
One Man's Magic: McLaren X-1 concept hits the headlines in Monterey

17 August 2012 | Charis Whitcombe

It all began with a car enthusiast. An (anonymous) enthusiast who already owned a McLaren F1, a Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren and a 12C, but who wanted something even rarer; even more special.

He wanted, says McLaren, 'a machine that had all the capability of the 12C but wrapped in a unique body that reflected his needs and personality'. So McLaren agreed to build it for him.

Called the McLaren X-1 and structurally based on the 12C's carbon MonoCell, with the 12C's twin-turbo 625PS engine, it has a totally new, one-off body, in which almost every component is bespoke, from the lights to the wheels - so no wonder it took two and a half years to build. Even the initial

meeting between our wealthy enthusiast and McLaren – when the first discussions took place about the possibility of creating this totally personalised machine – lasted three hours.

The project was taken on by McLaren Special Operations (MSO), the division of McLaren Automotive dedicated to bespoke projects, and the fruits of their labour were unveiled today, 17 August, at The Quail – part of Pebble Beach week in Monterey.

When McLaren lists the cars that influenced the X-1, it's enough to make your jaw drop: 1961 Facel Vega, 1953 Chrysler D'Elegance Ghia, 1959 Buick Electra, 1939 Mercedes-Benz 540K and a 1971 Citroën SM. And let's not stop with cars, because the team also drew inspiration from the Guggenheim museums in New York and Bilbao – plus a Jaeger LeCoultre art deco clock, an Airstream trailer, a Thomas Mann Montblanc pen and a grand piano. Plus a black-and-white photo of Audrey Hepburn. Oh – and an eggplant. “The client liked the shiny texture of the finish”, apparently.

In the end, the design that was chosen was by McLaren's Korean-born RCA graduate, Hong Yeo – with the design work completed under the direction of Stephenson, of course.

And the X-1 is no static exhibit – it's a useable car, road legal and capable of travelling at supercar speed with two adults aboard. All the body panels are made from carbon, and are finished in a rich piano black (as specified by the owner), but perhaps the most unusual styling feature is at the rear, where the enclosed wheels are accessed by carbon panels using (says Stephenson) “some of the most gorgeous hinges you've ever seen”.

After its debut on the Monterey Peninsula, this genuinely unique and wildly different automobile (complete with its gorgeous hinges) will return to MSO headquarters in Woking, to be carefully inspected before it takes its place in the owner's collection.

On the subject of McLaren, Classic Driver recently visited the Technology Centre in Woking; and next week we'll be bringing you a full report on what being part of the McLaren 'family' is like – along with some more examples of the work of the Special Operations team.

Photos: McLaren Automotive

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