gallery





























































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