



The Influence of the Porsche 928

This German GT's styling paradigm inspired copies around the globe

BY MARK J. McCOURT • IMAGES FROM THE HEMMINGS ARCHIVES

In the 1970s, the concept of a powerful luxury cruiser with a front-mounted, water-cooled V-8 was more Corvette than Porsche, that traditional builder of rear-mounted, air-cooled, horizontally opposed-engine cars. The German sports car firm did follow convention in mechanical terms, somewhat, with its 928, although this unusual flagship model would sport a timeless design that proved daring enough to influence stylists around the world.

The 928, unveiled at the 1977 Geneva Motor Show, represented a fresh direction for this company. Aside from the basic fast-back profile, its lines owed no allegiance to prior Porsches. Penned by Wolfgang Möbius — working under design chief Anatole “Tony” Lapine, and perhaps having cast an eye over the mid-1970s AMC Pacer — the 928 would be a flying saucer disc in a world of wedge-shaped doorstop supercars.

“In the latter part of the last century, it was the Porsche 928, which was such a departure from the norm,” explained Peter Horbury, former Ford and Volvo Cars stylist and current executive vice president of design for China’s Geely. “In those days, [Giorgio] Giugiaro was doing his severe folded

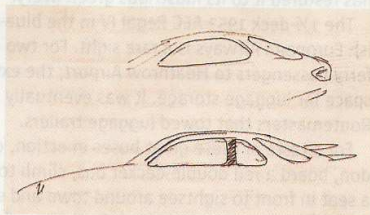
paper look. This car came along, and it was a revolution. The so-called ‘Japanese jelly mold’ was not invented by the Japanese — it came from Germany!”

As he revealed in his Profile in Excellence (*Hemmings Sports & Exotic Car* #71, July 2011), the 928 guided more than Japanese automakers; “In 1977, Porsche launched the 928, and in 1978, I was working for the Ford Motor Company in Germany, where we were working on the Sierra. All of the Sierra’s soft [aero-influenced] shapes that were considered pioneering... we were just copying the Porsche, doing the 928 in a Ford Cortina package,” he said. “If you remember the XR4i [sold in America as the Merkur XR4Ti], the one with three side windows — the windows of the Porsche were like that. The Sierra XR4i had the door window, a blacked-out B-pillar, and a small quarter window. Combine the XR4i’s first and second window, and you get a copy of the 928’s door window, plus the rear side glass.”

Peter continued; “The 928 would enjoy a surprisingly long life, being on the market for 18 years. The mark of its successful design was that it sold for so long without need for knee-jerk overhauls. They flushed

the [pioneering fully integrated] bumpers out and did a couple of other minor changes. The interior didn’t change — it was a masterpiece, with the instrument binacle that moved with the steering wheel and the angled center console that wrapped around to the door. It gave you the feeling of being in control. And to top it all, the [“Pasha”] checkerboard fabric was another masterpiece, something that was never seen in anything else.”

It wasn’t only Ford that riffed on this Porsche’s styling for its Sierra — and subsequently, that of the U.S.-market Tempo and Taurus — but Chrysler did, too. One look at the cut of the doors and the profiles of the side windows of the slick, new-for-1984 Dodge Daytonas and Chrysler Lasers reveals their distinct similarities to the 928s. With this concept in mind, can you think of any other copycat cars? 🚗



Former Ford stylist Peter Horbury made these quick sketches (above) as he described how the side window profile of Ford’s aerodynamic Sierra XR4i (far left) had been intended to mimic that of Porsche’s 928, albeit with a pillar splitting the Porsche’s door window in two.

