

## A profile of Marcello Gandini, the most innovative car designer of all time, with a look at some of his incredible creations...

TEXT: GAUTAM SEN

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**a**S A READER OF THIS MAGAZINE, you will certainly be into cars and bikes. And if you are into cars and bikes, the chances are that you have heard of Pininfarina, Giorgetto Giugiaro, even IdeA. But have you heard of Marcello Gandini? Though not as high profile as Pininfarina or Giugiaro, Marcello Gandini is, arguably, the most important car designer the world has (hardly) known in the second half of

the 20th century. Mention of his name may draw blank stares even in his homeland, Italy, but to the cognoscenti and the European industry, Gandini is the greatest.

True, Giugiaro was voted the designer of the century, but to most designers and experts Gandini's influence has been much more profound. When you examine his portfolio you will realize that Gandini

has had more impact on modern car design than anyone else, and is today seen as a designer's designer.

To start with, the Lamborghini Miura, the car that made Ferrari look old and outdated in 1966, a car that launched the genre of 'supercars'. To a lot of enthusiasts, and to me specifically, the Miura is the most beautiful car in the world, the most gorgeous form that ever crouched between four



1970 LANCIA STRATOS ZERO



# IN FOCUS



wheels. A car that is an automotive orchid on the outside, a watch-like precision of intricate engineering inside, a car that is the perfect synthesis of beauty and beast, of silk and steel, of art and science. A car that epitomizes how an infinite series of exquisite details together, can create an effect of total harmony. Of how details like the slightly bulging air intakes on the B-pillar, along with the wide, almost bumper-less front grin, merge perfectly with the horizontal slats on the rear window and the hexagonal grille of the rear.

“The Miura stands for a kind of beauty that lies in merging opposites,” explains Marcello Gandini. “It is a body with lots of muscles, but they are the muscles of a beautiful woman, not a

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1966 LAMBORGHINI MIURA

1966 PORSCHE 911 ROADSTER  
1966 JAGUAR FT  
1967 PANTHER  
1967 FIAT 125 EXECUTIVE



1967 LAMBORGHINI MARZAL

1967 ALFA ROMEO MONTREAL  
1967 JAGUAR PIRANA



1967 LAMBORGHINI MIURA SPIDER

1967 INNOCENTI LUI (SCOOTER)



1968 ALFA ROMEO 1750

1968 RACER TEAM  
BERLINETTA

male body builder. It is wicked, but with some gentle touches. It has lots of edges but all the curves are in the right places. The stare is aggressive, but tempting, the car is intimidating, but attractive.” And impossible to resist, may I add.

The Lamborghini Miura wasn't the product of a grand plan, a master strategy. It just kind of happened. Born a farmer, Ferruccio Lamborghini became a millionaire industrialist, who when insulted by Enzo Ferrari, decided to challenge the potentate of Maranello by making cars that would cock a snook at the best from the stable of the prancing horse. The Lamborghini 350GT, from 1964, was the result of that. More modern than contemporary Ferraris and Maseratis, the 350GT was

conventional in having its V12 in the front, driving the rear, through a five-speed gearbox. A nice car.

But then Lamborghini, at that time, had the sharpest young automotive talent in Europe. And harnessing them was difficult. The story goes that engineers Gianpaolo Dallara and Paolo Stanzani conspired with development test driver Bob Wallace (all averaging 25 years old) to create a revolutionary chassis that they hoped would convince Ferruccio to allow them to go racing. Emulating racing cars of the time, they took the Lambo V12 (which had been designed by ex-Ferrari engineer Giotto Bizzarini) and located it ahead of the rear wheels, but transversely, within a stunning perforated sheet metal monocoque

chassis. This prototype chassis-engine combo was first shown at the Turin motor show of November, 1965.

Coachbuilder Bertone saw immense potential in the concept and proposed to clothe the chassis. And he got his recent recruit Marcello Gandini – just 27 then – to carry out the project. In just four months, in time for the Geneva Motor Show of 1966, the fully clothed car made its – sensational – debut. Putting the engine behind the driver – race car style – was special enough. Putting a hugely powerful and exquisitely crafted V12 amidst was sensational. But that body, oh my god, that daring, spirited, lithe, sexy piece of automotive sculpture, was the ultimate icing on the cake.

Ferruccio Lamborghini, born under the astrological sign of Taurus, adopted the charging bull as the emblem of his marque, taking on the prancing horse of Ferrari, and adding a certain element of drama and tension in the cars that he made, cars that have



1968 LAMBORGHINI ESPADA

1968 ALFA ROMEO CARABO  
1968 BMW 2500i/2800



1968 MOTO GUZZI V7 SPORT



1969 ISO RIVOLTA LELE

1969 AUTOBIANCHI RUNABOUT  
1969 FIAT 128 COUPE  
1969 BMW 2800 SPICUP



1970 LAMBO JARAMA

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always been strong, wilful, prideful beasts, only partly tamed. And the Miura was the first in a series that took the name of a famous breed of fighting bulls from Spain.

So here was a car that was everything: a car with a powerplant that was the ultimate at its time (the Miura developed 350bhp, whereas Ferrari's best at that time, the 275GTB managed only 315), an engine layout that was a revolution, a styling that was a generation or two ahead of the rest, a performance potential (V-max of over 270kph) that was second to none, and an appropriately poetic name.

What could be the next step forward? The next step forward was the Lamborghini Marzal and Gandini, went on to design another stunner. A year later, in 1967, Lamborghini showcased the Marzal, a mid-engined four-seater, that took the engine of the Miura, halved it and positioned it at the rear, behind the glasshouse of a glasshouse that sat four. But the concept was too futuristic, what with its gull-wing doors, and the Marzal remained a one-off, though becoming the basis for the Espada, easily one of the most stylish of four-seater GTs of all time. Launched in 1968, the "Espada was undeniably the world's best looking 2+2 Italian GT, and it only lost the claim when it ceased production," says a certain well-known TV presenter.

In the same year that the Espada was unveiled, Gandini's experimenting with



Wife Claudia and daughter Marzia flank Gandini

new form and concept took another step forward with the Alfa Romeo Carabo. The Carabo might have been just another step forward for Gandini, but for the design world at large, it was a revolution. Till then, high performance sports cars were low with curvaceous, flowing lines that swept over the two pair of wheels as undulating humps and the Miura was the ultimate expression of that style and period. The Carabo changed all that. It was a perfect wedge, the front end sharp and arrow-like, the rear thick and heavy



1968 ALFA ROMEO CARABO

1970 ISO GRIFO SERIES II



1970 ALFA ROMEO MONTREAL

1970 LANCIA STRATOS ZERO  
1970 CHRYSLER SHAKE  
1970 BMW 2200 TI GARMISCH



1971 LAMBORGHINI URRACO

1971 FANTICISSIMO (BIKE)



1972 FIAT X 1/9

1972 LAMBORGHINI COUNTACH





and all-powerful. And for the next four decades the wedge became the cutting-edge of design.

In 1970, Gandini took the idea another extreme step forward with the Lancia Stratos, a concept car that remains the ultimate. Nothing since has been as extraordinary, as ground-breaking. And along with the Carabo, the Stratos Zero (as it was called eventually) provided the inspiration for the stunning Lamborghini Countach, the rally-going projectile called the Lancia Stratos, and every other supercar since then. Scissor-action doors, rear window slats, headlamp eyelids, clamshell doors, bonding the glasses to the body, and many such ideas are Gandini's and are from that period.

Ah, the Countach! The beginnings of postcardom! Wonder how many of you



1972 MASERATI KHAMSIN



1972 CITROEN CAMARGUE



1972 BMW 5 SERIES



1972 ALFA ROMEO ALFETTA

1972 SUZUKI GO

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grew up with posters of supercars plastered across the walls of your rooms: posters of the Countach, the Alfa Romeo Montreal, the Lancia Stratos, the Lamborghini Urraco, the Maserati Khamsin, the Lamborghini Bravo, the Ferrari 308 GT4, the Lambo Diablo, the Cizeta V16T, the Bugatti EB110, each one more extraordinary than the other. If you wanted a supercar designed in the '70s or the '80s, even in the '90s, there was just one address, that of Marcello Gandini.

In the meantime the address had changed. Gandini was the designer for Italian coachbuilder Bertone and many of the cars that I have mentioned above appeared under the badging of Bertone. Hired to replace Giugiaro, who also used to be with Bertone till 1965, Gandini came from a fine arts background. His father was a musician and a well-known composer, and Gandini may have followed an altogether different career path if Nuccio Bertone hadn't recognised talent in the sketches that Gandini had showed him two years before he joined him in 1965. And for the record, the Miura wasn't the first car that Gandini designed at Bertone: a Porsche cabrio concept and a Jaguar saloon proposal predated the work on the Miura, but these two interesting designs were

completely overshadowed by the Miura, and the cars that followed.

For 14 years, Gandini was Bertone, the period when the venerable old Torinese design house was at the peak of its golden era. In 1979, Gandini eventually left Bertone, to strike out on his own. And Renault grabbed that opportunity to sign up a five-year-long exclusive contract with Gandini.

Well, Renault didn't make supercars, so why sign up Gandini? The fact of the matter is that it's not just supercars that



1972 LAMBORGHINI COUNTACH



1973 FERRARI DINO 308 GT4



1973 NSU TRAPEZE



1974 AUDI 50



1974 INNOCENTI MINI

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have been Gandini's forte, a misconception that jounros the world over subscribe to. The shape of the modern hatchback really comes from him too. The Audi 50 (which also became the VW Polo) from 1974 (along with the Innocenti Mini) defines the shape of the modern 'squarish' hatch and both were Gandini's designs. The famous racer-turned-journalist Paul Frère, when writing for Road &

Track in October '74 said: "In our opinion the little Audi is extremely good-looking."

Design experts will point out that Giugiaro's VW Golf from the same year actually defines the modern hatch. But go back to 1969 and take a look at the Fiat 128 Coupe concept that Bertone presented at the Turin motor show that year, and you will realise that the 128 Coupe concept defines the straight line origami style that became the vogue in the '70s and '80s and thereafter.

And the years working for Renault were very fruitful for Renault. Other than designing the best selling Super 5 from 1984 and proposing various futuristic projects that defined future products and the revival of Renault, Gandini's most remarkable design from this period was the Renault Magnum truck cab. In the realm of truck design, the Magnum, launched in 1988 (though Gandini had originally penned it in 1980) remains one of the most remarkable designs of all

- 1974 MASERATI QUATTROPORTE II
- 1974 LAMBORGHINI BRAVO
- 1974 FIAT 127 VILLAGE
- 1974 FIAT X1/9
- 1975 VOLKSWAGEN I POLO
- 1975 SAVIEM S62
- 1975 FIAT X1/9 DALLARA
- 1975 BERTONE VISITORS BUS



1974 LANCIA STRATOS



1976 FIAT 131 RALLY



1976 LAMBORGHINI SILHOUETTE

1976 FERRARI RAINBOW





times. Still in production today and looking as modern as ever (with just a minor facelift), the Magnum is another evergreen Gandini classic.

Of similar significance was the work that Gandini had done – through Bertone – for BMW. Other than collaborating with BMW in 1966/77 on the design of the 2500/2800 saloons that were launched in 1968, Gandini also penned the BMW 2200 TI Garmisch concept from 1970. Unveiled at the Geneva motor show that year, the

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Garmisch was immediately after acquired by BMW and was surely the design that influenced the first of the 3 Series. At the same time, Bertone was commissioned by BMW to design the BMW 520 that defined the BMW-look for the 5 Series, a look that has since become the house style of the Bavarian marque.

But surely more than BMW or Renault, the automotive marque that should credit its very existence and survival till date to Gandini, is Lamborghini. If designs like the Miura, the Espada, the Urraco, the Countach and the Diablo hadn't happened, Lamborghini may not have survived the recession of the '70s, and then once again the '90s, and would surely have gone the way of Iso Rivolta, de Tomaso, Monteverdi and other supercar makers of the '60s.

One would imagine that a man famous for creating some of the most



1990 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO

- 1976 ALFA ROMEO NAVAJA
- 1977 JAGUAR ASCOT
- 1978 OTOSAN ANADOL
- 1979 LANCIA SIBILO
- 1979 VOLVO TUNDRA
- 1981 MAZDA 229



1982 CITROEN BX



1988 RENAULT MAGNUM



1989 MASERATI SHAMAL

1984 RENAULT SUPER 5

1990 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO


exciting and extrovert machines in the last four decades would be an extrovert himself. But Gandini is just the opposite. Self-effacing to the point where he is embarrassingly modest, Gandini maintains a profile that is even lower than some of his supercars. Sure enough, he doesn't have an official website, or for the matter, visiting cards. Ask him for photographs of the cars he has designed, and he has none. Does he have a list of all the cars that he has designed? Of course not. And so, did he do some designs for Mazda in the late '70s? Yes, but can't quite remember the model name...

It took me the best part of two decades of trying, to eventually meet up with Marcello Gandini. And every meeting with him, since then, has been worth it. On a recent visit to India - the first time that Gandini had been to this part of the world - I was

struck by the fact that when introducing him to people the references were to cars that everyone knew by heart but no one seemed to realise that Gandini had designed them. But most striking was the fact that he didn't care. Yet, on a personal level, his interaction is wonderful: his interest in personal relations is as total as his indifference to the public kind.

And along with that comes his indifference to the past. The past to Gandini is something that's behind you. The most exciting part is the process itself, the process of conceptualising and designing and executing the design. Once that's over, it's all over. Time to move on, on to the next design, the next idea, the next concept. And that next concept needn't be a supercar. It could very well be a scooter or a motorcycle, like the innovatively 'naked' Innocenti Lui,

or the strange Fantic Issimo, or the good looking Moto Guzzi V7 Sport. Or something totally different, like a helicopter - like the DragonFly 334GP - maybe!

And along with the innovating and the rethinking of ways that anything is designed or made, comes a working style that's so very different from current practices. Loner that he is, Gandini works in a very individualistic manner, doing the design and scale modelling himself, tucked away in his 17th century villa, amidst his dogs and his horses, several miles away from Turin. And, when necessary, going to the various suppliers in and around Turin for the rest of the engineering and the prototyping and whatever else needed to get the job done. A way of working that most of the majors who have worked with him, be they Renault, Citroen, Nissan or someone like de Tomaso, are aware of, and respect. And let him be. Waiting for him to come up with another one of his wonders. 



1990 RENAULT MAGNUM  
1990 RENAULT MASTER  
1990 MASERATI GIBLI  
1990 MASERATI CHUBASCO



1991 BUGATTI EB110



1991 CIZETA V16T

1991 ISO RIVOLTA GRIFO 90  
1992 CH7 ANGEL (HELICOPTER)  
1993 AUTODROMO/MAN BASSOTTO  
1994 NISSAN AP-X  
1996 MASERATI QUATTROPORTE IV  
1999 DE TOMASO MANGUSTA  
2000 STOLA 581



2005 DRAGON FLY 334GP

2005 STOLA S86 DIAMANTE