

CLASSIC DRIVER

Giorgio Moroder, Marcello Gandini and the unlikely tale of the Cizeta V16T

Lead

Cue the Janet Jackson and pour yourself a punchy pina colada, because we're taking you to sunny Miami today and perhaps the most outrageous 1990s supercar of them all: the Cizeta V16T...

There are three unlikely protagonists in the ill-fated tale of this 16-cylinder unicorn. The first is Claudio Zampolli, an ex-Lamborghini engineer who successfully turned his hand to selling exotic cars on America's West Coast. He eventually grew restless, deciding instead to pursue his dream of building a supercar superior to the ones he was peddling. All he needed was an equally enthusiastic financier.

Enter Giorgio Moroder. That's right, the godfather of electronic music's appetite was sufficiently whetted by Zampolli's vision for a genre-toppling supercar. Last, but by no means least, there was Marcello Gandini, the design wunderkind responsible for some of history's most awe-inspiring cars including the Lancia Stratos and the Lamborghini Countach.



Zampolli had the vision and the engineering knowhow, Moroder the money and one hell of a black book, and Gandini a fundamental design for a new supercar which had been originally drawn for Lamborghini but rejected by the top brass at Chrysler, who'd saved the Raging Bull from financial doom. Together, under the banner of Cizeta-Moroder, the trio would create the definitive supercar. Well, that was the plan.

If Zampolli's car was to be taken seriously in a flourishing supercar sphere which had already produced the Ferrari F40 and the Porsche 959, it needed to push the technological envelope. And push the technological envelope it did. Clothing a tubular spaceframe chassis with double-wishbone suspension at each corner, Gandini's gargantuan body looks, at first glance, to be a lower-res Diablo. The striking and typically wedge-shaped body is loaded with extravagant details – the stacked pop-up headlights, for example. Because too much simply wasn't enough in the 1990s.



It's at the rear where things got a little weird. Gandini was forced to rethink the tail in order to accommodate the hulking brute of an engine, a transversely mounted sixteen-cylinder powerhouse created from two V8s grafted together with a shared cast-alloy block and mated to a five-speed manual gearbox driving the rear wheels.

At 1,705kg, the Cizeta-Moroder was no lightweight, so perhaps more impressive than the 540bhp produced by the engine was its reported tractability and zest – especially when you consider it had 64 valves, eight camshafts, two fuel-injection systems, four cylinder heads, and twin timing chains. The 0-60mph sprint was dispatched in four seconds and the top speed was apparently 204mph. The powertrain was Zampolli's pride and joy and lent the car its name: V16T. Unfortunately, less attention was paid to other important areas, such as getting the car homologated for the American market.



Despite a promising launch at the 1989 Los Angeles Auto Show, where a number of orders for the 650,000-dollar supercar were reportedly taken, the cracks were already beginning to show. Despite there never being a better embodiment of his high-tech music and glamorous lifestyle, Moroder withdrew in 1990, leaving Zampolli to man the ailing ship alone.

Moroder's departure was not the V16T's death knell, but the writing was on the wall. Zampolli persevered until 1995 before pulling the plug. Just nine examples were beautifully hand-built by a small group of ex-Lamborghini and Ferrari engineers in Modena.



The electric blue car you're staring at no doubt slack-jawed is one of those nine. For the last six months, the Miami-based Classic Driver dealer Curated has been negotiating to buy chassis #101, the sixth Cizeta V16T to leave the factory. Following its moment beneath the spotlights at Geneva in 1993, the car was shipped to Hong Seh Motors in Singapore on behalf of the Sultan of Brunei.

For reasons unbeknownst to us, the Cizeta never made it onto Brunei. It remained in Singapore, amazingly in its 'as-new' and unregistered condition, until John Temerian Jr. of Curated successfully bought it in July of this year. "We spent months researching the car and eventually organised an interview with Claudio Zampolli," Temerian Jr. told us. "He has always described chassis #101 as his favourite V16T. Today, it represents arguably the best Cizeta left in the world with its incredible provenance, as-new condition and unique livery."



That the V16T didn't reach the dizzying heights of success Zampolli had envisioned only serves to heighten its desirability today. Especially when the car was very well put together and not a hastily constructed bodge job as many people assume when they learn of its existence. After seeing the Cizeta at Geneva in 1991, Gordon Murray and Peter Stevens sent Zampolli a personal letter commending the quality of the car. High praise indeed.

More than ever, rare and unusual modern-era supercars are garnering the attention of younger collectors. And you'll agree that modern-era supercars don't really get any rarer or more unusual than this. Who knows if the opportunity to acquire a time-warp Cizeta V16T will arise again?

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