

CLASSIC DRIVER

Iso Rivolta Fidia: The fastest four seats in the world

Lead

With the Quattroporte of the early 1960s, Maserati established a market for Italian sports saloons and, a few years later, Piero Rivolta introduced a fast four-door into the Iso product range.

Designed by Giugiaro and built by Ghia, the Iso Rivolta Fidia (initially named the 'S4') should have met with instant success... but the truth was rather different.

The launch of the four-door Iso Rivolta was beset by problems - though it gained a certain celebrity status when John Lennon showed great interest in the marque and bought the second Fidia made (and the first with right-hand drive). The problems, however, were to do with the press launch in Athens. The local fuel was of poor quality, and had too low an octane rating for the new Italian saloon, which resulted in accusations of "horrible pinking" from the journalists given the chance to drive it. This rather unfairly damaged the car's reputation from the outset.





The four-door Fidia was the first project of Piero Rivolta after taking over the business from his father, Renzo, who died in 1966. The first models were powered by a 5.4-litre 355HP Chevy V8, accelerating the saloon from zero to 60mph in about seven seconds. From 1973, however, a 5.8-litre Ford V8 engine was used, developing some 325HP.





In contrast to the harmonious proportions of the Grifo, the model was a veritable patchwork of styles and fashions of the time. You can see a burly and broad front end, not so different from the Iso Grifo or De Tomaso Mangusta, while the silhouette has a rising window line, a massive C-pillar and a long sloping rear.



The premiere of the four-seater came in the autumn of 1967 at the Frankfurt Motor Show. At the time, it went

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by the name of Iso Rivolta S, but was given the name Fidia (after the Greek sculptor Phidias) at the time of the unfortunate press launch in Athens. Added to that bad press was the fact that production was expensive and hence Rivolta raised the sale price to a level not far off that of a Rolls-Royce. Nevertheless, well-heeled celebrities did become buyers – after John Lennon came Pete Townshend, Sonny Bono and James Last.



Until Iso Rivolta ceased to exist as a company in 1974, just over 190 cars were built – including some with a new interior for the 1969 model imported from the Iso Lele. Today, the Iso Rivolta Fidia is sought-after as an unusual collectors' item – even if its four seats are no longer the fastest in the world.

Photos: Jan Baedeker

Gallery

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