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This 'baby' Bizzarrini 1900 GT arose from a European alliance

07 October 2016 | Alex Easthope

When Opel approached Bizzarrini, inviting the Italian company to design a sports car around its 1900 platform, the result was christened the Europa in light of its cross-continental conception. But while it could have propelled Bizzarrini into the mainstream, it was cruelly robbed of its potential...

Cars are often thought of as national treasures, but cast your mind back through automotive history and you'll realise that many of the greats were designed with expertise from at least two different countries or cultures.

In spite of its current state of turmoil, Europe is a good case in point. Take the [Aston Martin DB4](#), for example, with its Italian Superleggera body and six-cylinder engine designed by the great Polish engineer Tadek Marek, or the Maserati-powered [Citroën SM](#). These cars only serve to remind us of the benefits of collaboration, when great minds come together to build great things.



One of those great minds was, undeniably, Giotto Bizzarrini. The talented Italian engineer played a prominent role in the design of, among other things, the Ferrari 250 Testa Rossa and the fabled 250 GTO, the original Lamborghini V12 engine and, of course, the beautiful-yet-brutish Iso Grifo GL, a car that would subsequently – and some would say fittingly – bear his own name as the Bizzarrini 5300 GT.

It was while operating his newly founded eponymous company in the mid-1960s that Bizzarrini built the GT Europa on Opel 1900 underpinnings, as a proposal for the German marque's new sports car. The handsome coupé mildly resembled the larger 5300 GT, and was intended to thrust the marque into the realms of mass production. Alas, Opel rejected the idea opting instead for an in-house project, prompting Giotto to go about producing the car himself at his Livorno factory, alongside his other vehicles. It was a task in which, sadly, financial woes – and eventually bankruptcy – prevented him from succeeding. Many actually lament it as the 1900 that Opel *should* have built.



Unlike its snarling, Chevrolet V8-powered older sister, the 'baby Bizza' drew its power from the humble (yet robust) 1900cc Opel engine, developing 110bhp and mounted amidship between the front axle and the driver. As a car that weighed just 650kg (thanks, predominantly, to the use of glass-fibre for its sultry body) and boasted independent suspension, a limited-slip differential and disc brakes all around, the Europa was a potent prospect indeed. Would you expect anything less from an engineer so blatantly motorsport-minded?



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Deep orange doesn't suit many sports cars, but the baby Bizza certainly pulls it off. That Pietro Vanni-designed body is really rather handsome, even if it takes a while for your mind to realise that it isn't a 5300GT that's simply shrunk in the wash. And those quirky glass panels above the doors add a touch of drama *and* practicality, aiding ingress and egress to the snug cabin. Registered in Belgium, [this extensively restored example](#) is believed to be the last Europa built at the factory, and is reportedly accompanied by a letter of authentication from Giotto himself confirming so.



While production numbers understandably vary from source to source, it's believed that between just 15 and 20 Bizzarrini 1900 GT Europas ever saw the light of day. Okay, so it might not sit on the top shelf of automotive greats, but as an intriguing study that was built by a man considered among the greatest engineers to have ever lived and robbed of its potential, we think it's a fascinating ownership prospect. It's also another great example of a cross-European collaboration, proving that even the most influential of minds must sometimes look across their borders for ideas. The car's name says it all: 'Europa' - a moniker that has been used on several other important classics, we hasten to add...

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