

THE GREATEST SUPERCARS OF THE EIGHTIES



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY JAKE ROBERTS

An insight into the greatest cars of the 1980's

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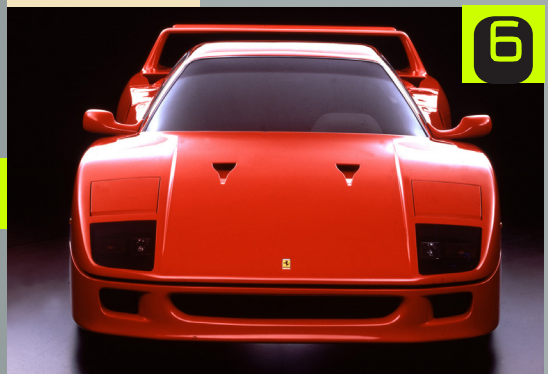
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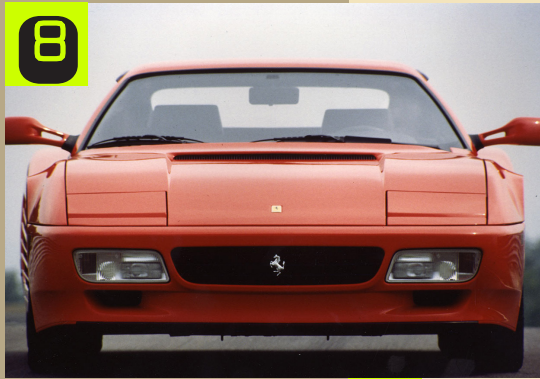
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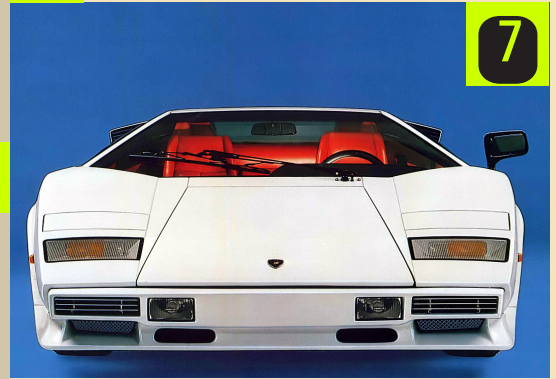
Ferrari F40

The seventies brought us a futuristic vision of wedge-shaped supercars with pop-up headlamps. The eighties took things to the next level.

A Top 10 continued



Ferrari Testarossa



Lamborghini Countach



Lotus Esprit Turbo



Porsche 959



//// **WHAT IS A SUPERCAR**

What exactly is a supercar? And what makes them stand apart from other sports cars?

Like a lot of things, there is no single agreed upon definition, but there is a generally an accepted list of criteria that motorsport enthusiasts alike, accept.

Three things are more important than anything else when it comes to identifying a supercar: cost, design and performance. Everyday concerns like comfort & practicality do not matter.

If it doesn't go fast and doesn't look great, it doesn't qualify. Supercars have to reach for the stars, and an important aspect of achieving super-status is an astronomical price-tag.

Most often driven by celebrities, millionaires and royalty, supercars have to be expensive, exclusive and beautiful. Italian design houses and huge amounts of funding have created some of the most iconic and recognizable cars of the 80's.

Lastly, perhaps, most importantly, there is speed.

Welcome to the world of iconic 80's supercars.

THE BOS

AN INTRODUCTION

Money ruled the '80s and the supercar brands boomed while Wall Street shone. As international trade opened up, so did new markets – particularly in America and the Middle East.

This led to a shift in the image of a supercar driver, no longer was he a privileged European playboy, now he was Gordon Gekko. The cars changed to suit these new buyers. Still mostly mid-engine, vastly powerful and rear-wheel drive, but now with a different, more boulevard vibe.

They lost focus, catering not to wannabe racers, but a more middle-aged clientele. Step forward the Ferrari Testarossa and, once again, the Lambo Countach.

Be-winged & be-wedged, they suited the big-hair and shoulder-pads generation.

Miami Vice was the new creed. But underneath the yuppie fluff, the Testarossa & Countach were damn good cars. The 180mph barrier was now being breached with increasing regularity.

Ferrari became the dominant force in supercardom, largely because of Lamborghini's parlous financial state as it had gone bust in 1978 until Chrysler took over in 1987.

But the Prancing Horse wasn't without competition, a turning point had been reached and the result was an explosion within the automotive industry with cars such as the BMW M1, the DeTomaso Pantera and the Aston Martin V8 Vantage bursting onto the scene. Mindful racing saw the introduction of the Porsche 959. Hailed as the most technologically advanced supercar ever, it rewrote the acceleration rulebook.

It was during the '80s, the industry developed emissions-friendly power, experimented with turbocharging and began serious work on the all-wheel-drive systems we take for granted today.

You're to be commended if you ever get to drive any one of these motors.

You don't see any of these often because there weren't that many to begin with.

And if you ever get to own any of these, be sure to safeguard that memory forever

Below are two prominent design houses of the time that contributed their expertise.



Italian Design House Pininfarina



Italian Design House Bertone



THE 1986 ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE ZAGATO

If exclusivity is your thing, then Aston Martin had you covered. Renewing their partnership with Italian design house Zagato, between 1986 and 1990, the two marques produced just 52 coupes and 37 convertible hand built V8 Vantage Zagatos.

Power came from Aston's great 5.3-litre V8 and thanks to an aluminum body, weight was kept down allowing the Zagato to reach 60mph in just 4.9 seconds, and push on to a top speed of 186mph.



ASTON MARTIN

*432 horsepower
395 ft-lb of Torque
Produced: 1986-90
Designer:
Giuseppe Mittino
at Zagato
89 made
52 coupes
37 convertibles
5.3 LV8
6 speed manual*

Many found the avant garde looks disappointing after the sixties' DB4 Zagato – squared-off headlamps, wraparound glasshouse and angular, though recognizable grille breaking from Aston Martin's traditionally flowing lines.

While these are primarily a European branded car, there is no denying its influence and while it wasn't anything to look at, it's powerful 4.5-liter engine could sprint from 0 to 60 in 4.9 seconds and had a top speed of 186 mph. You were definitely in for some sticker shock, but you need to remember each car was hand built and it took around 1200 hours to complete just one of these cars

The car was the first collaboration between Aston and the Italian design house, Zagato. The DB4 GT Zagato produced previously was held in such high regard that the two companies were understandably hesitant to create a follow-up.. What finally triggered that step was the 1984 Geneva Motor Show, at which appeared the Ferrari 288 GTO and the Porsche 959 special.



These new motors persuaded the top brass at Aston that the market for such low-volume supercars was there, they just needed to find that extra facet of desirability to justify the price premium. Cue talks with Zagato, and the subsequent decision to produce a lighter, more powerful and more radically designed version of the V8 Vantage, in limited numbers.



• The unveiling of the 10'000th standard V8 Vantage above

Thought Aston Martin was all understated style? One look at this Eighties special should show you otherwise, the absurdly square machine took the muscular V8 Vantage and wrapped it in a wacky shell, complete with a bulging bonnet hump, wraparound rear window and trademark double-bubble roof.

It was nothing if not controversial at the time and the grille alone had purists up in arms. However, today they are very sought after and can command very high prices on the second hand market and at auction with good condition examples going for around the 300k mark.



BMW E26/M1

274 horsepower

243 ft-lb of Torque

Produced: 1978-81

Designer: Giorgetto

Giugiaro

453 made

2-door coupe

Rear engine,
rear wheel drive

3.5 L M88/I DOHC i6

5 speed manual



THE 1981 BMW M1

BMW's first (and up until now, only) supercar project very nearly didn't happen at all; BMW had contracted Lamborghini to produce the required numbers for homologation purposes, but the Italian marque's financial woes caused irreparable tensions between the two. BMW re-assumed control of the project and produced around 450 road-going examples.

The M1's race-bred, straight-six, yet-to-be-revisited mid-engine layout, Giugiaro-penned lines and exclusivity ensure that the M1 is infinitely more popular now than it was when new; add to that the fact it had its own ProCar

championship series starring then-current F1 drivers, and you've got the competition-pedigree box ticked, too.

Built to go racing, the BMW M1 was produced to the tune of just 453 examples – each equipped with a straight-six motor that barked like nothing else. More than the noise though, the M1 looked unlike any Beemer before or since, with its low, tapered nose and angular shell. Probably because Lamborghini had a hand in designing it – before its finances ran out and another guy had to finish the job. A guy by the name of Giorgetto Giugiaro. Who also designed the Esprit. Coincidence?

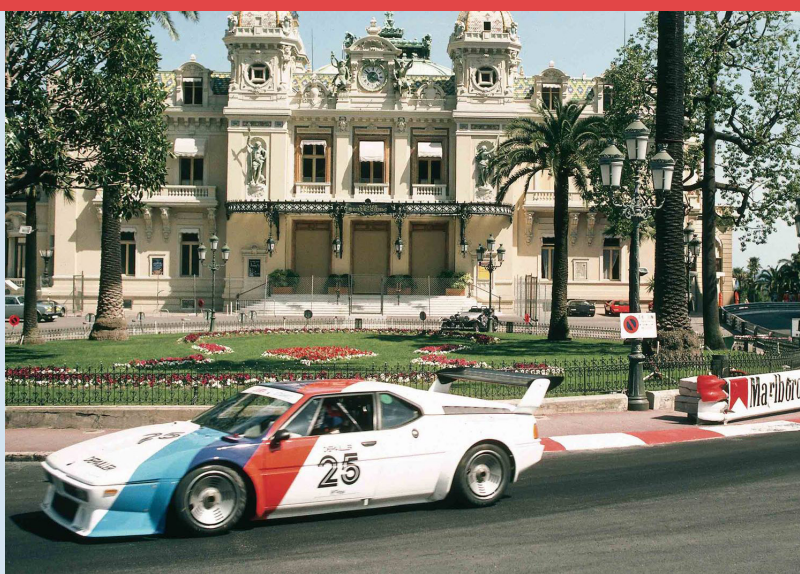
Road going versions of the BMW M1 came about as a result of BMW wanting to race the car in Group 4 competition. The mid engine exoticar uses an

Italian-built chassis and body, combined with a BMW engine, transaxle, suspension and interior. It was an outrageous recipe for BMW at the time and set the tone for many a wonderful M machine to come. Jerry Sloniger wrote in a March 1979 review, “There certainly is more macho here than in a Turbo Porsche.” The M1, BMW's first supercar, takes its cues directly from the wedgy Turbo concept of 1972.”

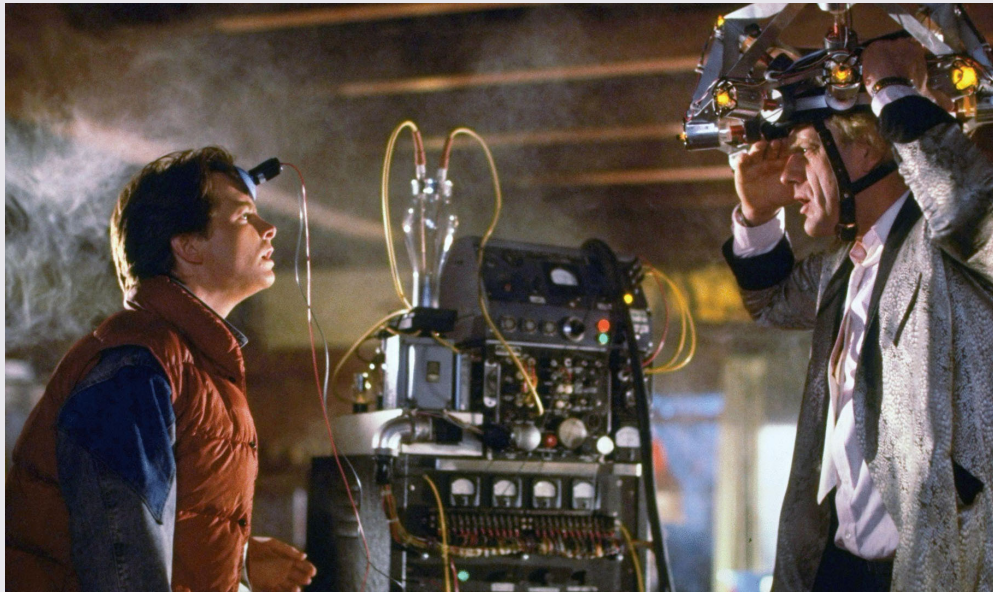


The result was a German car with plenty of Italian influence. Not only was Lamborghini originally contracted to help produce the car (BMW later took back the reins), but the M1's distinctive take on 70s angularity comes directly from the pen of Giugiaro, the man who practically invented the look.

The hand-built mid-engine M1 used BMW's glorious 277-hp, 3.5 liter six-cylinder engine and the M1 was reportedly wonderful to drive and more forgiving to use daily than most supercars of the day. Only 400 were produced, so today they are highly valued by collectors.



• The BMW M1 on the track in Montecarlo, Monaco



• Michael J Fox & Christopher Lloyd star in the 1985 blockbuster 'Back to the Future' alongside the DeLorean Time Machine above

DELOREAN DMC-12

130 horsepower

153 ft-lb of Torque

Produced: 1981-83

Designer:

Giorgetto Giugiaro

2-door coupe

Rear engine,

rear wheel drive

Gullwing doors

2.85 L PRV V6

5 speed manual

3 speed automatic

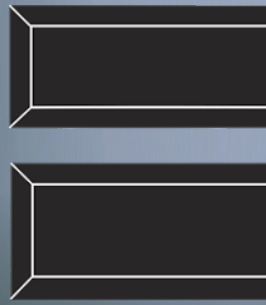
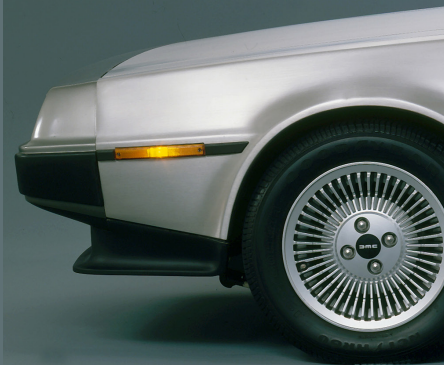


THE 1981 DELOREAN

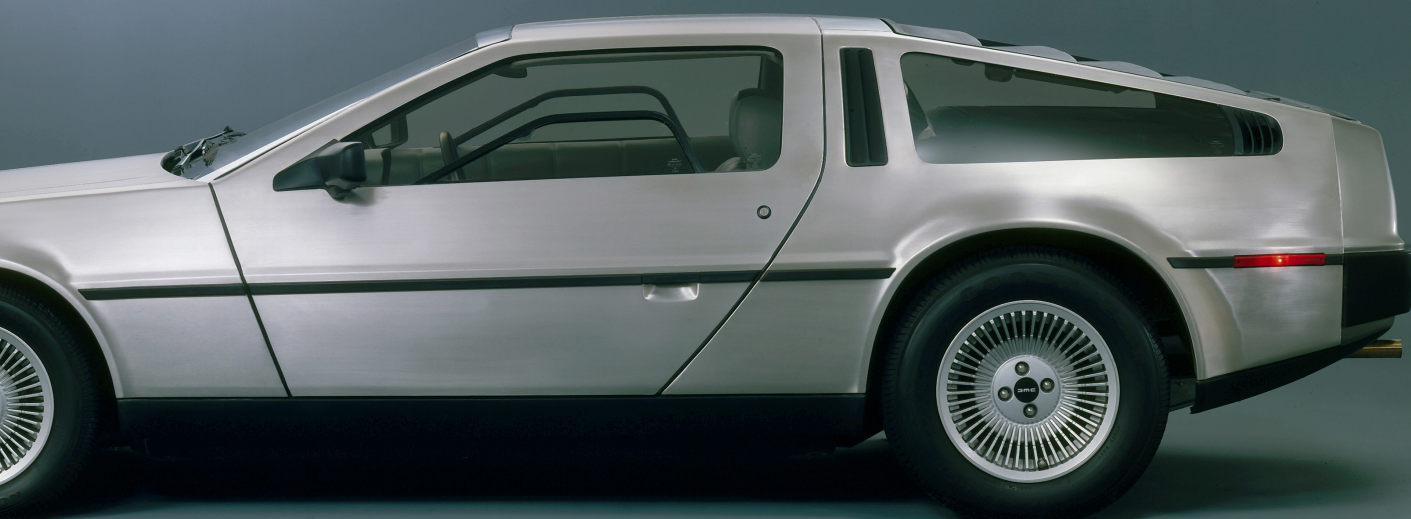
Looking purely at performance figures, the DeLorean is not a supercar. Even by the standards of its day it was sluggish, taking over 10 seconds to reach 60 miles per hour from a standstill. Its 2.8-litre V6 was restricted by tough emissions regulations at the time of its release, meaning in the real world 88mph was too much serious work to reach.

And yet, this machine is still one of the most recognizable cars out there, turning heads and dropping jaws over 30 years since it was first produced. That kudos is helped in part by its starring role in the Back to the Future film trilogy, but even without the Hollywood side of things the DeLorean manages to hold its own in the bedroom poster scene so dominated by Lamborghini during this period.

The brushed stainless-steel exterior, coupled to its gullwing doors and vented rear-window slats, which could be replaced with a flux capacitor as an aftermarket extra, if needed – gave this fascinating machine the looks it needed to be considered a supercar. So, what if it wasn't quick. Its legacy speaks for itself!



DMC



Best remembered as the time machine in *Back to the Future* invented by Doc Brown and travelled in by Marty McFly. The DeLorean was here and gone with the blink of the eye.

The DMC-12 shared many of the same characteristics as other space age looking cars from the eighties. It had those doors that went up in the air which we had seen before on both the Mercedes C111 and the Bricklin SV-1.

Maybe it feels different because the DMC was the only car built by the DeLorean Motor Company and even then, the company only manufactured cars from 1981 to 1983. Had it not appeared in the movie, we might have forgotten the vehicle all together. John DeLorean's ill-fated foray into sports cars lasted for just two years, but it left an indelible mark on the automotive industry.

Graced with saluting gullwing doors and clad in gleaming stainless steel, the DMC-12 shot to fame in a modified form and rightly became an Eighties icon in its own right, albeit one with a suspect build quality and a variety of bonnet designs. When John DeLorean, the ex-GM executive (right), needed a design for a new sports car that would bear his name, he turned to Italian designer Giugiaro.

When the DeLorean DMC-12 finally came around, it was dogged by controversy related to the performance of its weak-V-6 engine, the delay in production from the Northern Ireland factory and finally DeLorean's own well-publicized legal woes. Of course, little of that mattered once the DeLorean graced the screens of a sci-fi hit. It has since been cemeted in time as a retro futuristic classic.



**"WHERE WE'RE GOING
WE DON'T NEED ROADS"**



THE 1989 DETOMASO PANTERA

Pantera might be Italian for panther, but De Tomaso's Ghia-bodied sports car was more brash lion than lithe cat. Originally a tie-up with Ford, the Blue Oval pulled out in the Seventies, leaving the upstart Italian marque to go it alone. Unperturbed, it launched a bold new model for 1980: the GT5, equipped with head-turning air dams, side skirts and fenders – and a V8 motor for good measure.

Low, wide and sharp in the nose, the only thing more appealing than the striking shell was the refined cabin. The Pantera was De Tomaso's most successful and famous supercar. Unlike just about every Italian sports car born in the early 1970s, it was designed by an American, Tom Tjaarda.

The Pantera wasn't as low as some of the cars on this list and didn't have quite the extreme angularity. Perhaps as a result, its lines have aged well. Under the hood of the mid-engine Pantera is another American surprise.

A Ford 351-cid Cleveland V-8. And because Panteras were sold through Lincoln-Mercury dealerships, each component on the car carried a Ford part number, therefore servicing a Pantera wasn't particularly difficult then or now. Ford has all parts catalogued so it is fairly easy to find spares directly from them.

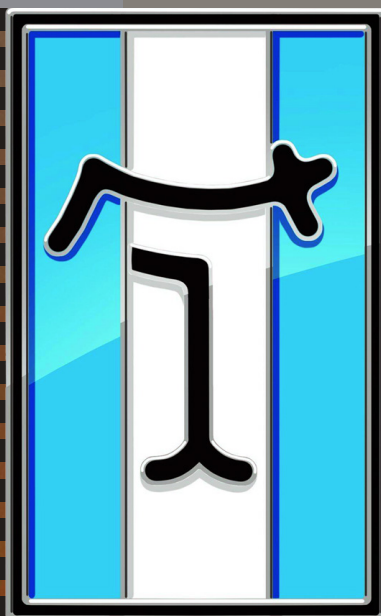
The later GT5 cars in the '80s grew wings and flares in an attempt to appeal to those looking for a budget Lamborghini. In total, about 5000 Panteras were produced for the U.S. market and today they remain one of the best supercars for classic value.



DeT



Pan



De Tomaso



Pantera

**De Tomaso
Pantera**

350 horsepower
333 ft-lb of Torque
Produced: 1971-92

7,260 made

Designers:
Tom Tjaarda at Ghia
Marcello Gandini at
Pantera

2-door coupe
Rear mid-engine,
rear drive

5.8L Ford Cleveland V8
5 speed manual

THE 1984 FERRARI 288 GTO

Seen by many as the car that set the performance precedent at Ferrari that eventually led to the F40, the 288 GTO is an even rarer gem from the prancing horse's past.

Another supercar to come from the need to meet homologation requirements for Group B rallying, but that was left without a purpose when the series was discontinued in 1986 after the tragic deaths of Henri Toivonen and co-driver Sergio Cresto while competing. 272 examples were produced, more than enough to satisfy homologation and each based on the underpinnings of the 308 GTB but with a 400bhp 2.9-litre turbo V8 mated to a 5-speed manual box.

This was good for 0-60 in 5 seconds, helped by the innovative body construction which featured a combination of steel, fiberglass, kevlar and carbon fiber. The aggressive, angular body styling reflected the GTO's character, though Ferrari took that a step further in 1989 when it introduced the insane 288 GTO Evoluzione.



Ferrari 288 GTO

*395 horsepower
366 ft-lb of Torque
Produced: 1984-87
272 made
Designer:
Leonardo
Fioravanti at
Pininfarina
2-door berlinetta
Rear mid-engine,
rear wheel drive
2.9 L FI 14 B 000 twin
turbo V8
5 speed manual*

FE



Ferrari

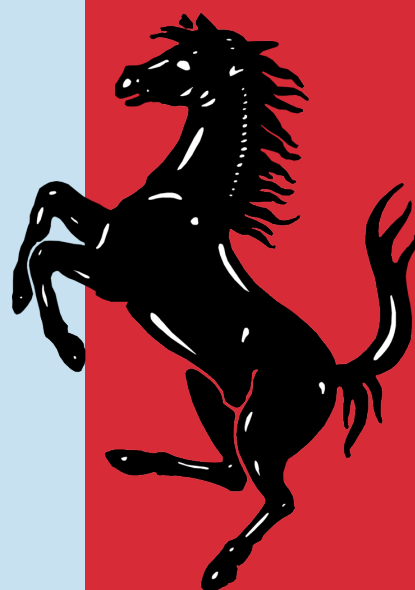


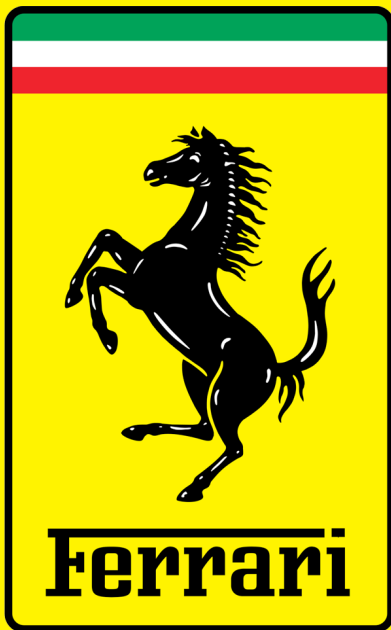
650bhp was put through the rear wheels of a car which weighed just 940kg, meaning a top speed somewhere north of 220mph. The small number of 288 GTOs produced means they fetch sky-high sums at auction houses these days. Compared with the very similar, series production 308 GTB, the 288 GTO was an altogether different animal.

First the mid-mounted V8 was mounted longitudinally, not laterally. Secondly, a twin turbo-charged engine boosted power to around 400bhp. In addition, a longer wheelbase,

bigger wheels, tyres and improved brakes gave the whole package originally intended as a homologation special, hence the 'O' for omologato massive performance. The 288 GTO set the standard for top speed in the early 1980s.

Production never exceeded 300 cars and today it is a highly sought after supercar, that always impresses either on the road, the showroom or the track. So, I wish you all the good luck in the auction room.





Ferrari F40

478 horsepower
426 ft-lb of Torque
Produced: 1987-92
1311 made
Designers: Leonardo
Fioravanti
Pietro Camardella at
Pininfarina
2-door Berlinetta
Rear mid-engine,
rear wheel drive
2.9 L twin-turbo Tipo F120A/
F120DV8
5 speed manual

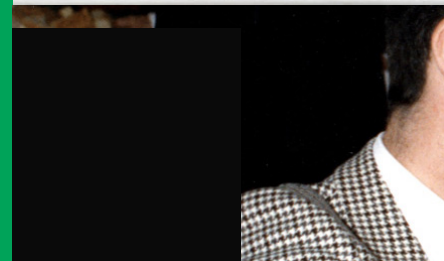
THE 1987 FERRARI F40

Many see this as the absolutely definitive Ferrari. Mid-engine, 2.9-litre V8, rear wheel drive, and with both regular and pop up headlamps, the F40 absolutely defined the notion of the supercar.

478bhp launched the last Ferrari signed off on by Enzo Ferrari from a standstill to 60mph in around 4.2 seconds, and on to a smug top speed of 201mph – 6mph more than Porsche's then-record holder, the 959 – but those figures only tell part of the tale.

Thanks to a body constructed from Kevlar, carbon fiber and aluminum, the F40 weighed just 1,369kg, bestowing it with go-kart-like handling characteristics. Ferrari had started out with the intention of building just 400 cars. By the end of its production run, over 1,300 had been built.

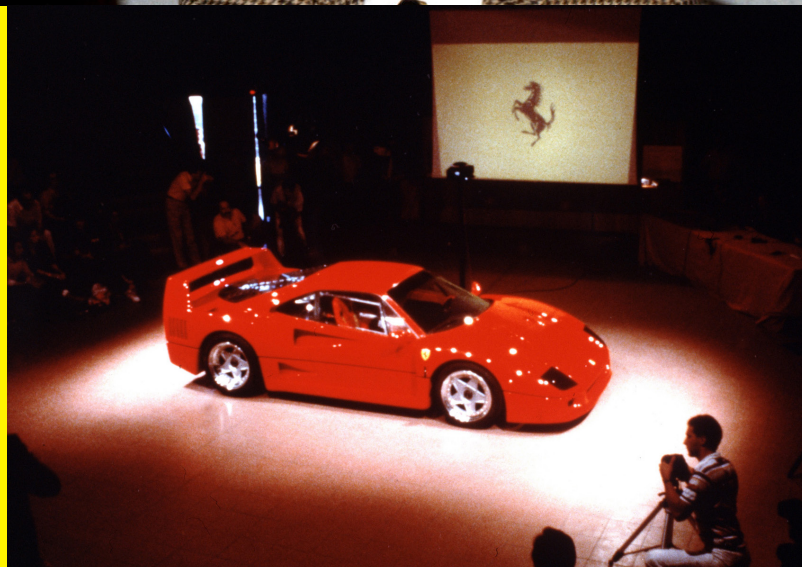
Note that Ferrari also went on to produce custom-made racing versions for sports car championships. This sparked a customer demand for elite performance-focused iterations, under the 'Competizione' brand which drew production out through to 1996.





Even looking at this legendary supercar it's hard to imagine that it's 30 years old, in 2017 that anniversary came around for the F40. Sadly, few of us will ever get the chance to experience one for ourselves.

The F40, one of the 1980's top superstars, and the last car to have personal design involvement by Enzo Ferrari. "This thing doesn't just accelerate, it pounds. It's going 150, 160, and still rocketing. More engine and brake than tire, but a lot of each. And I used all I could." - Don Fuller, Maranello test driver.



• The unveiling of the Ferrari F40 in 1987, Maranello, Italy.



THE 1988 LAMBORGHINI COUNTACH

The Countach entered the fray in the seventies, searing its sharp angles on the conscience of car fans the world over.

Lamborghini knew they were on to something special, and carried on producing the Countach in various forms all the way until 1990.

Lamborghini played with the formula throughout the eighties, upping the V12s size and power in an attempt to keep pace with the competition.

1982 saw the LP500 S, which sported the bodywork of the seventies' LP 400 S car which hid an uprated 4.7-litre V12. 1985 saw the introduction of the Countach 5000 Quattrovalvole, powered by an even bigger 5.2-litre V12 capable of producing up to 455bhp.

The Countach's swan song came in 1988, with the 25th anniversary edition (as seen above), celebrated the company's silver anniversary in style.

This run-out for the Miura successor featured details added and tweaked by Horacio Pagani, refining the visual impact from the supercar posters of the 1980s.

The Countach featured in the 1981 movie Cannon Ball Run starring Burt Reynolds and seen most recently in the 2013 film, The Wolf of Wall Street starring Leonardo DiCaprio with its iconic butterfly doors, highly unique for the time.

With the standard V12, it had a lot of power, but was decided early on that the engine be mounted backwards for better weight distribution.

Lamborghini



This is one supercar that still looks as good today as it did in 1981. With more angles than an A-level math's exam, this boxy beast still defines what it means to be a supercar.

Equal parts captivately futuristic for the time but yet completely impractical but also insanely cool, the legendary supercar established itself as an icon in Italian design and performance, but most importantly a style icon destined to live on bedroom room posters forever.

Long live the countach.

countach

449 horsepower

369 ft-lb of Torque

Produced: 1974-90

25th Anniversary edition in 1988

1983 made

Designer: Marcello Gandini at Bertone
for the LP500 prototype

Paolo Stanzani for production models

2-door coupe with scissor doors

Rear mid engine, rear wheel drive

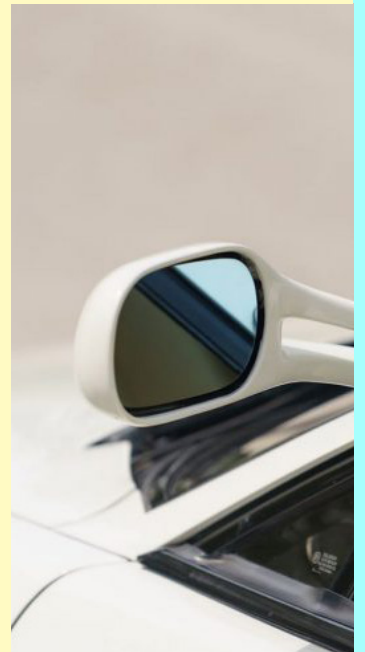
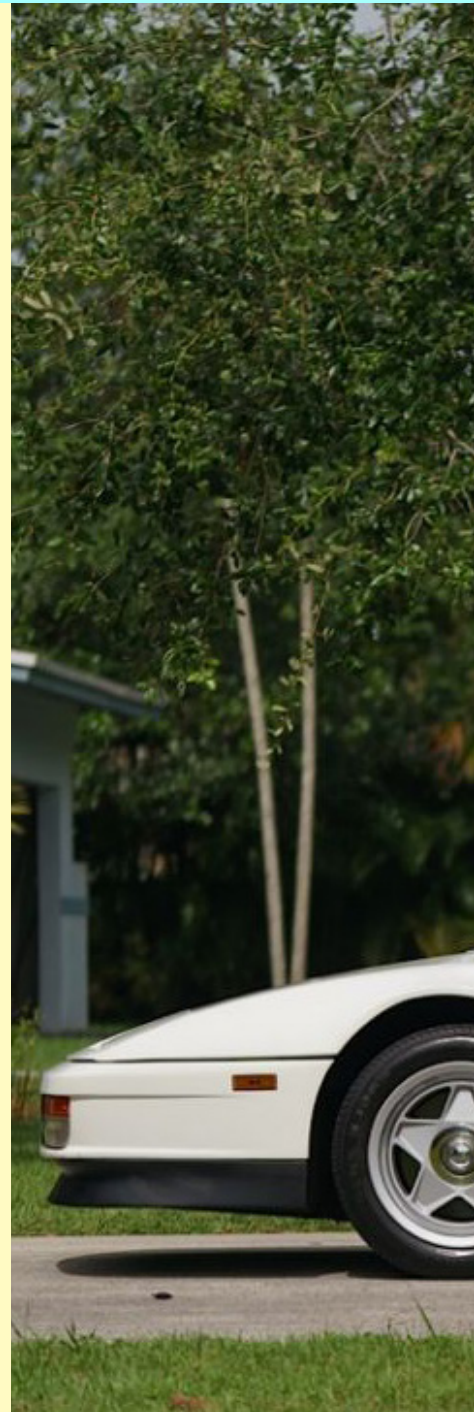
5.2 LV12

5 speed manual

MIAMI

VICE

385 horsepower
361 ft-lb of Torque
Produced: 1985-91
7177 made
Designers:
Leonardo
Fioravanti,
Ian Cameron,
Guido Campoli,
Emanuele Nicosia &
Diego Ottina at
Pininfarina
2-door berlinetta
Rear mid-engine, rear
wheel drive
4.9 L F12 flat 12
5 speed manual





THE 1985 FERRARI TESTAROSSA

After the Berlinetta Boxer there came the Testarossa, Ferrari's mid-engine V12 supercar designed for eighties yuppies figuratively speaking. 385bhp was sent to the rear wheels from the 4.9-litre power plant mounted just behind the drivers' head.

Pininfarina also designed numerous solutions for the problems experienced with the BB, including cabin heating thanks to poorly placed plumbing systems. Fans of arcade machines and the game OutRun will remember the Spider variant most fondly as the star, but actually only a single drop-top convertible Testarossa was produced, meant as a gift for the head of Fiat at the time, Gianni Agnelli. While its 180mph top speed is undoubtedly fast, its 0-60 sprint time of 5.2 seconds is bested by many other supercars of its day.

Performance shortfalls aside, the Testarossa still holds a fond place in many car fans' hearts, thanks to its swooping lines and place in pop culture, it's sure to remain an icon for years to come remembered best as the Miami Vice car.

Being well endowed with a 4.9 liter engine, it supplied Crockett with 385hp and 36ft-lbs of torque. While it could go from a standstill to 60 mph in 5.2 seconds, by the mid 1990s, it was improved to 4.7 seconds with a top speed of 196 mph.

THE 1987 LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO X180

Lotus stepped up its game for the eighties' Esprit, adding a turbo and making other improvements to the 2.2-litre power plant to up its output to 215bhp and 220 lb-ft of torque. Weight remained low at around 1200kg, meaning the Lotus still handled better than most of its contemporaries, and 0-60 times were shortened to just over 5 seconds.

In 1987, the Esprit's Giugiaro-penned lines were tweaked by Peter Stevens, who chose not to change too much, he rounded off some of the edges of earlier models and Kevlar was introduced to increase protection in the event of a crash, which had the added benefit of improving body rigidity and handling.

The Lotus Esprit had a nice run – 28 years to be exact. The first incarnation debuted at the Paris Auto Show in 1975 and went into production the next year. By the 80s it was given a turbocharged engine under a fiberglass body, the Esprit barely topped out at 150 mph. However, as the years went on, it found itself in yet another Bond flick, *For Your Eyes Only* in 1981. It was never very quick as the selling point was its looks.

Speaking of the Lotus. Roger Moore's Bond might have driven an Esprit into the sea in '77, but it was the 80's that saw it go turbo. Besides the extra power squeezed out of the 2.2-litre, the famously fragile coupe gained added skirts, a boot lip and those all important decals to the wedge. So many edges, it's a surprise the wheels weren't square.





ESPRIT

Predecessor models: S1, S2 and S3

215 horsepower

220 ft-lb of Torque

Produced: 1987-93

Designer: Peter Stevens

2.2 L Types 910 and 910S

turbocharged i4

2-door coupe

Rear mid-engine, rear wheel drive

5 speed manual

THE 1986 PORSCHE 959

The antithesis to almost everything the F40 stood for (apart from the pursuit for ultimate performance), the Porsche 959 drove car technology forward, teaming four-wheel-drive with banks of computers to create a driving machine far ahead of its time. Initially designed to be a group B rally car, much like the F40's predecessor the 288 GTO, the 959 was the fastest street legal production car when it was introduced in 1986, with a top speed of 195mph – shortly after it was bested by the aforementioned Ferrari F40.

That record-breaking top speed came courtesy of a twin-turbo flat-six mounted in the rear of the car, which put 444bhp through a 6-speed gearbox and all four wheels. Even more impressive was the 959's 0-60 time, a staggering 3.6 seconds in Sport trim, and a time which would bother some of the cream of supercar royalty even today.

The looks were very forward looking for their time too – the lines were traditional Porsche, but with a DTM-aping body kit attached bringing them up to date as well as providing excellent aerodynamics necessary for such extraordinary performance.

While the Porsche 959 looks a bit dated now since its debut in 1986, back in the day these vehicles were high performance status symbols, a reputation they still carry, but unlike Ferrari and Lamborghini, Porsche was actually affordable.

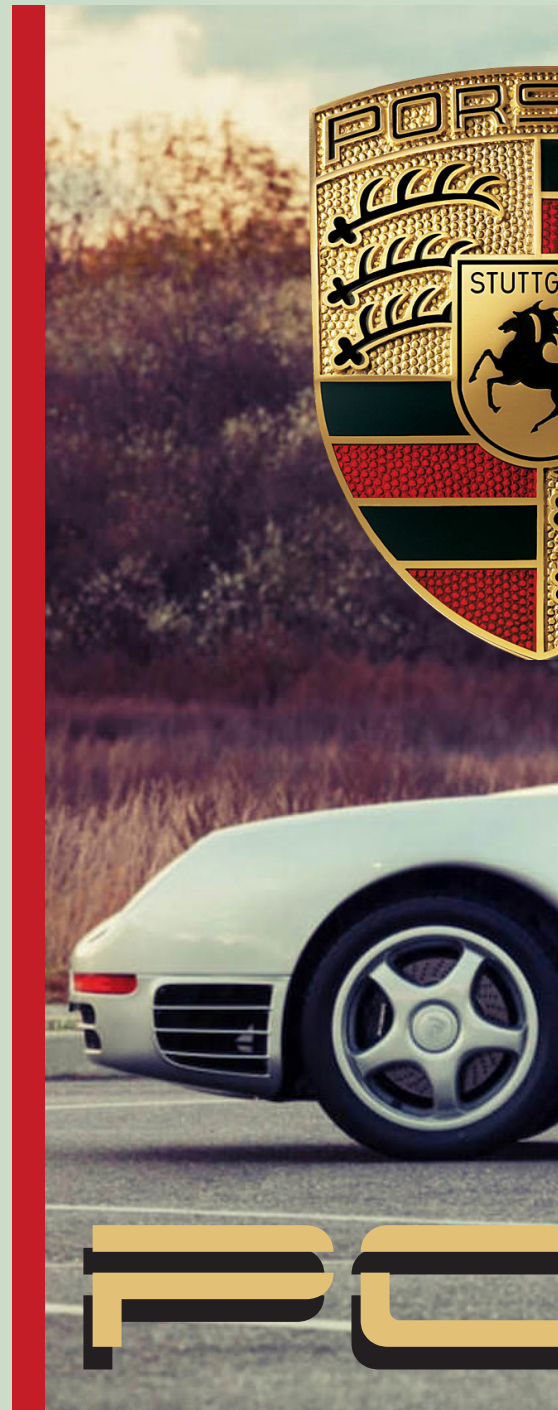
At the time of its debut, the 959 was the fastest street legal car on the market. Thanks to the twin turbocharged engine Porsche could push it to 195 mph. Like the 911, the 959 was a rear engine sports coupe.

With air cooled cylinders and water-cooled heads, the Porsche would unleash an astonishing 444 horsepower. Performance was the key to this car's success and everything that went into it was geared with that in mind. Instead of a metal body, Porsche used a lightweight aluminum and Nomax for the floor. Aerodynamics were also thought out carefully for drivers who wanted to push the boundaries without turbulence. And while it might appear dated, it was the manufacturer's crowning achievement. Porsche, there is no substitute.

Few cars of the 1980s high performance 'arms race' were more complex and expensive than the Porsche 959: a 4WD car created by the homologation process for racing and rallying. It was powered by the company's famous turbocharged flat six. For the first time in a production Porsche, the engine featured four-valve, water-cooled cylinder heads.

Inside hosted a three position rotary switch (with 'Wet', 'Dry', or 'Icy' settings), the driver could rely on the car's electronic black box to automatically vector torque to exactly the right wheel at the right time. Up to 50 per cent was available at the front wheels. Making full use of the car's clever 4WD system, an experienced driver could sprint from zero to 100km/h in 3.7 seconds.

Not boxy? Just look at those rear wheel arches: they're basically automotive shoulder pads. Depeche Mode on wheels. It looks like a 911 after rear-end surgery only adds to the appeal of this Eighties legend.



959

444 horsepower

369 ft-lb of Torque

Produced: 1986-88

337 made

Designer:

Helmuth Bott

2-door coupe

Rear engine,

four-wheel drive


2.8 L Twin Turbo flat-6

6 speed manual



PORSCHE





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