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Is it a bird? Is it a fish? No, it’s the one-off Pininfarina X

Lead
Over the years, countless vehicles have drawn inspiration from nature – but while this Pininfarina concept might look like the automotive equivalent of a blowfish, it’s actually inspired by another of Mother Nature’s phenomena: advanced aerodynamics…

This is probably one of the weirdest cars you’ve ever seen; it will also be one of the most aerodynamically efficient. In 1960, the newly rebranded Pininfarina (formerly Pinin Farina) was looking to modernise other aspects of the business, with one potential path leading towards a horizon of aerodynamic excellence. The Cambianese coachbuilder thus called on a wind-wizard professor from Turin Polytechnic, asking him to apply his knowledge from other aero-intensive fields to a practical, low-drag family saloon.

Diamonds are for leather

The result was the Pininfarina X, whose refreshingly uncomplicated moniker referenced the diamond-drivetrain layout the professor believed necessary to achieve the teardrop shape. In essence, it was a Fiat 1100-engined motorcycle with stabilisers and a saloon body: the front wheel steered, the rear wheel drove, and the remaining pair served as outriggers. Oh, and those fins? Their purpose was not to jump on the bandwagon of symbolic extravagance, but rather to counterbalance the destabilisation that was a by-product of the slippery shape.

Ultimately, the X’s drag co-efficient reading was a mere 0.20Cd – not only bettering the legendary Tatra T77a and pretty much every production car made since, but also its successor, the ‘Y’ concept. Laugh at its appearance all you want, but the Pininfarina X has nothing left to prove as a pioneer of aerodynamics.

Photos: Barrett-Jackson

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