

# TIMELESS DESIGN

WHEN THE STUNNING COUNTACH LP500 prototype debuted at Geneva in 1971, the automotive media doubted it would see production. The Lamborghini's angular shape, with its steeply raked windshield and scissor doors, was outrageously different from supercars that had come before. Turns out this Miura successor, a car even more focused on providing the ultimate in street performance, would redefine the genre with a design that has proved to be timeless.

In 1974 the Countach LP400 went on sale with the Miura's 3.9-liter V12 rather than the prototype's temperamental 5.0-liter. Paolo Stanzani, chief engineer for Project 112, mounted the Giotto Bizzarrini-designed 3929-cc engine longitudinally in the Countach's tubular steel space-frame chassis, putting the "LP" (for "longitudinale posteriore") in LP400.

Stanzani also came up with the ingenious solution of achieving better weight distribution by placing the gearbox in front of the engine, with a sealed tube running through the engine's sump to the rear-mounted differential. Having the transmission next to the driver ensured crisp shifting action, not to mention excellent chassis balance.

The clever packaging meant Bertone designer Marcello Gandini enjoyed enormous freedom in sketching the ultimate in Italian exotics. The car was simple of line but ferocious in spirit, building upon the

wedge theme begun with the Bertone Carabo 1968 show car.

James Bleecker of New York owns this 1975 LP400, one of only 60 examples built that year. He bought the car in Toronto two years ago and couldn't be happier with it. "There's no way around it," he said, "you make friends when you own this car."

The Countach's scissor doors add to the visual excitement of the design, but they make for a bit of a challenge in



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climbing in. We follow Bleecker's advice: Sit on the wide sill, slide backward into the seat, then swing both legs in. Those in skirts or kilts need not apply.

This car is about speed, and the cockpit reflects that singularity of purpose, a flat-black office devoid of ornamentation. The seats themselves are a revelation. They offer tremendous support, yet are narrow enough to make you wish you'd declined that second helping of lasagna. The huge

sill makes for a comfortable armrest.

Twist the key and the six Weber two-barrel carburetors breathe deeply before the engine charges to life. Every inch of the car seems to vibrate with an energy that screams for the throttle to be slammed down and its 375 hp let out.

At speed it is impossible not to be tempted to look over your shoulder, such is the fury just inches behind you. The engine combines the howl of a Ferrari V12 with the guttural rumble of a small-

block Chevy. The all-round double-wishbone suspension with coil springs (dual coils in the rear) and antiroll bars ensures a firm and controlled ride. The footwell is narrow, but a taller driver can get around this by working the pedals sans shoes. Shifting up through the five-speed gearbox unleashes equal amounts of aural and accelerative pleasure. Forget that rear visibility is nil: Those lucky enough to be driving a Countach LP400 need worry about something behind them only if it is flashing red

and blue lights. This car is, quite simply, a roller coaster of a ride.

More than 30 years later the purest of the Countach designs remains as fresh as the day it was unveiled. "Incredibly, most people think the car is new," Bleecker says. The Countach LP400 brought to the automotive world an original look that has characterized Lamborghini as a trendsetter of supercar style ever since.

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## MARKET

**Branson Fall Auction**  
Branson, Mo.  
Oct. 17-18

### 1970 Volkswagen Beetle

16,469 miles showing, who knows how many times the odo has been around. Sony AM/FM, replacement, vintage-style VDO gauges and Auto Meter tach, roof rack, Portwall instant whitewalls on Dunlop radials. Most rubber gaskets failing, cracked turn signal and dash pad, rear lights have blue dots. Good chrome.



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Paint could stand some color sanding to take car from good to very good. Probably in better condition than it has a right to be.

**Sold at \$4,770**

Let's admit one thing: These are horrible cars in nearly every way. They are slow, don't stop, and if pushed in turns, are likely to go turtle on you. Still, there are reasons that whenever one crosses the auction block, everyone steps up to watch. They're cute, they cost nothing to run, and you can't kill them unless you run them out of oil. The pre-1968 Beetles are far more desirable, and perfect ones can top \$10,000. For this year, and in this mildly customized state, this was an absolutely correct price.

—KEITH MARTIN