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Sleeping Beauty №14: Bugatti EB110



Sixty valves, four turbochargers, 550+bhp, permanent four-wheel drive - and a Bugatti badge on the car's squat nose.

Wealthy businessman **Romano Artioli** was the man behind the hare-brained but passionate scheme to create this car from nothing. More than 30 years after the last **Bugatti** had been built, he acquired the **Bugatti** name and somehow raised the capital (to this day, no one is quite sure how) to develop a car, build a factory and employ a workforce. But the market collapsed and, by February 1993 (when the **EB110** was finally launched in the UK), only three cars had been registered in Italy and they all belonged to **Bugatti**.

Only around 150 cars were ever built and eventually the money dried up - not helped by **Artioli's** £30 million purchase of **Lotus** in 1993. The story is a tragedy in financial terms, yet there are so many reasons to celebrate the Bugatti EB110. As a stunning piece of engineering; as a rare and courageous attempt to create something totally outstanding; and as a car that is shockingly entertaining to drive.

The engine chatters, the turbos chirrup and the transmission whirs; yet all this is muffled by the sound-deadening of a luxury sportscar. Artioli wanted outstanding performance with a docile nature, and that's what he got. The clutch is light and the gearlever moves with easy precision, backed up by effortless power steering: a far cry from the heavy stomp-and-snatch of many supercars of that era.

Put your foot down and it feels like an aeroplane on a runway - civilised at first, but then the speed builds and builds and keeps on building without drawing breath. Yet drive hard into a corner on a wet road and the four-wheel drive pulls you through, the car's bulk changing direction with the ease of a slot car. And then there's the wonder of the rear-view mirror. All you can see is a slit of sky, a strip of spoiler and a vast, glittering expanse of engine - twelve cylinders and four IHI turbochargers, no less...

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