

LAMBORGHINI BRAVO

A winning performance from Bertone and Gandini

Designed to replace the Urraco, the Bravo concept was Marcello Gandini's effort at translating the avant-garde into the "baby" Lamborghini. He had made such an impact with the Countach prototype just three years earlier, and for the past ten years had enjoyed pushing the limits of design with the brand: as if the wild, glass-laden, forward-thinking Marzal of 1967 wasn't enough, the Countach was surely in his mind's eye, a pinnacle of production-ready extremes. How could he extend this adventurous style to the smaller, V-8-powered Urraco?

When he and Bertone introduced the Bravo concept, at the 1974 Turin Motor Show, it was the best of both worlds: the clean, unadorned surfacing seen on early Countaches, before wings and fender flares, and yet with the flamboyance of the existing Countach's style, namely its telephone-dial wheels and air intakes. Both restrained in shape and wild in its surfacing, with its nearly perpendicular surfaces punctuated by a front-end patterned by geometric louvers. This mirrored the back end, full of thin slats that allowed the mid-mounted V-8 to breathe.

And where the earlier wedge-shaped spaceships of Gandini and Bertone had explored their own extremes, the Bravo was surprisingly sophisticated in how it treated its occupants. Instead of flat surfaces for its front and side windows, the Bravo blended an inward-facing curvature in its side windows, meeting the front panels that curved downwards into the low

front end—an example of Gandini's skill at creating beautiful, deceptively simple surfaces. The formal upright lines for the rear windows blended into side air intakes: perhaps Giugietto Giugiaro, across town at Italdesign, was paying attention when he designed the Lotus Spirit SL, two years after the Bravo. It's a look that rings all the more true when one looks at the Bravo's contemporary pearlescent white paint, and the Lotus submarine in the 1977 James Bond movie *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Folded paper design may seem simple, but its subtleties are what make this era of design so exciting.

What was truly unique about the Bravo was the amount of attention that Lamborghini put into the Bravo prototype. Uncommon for a concept vehicle, it was fully functional: engineers subjected the Urraco-derived chassis to 43,000 miles (70,000 km) of rigorous testing. Lamborghini was promising a production version well into the late 1970s, but turbulent times deeply affected the company, which had only been in existence for ten hard-fought years.

Since then, it has sported hues ranging from copper to lime green and returned to its dazzling white, maintaining its allure throughout these shifts in color. Upon being listed for auction in 2011, it displayed no discernible signs of the distance it had traveled: just as pristine and cutting-edge as when it harkened the future in 1974.

