

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Life could be a dream in this scarlet Plymouth Asimmetrica Roadster by Ghia](#)

Lead

There are few cars that leave onlookers in complete astonishment quite like America's space-age concepts of the 1950s and 1960s. For legendary designer Virgil Exner Sr, it was all in a day's work, but the Plymouth Asimmetrica Roadster was perhaps his greatest creation...



Post-war America was a country on a mission. A mission to the moon, a mission to invent just about anything that would enrich the lives of their pastel-clothed countrymen and women, and a mission to create some of the finest automobiles the world had ever laid its eyes on. While the 1940s saw some glimmers of hope for a fresh-faced automotive world, the 1950s and the jet age was when some of the world's most famous creatives let their designs do the talking.

One of those designers was Virgil Exner Sr, a man with a highly decorated resume, one filled with some well-known, and some almost unheard-of creations, such as this glorious Plymouth Asimmetrica Roadster. Exner was born and raised in Indiana, a state many would overlook as an automotive powerhouse during the 1950s, but areas like South Bend were producing cars with the same enthusiasm and speed as Detroit's Motor City. One of South Bend's own was Studebaker, a brand which would see Exner begin his life-long career in automotive design, despite dropping out of art school before graduating. Starting in a role as an ad designer, Exner's artistic competence did not go unnoticed, and in 1934 he was hand-picked by Harley Earl himself to join his design team at General Motors. Talk about landing on your feet!



After spending some time with Studebaker, Exner landed a job at Chrysler in 1949, a time when the Detroit-born brand needed a fresh vision now more than ever. While the 1940s did see some bold designers dipping their toes into an obscure body accent here, or a panel crease there, Exner ripped Chrysler's original design handbook to shreds, almost immediately creating concepts that would be sure to get the Chrysler name back on the lips of the uptown city folk and suburban dwellers alike. While Exner is perhaps best known for his 'Forward Look' approach and the Chrysler 300C, a multiple record-breaking car and the most powerful production car in America upon its release, it's the quirky creations that catch our attention, and few do it quite like this Plymouth.

The XNR, named after the designer himself, is a car that symbolises so much more than its unique styling. Exner used the Plymouth as something of a last hurrah for his flamboyant Space Age tendencies, which were starting to be met with conflict from management and the public, who were seeking increasingly less dramatic automobiles by the late 1950s. Tailfins were so five years prior, and many believed the excess chrome décor was a touch unnecessary. Aware of the ever-present pressure on his shoulders, Exner resisted the urge to create something civil, and the Plymouth XNR was born with a little help from long-time partners Ghia, showcasing exactly how Virgil Exner wanted to be remembered.



Sure, it might have been too nuts for the now more serious and chrome-hating public, but it attracted enough attention for the two brands to unite and create a small number of models for their most prestigious clients. Created as a slightly more toned-down version of Exner's outrageous XNR, the Asimmetrica Roadster by Ghia still looks as eye-catching as its one-off sibling and was intended to be produced in a slightly higher quantity. Although official build figures have been unclear for decades, reports suggest this is the only Roadster to exist, which was displayed at the Turin and Geneva Motorshows in 1961. The looks might have been slightly different to the XNR, but the running gear underneath that swooping hood and bodywork was based on a Plymouth Valiant, albeit with the Hyper-Pack that featured cast-iron split headers and a Carter AFB carburettor, similar to the infamous NASCAR Valiants.



Seeing this truly unique machine glide through the character-filled suburbs of Manhattan is something we never thought we'd witness, but when Morton Street Partners are involved, you can always expect something special. Whether it's [a trio of pre and post Mercedes-AMG merger bruisers causing a scene on the streets](#), or a [cross-state road trip showcasing just how capable the Citroën SM really is](#), MSP are always eager to give the lucky residents of New York City a show to remember.



While so many car-lovers will instantly think of big-bodied Cadillacs or hemi-toting Dodges as the icons of American car culture, creations such as the Asimmetrica Roadster by Ghia showcase just how beautiful a car can be when the vision of two leading designers and manufacturers collaborate to create a piece of rolling art. Ask yourself, are there any other cars from the early 1960s that would turn as many heads as this scarlet rocketship?

Photos by Rémi Dargegen

Gallery

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