

1974
1990 **Lamborghini Countach**

The beauty of concept, the horrors of plastic surgery.

To understand the Lamborghini Countach, look no further than the origin of its name. In the Piedmontese dialect, the word *countach* is an exclamation directed at a gorgeous woman to show appreciation of her beauty. While this expression may not fit the gold-chain, overly extroverted, and hypermacho later Countachs, a review of the car's history illustrates its true beauty.

Lamborghini showed the Countach prototype—the LP500—at the 1971 Geneva auto show. Designed by Marcello Gandini of Bertone, the wedge-shaped, scissor-door concept was so stunning that most attendees failed to notice Lamborghini's own updated Miura SV. The Countach went into production in 1974 as the LP400. These early cars use a 3.9-liter V-12 with 375 hp and only weigh about 3000 pounds. Although the LP400 is very fast, it lacks the grip of later editions—and its narrow Michelin XWX tires don't help. The LP400 is also the most valuable Countach today because of its limited build numbers, its simple yet gorgeous design, and its unique periscope-style roof.

The second-generation car—the LP400S—arrived in 1978. To improve roadholding, Lamborghini fitted larger wheels and Pirelli's newest tire, the P7. To accommodate the gigantic, 345-section-width rear tires, Lamborghini tacked on fender flares and revised the suspension and the brakes. It also introduced the notorious rear wing that added only minimal downforce and hurt top speed.

Like Elvis, the Countach bulged as it aged. The third-generation car, the LP500S, bowed in 1982 with the same slightly taller body found on later LP400S models, which helped make room for a 4.8-liter V-12. It also gained more padding and leather inside the cockpit and offered handling that was more forgiving for the average driver but slightly compromised for the hard-core enthusiast.

Horsepower junkies got their fix with the introduction of the 5000 Quattrovalvole, or QV, in 1985. The carbureted QVs produced a stonking 455 hp and are more valuable than the less powerful fuel-injected versions.

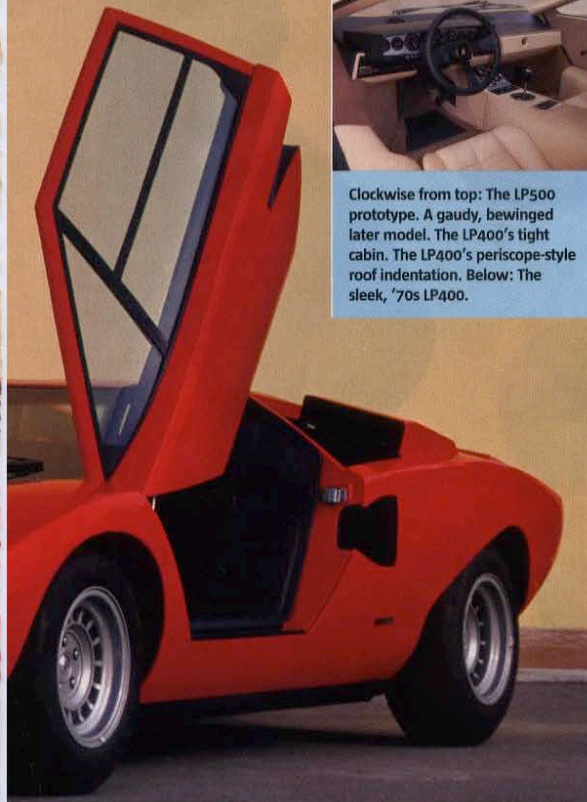
The most polarizing Countach arrived in 1989 to commemorate Lamborghini's twenty-fifth anniversary. Horacio Pagani, who later built the Pagani Zonda supercar, was responsible for the car's questionable wings, ducts, slats, and scoops. Although the anniversary edition is controversial, it is well sorted and the best of the lot to drive.

So, does one choose aesthetics or handling dynamics? For us, the answer is a no-brainer. Buy a proper, unmolested LP400 in period-correct yellow or green and park it where you can admire the minimalist design, but make sure there is an open road nearby where you can regularly exercise the glorious twelve-cylinder engine. In the end, it is these early Countachs that truly merit the *countach* catcall.

Marc Noordeeloos



Clockwise from top: The LP500 prototype. A gaudy, bewinged later model. The LP400's tight cabin. The LP400's periscope-style roof indentation. Below: The sleek, '70s LP400.



VITAL INFO

WHAT TO PAY
Decent cars start between \$40,000 and \$50,000. A pristine LP400 easily tops \$125,000, and prices are rising.

BODY STYLE
Two-door coupe.

PRODUCTION
About 1950 worldwide, including approximately 700 official U.S. cars.

WATCH OUT FOR
Corrosion where the aluminum body attaches to the steel chassis; cars that are poorly maintained and not driven regularly.

READ MORE

The Complete Book of Lamborghini by Pete Lyons, Publications International, Ltd., out of print.

Lamborghini Countach: The Complete Story by Peter Dron, Crowood Press, \$32.

"Lamborghini: The Quest for Perfection" (article in *Automobile Quarterly*, Volume 23, Number 1), by Ken Browning, \$25.

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