

CLASSIC DRIVER

Classic Concepts: 1964 Alfa Romeo Canguro

Lead

The Bertone-styled Canguro concept is seen as one of the most aesthetically balanced cars in history, from a golden era of Italian design. However, it was rejected for production and – even more tragically – shortly after its debut, the one-off concept was crashed.

Following the racing triumphs of the lightweight Alfa Romeo TZ – or *Tubolare Zagato*, in reference to its tubular chassis and coachbuilder – the company explored the idea of a road-going version. While Zagato had been responsible for the racing car's coachwork, Alfa gave a TZ chassis each to rival coachbuilders Bertone and Pininfarina to see if they could come up with substitutes. Heading up Bertone's effort was a young Giorgetto Giugiaro, fresh from penning the Giulia Sprint of the previous year.

The TZ chassis was super-low, already giving the car a ground-hugging profile even before Giugiaro worked his undeniable magic. Complementing this aerodynamic running start, he blessed the car with a lithe, curvaceous glassfibre body – complete with a Kamm-tailed rear end to further reduce drag. Zagato-inspired shape aside, the car also displayed several other notable design flourishes, including a glued-in windscreen (apparently an industry first) and distinctive air vents (which influenced many later Bertone designs). Another touch of brilliance was the use of Alfa competition cloverleaf-shaped heater vents inside.



Making its debut at the 1964 Paris Motor Show, the car was christened *Canguro*, meaning Kangaroo in Italian. Despite universal acclaim, Alfa rejected the proposal shortly afterwards, perhaps due to the fact that the newly absorbed Autodelta (which had become Alfa's racing department) did not yet have the ability to produce the chassis on a large scale. This was much to the disappointment of Nuccio Bertone – whose grief

was compounded when the Canguro suffered catastrophic front-end damage in a high-speed collision during shooting for a promotional film by Shell.

The incident occurred at the Parabolica curve of the Monza circuit, where it reportedly rear-ended another one-off Bertone concept: the 1963 Chevrolet Testudo. Nuccio Bertone considered the damage irreparable: he was later quoted as saying “the construction of a prototype involves around 15,000 hours of work” – so repairing the Canguro was considered unjustifiable, given that it had already been rejected for production. Henceforth, it was left in a derelict state to battle the elements outside the Bertone factory.



At some time during the seventies its carcass was procured by German journalist Gary Schmidt, with the intention of restoring it. Despite making some headway – many of the Canguro’s parts were interchangeable with same-era Alfas – he had trouble with the damaged front end, finding the organic shape hard to replicate accurately. He never completed the project and, near the turn of the century, the car was inducted into the collection of Japanese businessman Shiro Kosaka (who now also owns Pininfarina’s version). Kosaka continued Schmidt’s work, and the Canguro made a splendid second debut at the 2005 Ville d’Este, where it was voted ‘Best in Show’. Unfortunately, however, Schmidt had passed away in 2003, so never saw the car restored to its former glory.



As well as influencing the design of many icons since, the Canguro is a masterpiece in its own right. And thanks to not only the talent of Giugiaro, but to the determination of Schmidt and Kosaka, the splendour of the Canguro lives on to this day.

Photos: Bertone/Classic Driver

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