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Paris Motor Show: Design Review

Automotive design consultant Chris Hrabalek takes an analytical look at the highlights of this year's Paris show...

The Paris motor show is in the automotive Premier League. It is of no surprise, then, that foreign upmarket brands – **Aston Martin**, **Ferrari**, **Lamborghini** et al – are under pressure to show something truly special, something to differentiate them from the often borderline-insane concepts of the local brand heroes. **Citroën**, **Peugeot** and **Renault** are each out to exploit their home-game advantage.



Aston Martin's last-minute entrant was the yet-to-be-finished **Aston Martin Project One-77**. Teaser images have been circulating for months now, to whet the appetite of the allegedly 77 identified Aston-owning billionaires willing to fork out £1m-plus on what is arguably a rebodied **DB9**. Just why this target group wouldn't take their **DB9** to an Italian coachbuilder and have a true 'one-off' for an equivalent sum is beyond me. Furthermore, if one were really cynical, the design themes in the side-view images are nothing unique, even in real life, and could easily have found their inspiration in recent US sportscars of lesser value.

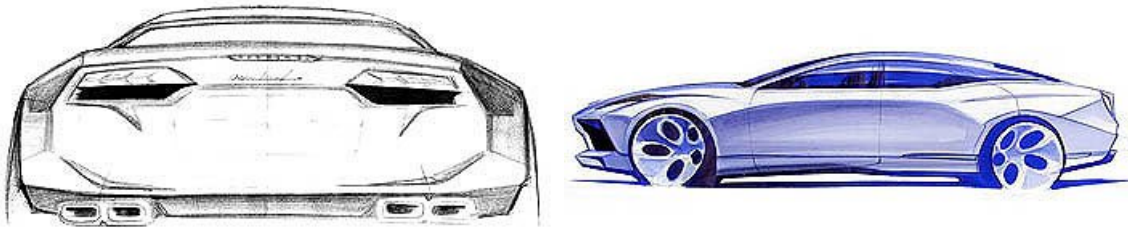
One element that was inspiring, however, was the front bumper. It features an air-intake that Aston's stylists have combined with the front light graphic, creating extra optical width and framing the more prominent DB7 Zagato-esque front grille. Designwise, the **One-77** is clearly a step up from the **DB9S** bodykit, although it remains to be seen if there really will be almost four times as many buyers for the **One-77** as those that put their cash down for the **Lamborghini Reventon**; arguably a very similar project.



The new **California** was **Ferrari**'s entrant; no big surprises here, as **Ferrari** has (probably wisely) chosen to follow the strategy of early previews and special viewings, way ahead of the 'world debut' at Paris. True 'motor show firsts' were probably limited to the two optional wheel-rim designs.



Meanwhile, **Lamborghini's Estoque** four-door supercar limousine was a big surprise and the unquestionable non-French highlight of the show. Although considered 'boring' by some, recognition must be given to **Lamborghini** for not falling into the trap of pure DNA theft in producing a retro-cloned **Espada** (something the brand did with its new **40th Anniversary Miura**).



It is important for any brand to be forward-looking and, if the manufacturer plays safe with regard to the vehicle concept or segment it targets, then it must at least be daring in its technical package and styling. Here, styling details such as the horizontal headlamps, with the now trademark Y-chromosome lights, are truly outstanding. These light clusters are a beautiful example of a revolutionary, rather than evolutionary, design strategy. It makes one wonder why **Lamborghini** didn't apply the same philosophy to the choice of colour and trim... Could someone in **Sant'Agata Bolognese** please throw away the stale battleship and fighter-jet colour swatches? They have now passed their sell-by date.



The true 'Champion du Monde' and, stylistically speaking, easily the most stunning automotive sculpture of 2008 is – by a long way – the **Citroën GT Concept**. When first confronted with the concept, it's difficult to rest the eyes on one single beautiful theme. The reason is that there are tens, if not hundreds, and that's before one has seen the extravagant interior.

The face, the sides of the body, the rear – all are unparalleled. At least 10 different show cars could be scavenged from the **Citroën GT Concept**'s countless original details. I can only think of a handful of motor show concepts (such as **Ferrari Modulo** and **Maserati Birdcage 75th**) that have such dynamically

sculpted lines and graphics, truly an artistic reflection of their era.



The **GT Concept** is the result of a partnership between **Citroën** and **Polyphony Digital**, the creators of the digital 'Gran Turismo' franchise; hence the concept will be experienced by millions of drivers of all age groups – digitally, in their living rooms. And that is yet another reason why the car is so fantastic: rather than creating a show stunner that has a one-day or one-week lifecycle, this concept will be 'experienced' by many, raising the brand awareness and brand image of Citroën with a new generation of future car-buyers.

While the efforts of the upmarket foreign brands at the Paris show must be respected, it's fitting that a French concept car stole the hearts of visitors. The unveiling of the **Citroën GT Concept** couldn't have been timed better.

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Photos: Ferrari / Aston Martin/ Lamborghini /Citroën / [Nanette Schärf](#)

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