

Taking the Fight to Porsche and Ferrari

THE 1970 URRACO REPRESENTED A bright future for Lamborghini. As the company's first move downmarket, the car was designed to compete with the Porsche 911 and Ferrari Dino in the small-GT field.

During tests of a Urraco P250 in February 1971, *Road & Track* observed that the engine "was designed for use either with a rear-drive layout or a front-engine, front-drive arrangement, which makes us wonder if Lamborghini is planning a sedan." Indeed, Ferruccio Lamborghini hoped profits from the Urraco would fund spinoffs using variations of the same mechanicals, including a mass-production, front-engined sedan. The greater sales volume generated by the Urraco would also allow Lamborghini's automotive division to finally turn a profit, rather than being kept afloat by the company's tractor sales.

On paper the original Urraco had a lot going for it: classy body by Bertone, fashionable mid-engine layout, and room for four. Extra care was taken to keep the design simple, allowing ease of production and straightforward maintenance. The engine was new and rather low-tech. This 2.5-liter transverse V8 had just one cam per cylinder bank, single-tooth rubber drive belts and interchangeable, flat-bottomed cylinder heads. Chapman struts with lower transverse arms and antiroll bars were used front and rear. Borrowed from the Fiat 130, it was a cheap but effective design. The sheet steel chassis of the Urraco did away with the labor-intensive space-frame chassis used in previous Lamborghinis. In theory, this

granted the Urraco production line greater immunity from the crippling strikes that plagued Italian industry.

Regardless, the downfall of the Urraco began with development problems and lengthy production delays. It was not until 1973 that the first customers finally got behind the wheel of their cars. This setback allowed the Urraco's rivals ample time to up the performance bar—with Dinors sporting a new 2.4-liter V6 while Porsche unleashed its sublime 2.7-liter Carrera. Lamborghini found itself stuck with an underdeveloped



NICK KURCZEWSKI

car that was also underpowered. To make matters worse, Lamborghini's tractor sales had soured and the world's first gas crisis was in full swing.

Lamborghini regrouped and answered complaints regarding broken drive belts and a lack of grunt by introducing the Urraco P300 at the Turin show in 1974. P300 owners got to reap all the rewards from the hard lessons learned by P250. The P300 had a longer-stroked 3.0-liter V8 with 265 hp—the P250 made due with 220 hp.

Interior improvements included standard a/c and power windows, leather seats and better materials overall. Chain-driven dual-overhead cams replaced the troublesome rubber belts and single-cam setup. New combustion chambers with revised flat-topped pistons added power and improved emissions.

Italian exotic car fan Richard Solomon owns the 1976 Urraco P300 pictured here. "This is a pure '70s sports-car driving experience," says Solomon. "It's a car that is off the beaten path, and I enjoy that."

A mix of city and highway driving proves the Urraco to be a fantastically balanced car that neither batters nor bruises its driver. It feels enormously capable and user-friendly—helped in no small part by comfortable seats and a spacious trunk behind the engine.

Click-clacking through the five-speed gated shifter—with first on a dogleg, down and to the left—in the typical Italian "long-arms, short-legs" driving position takes some getting used to. The same is true for the odd-looking dash, with tach and speedometer set at opposite ends of the instrument pod. Glancing at either is nearly impossible when getting a move on. The four-wheel disc brakes work well, with the suspension providing a controlled ride.

Of the 800 or so Urracos produced from 1973 to 1979, only 205 came in P300 spec. A shame, since in its final form the Urraco was a GT that had become capable of taking the fight to Porsche and Ferrari.

—NICK KURCZEWSKI

MARKET

Kruse International
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Jan. 2-4

1986 Ferrari 412i

Silver with saddle tan leather. 59,599 miles. Five-speed manual. 5.0-liter fuel-injected V12, 340 hp, 150-mph top speed. Evidence of bodywork in rear and ding on nose next to the badge. Rust bubbles bursting out in numerous places. Good dash, original leather dry. Owner refused or was unable to open hood, scaring



SPORTSCARMARKET.COM

off some bidders. A car that has spent way too much time outdoors near the beach.

Sold at \$13,800

The 400/412s are perhaps the most-unloved Ferrari V12 models of all time. They were never officially imported to the United States, and many that are here have a tough time meeting annual smog tests. If there are no mechanical issues, and all it needs is a \$3,000 paint job, the new owner did just fine. But in reality, no one ever lets a Ferrari get ratty-looking without neglecting the mechanicals. If very nice overall, this is a \$25,000 car. So the new owner has some room to fix a few things before he goes underwater.

—KEITH MARTIN