

# COLLECTIBLE BOOKS

By: Nathan Chadwick



Nathan Chadwick began his career in regional print journalism in the U.K., and after a few years working at a veterinary journal, he began his dream automotive career in 2011 at *Classic Cars* magazine and *Land Rover Owner*. His involvement with *Modern Classics* magazine, a new title dedicated to 1980s, '90s and '00s cars, turned his role from sub-editor to writer and assistant editor. After *Modern Classics* was closed in 2020, he moved into freelance journalism. He currently writes for *Magneto*, *Auto Italia* and several other publications, and provides public relations services as well. He lives in the U.K. with his wife and three greyhounds. He may be reached at [NayfLimited@gmail.com](mailto:NayfLimited@gmail.com)

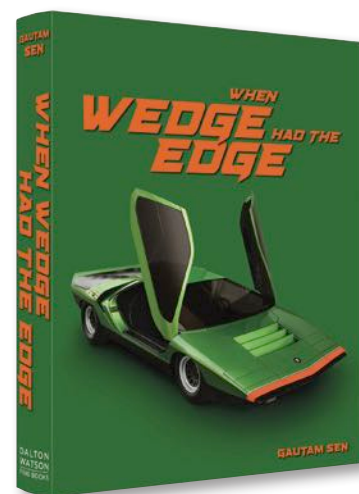
Right: To understand the reasoning behind the wedge, Sen details the developments in aerodynamics that led to this stylistic big bang.

## WHEN WEDGE HAD THE EDGE HOW AERODYNAMICS HAVE SHAPED CAR DESIGN

When I was first getting into the older side of the car world, anything without chrome or curves wasn't deemed "proper." Whatever the credentials of a vehicle – engineering, design, manufacturing, performance – if it didn't have either of those two prerequisites, you were more likely to be pointed into the visitors' car park, rather than the display area.

That's getting on 15 or 20 years ago now. The world has drastically changed – not only did the *Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance* recently run two classes for wedges, but the few cars that have done well this year at auction were invariably sharply styled. Think Testarossas rather than Testa Rossas, and you can see where the wind is blowing.

This all makes Gautam Sen's \$150, 480-page book on the history of the wedge well-timed. The book's cover pays due regard to the car that's seen as the defining axis point for kicking off the wedge movement, one that still dominates the prevailing thought among design studios around the world. The late Marcello Gandini's Alfa Romeo Carabo was a stunning vision of the future – one that we sadly haven't quite created yet – and while it was revolutionary, it was precipitated by developments that had led to this stylistic big bang.



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FROM TORPEDO TO TEARDROPS

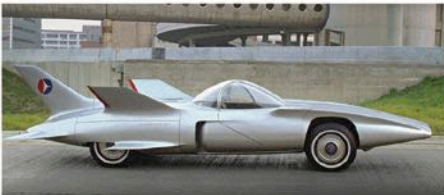
FROM TORPEDO TO TEARDROPS



TOP: Designs like this Stanguellini 1100 from 1940 predicted the move to the low Jiang-style pontoon blimps, which became commonplace after World War II. CHRISTIAN DESCRIBES

LEFT: 1940 was also when Chrysler showed a dream car, the Thunderbolt, of which six were made. The Thunderbolt was a perfect window to the future. L. AUTOMOBILE MAGAZINE

ABOVE: Even if this Alfa Romeo 9C 2500B Spider Corsa Sportiva was nicknamed Balena, a whale in Italian, it was a brilliant preview into the next two decades of automobile design. GAUTAM SEN



ABOVE: Yet there was hope... as Earl's successor Bill Mitchell encouraged concepts like the Corvette Sting Ray during the same year (1959). ALBERTO MARTINEZ

MIDDLE: Of course, Harley Earl had to outdo them all by providing the Firebird III concept from GM in 1958 with as many as seven first. CHRISTIAN DESCOMBES

BOTTOM: It's not that fins didn't show up in Europe, it's just that designs like the '59 Lancia Flaminia Coupé Zagato managed to be fearless and beautiful. MAKARAND BACHAR



OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Almost the last of the European tailfins were to be seen in a most unusual concept from Pinin Farina: the Proto X, from 1960, with the four wheels placed in a rhombus shape. JAVIER DE NOMBEL



**Above: Though the cover image of the Alfa Romeo Carabo illustrates the eureka moment in wedge design, there were many steps toward it, as displayed here.**

Sen sets the scene by showing us how aerodynamics have shaped car design – this is particularly important in the context of Gandini's Carabo. Rare among car designers, he was a qualified engineer too. For all of its show-stopping theatrics, the Carabo's form followed function, and this function was influenced by non-wedge designs over the previous decade.

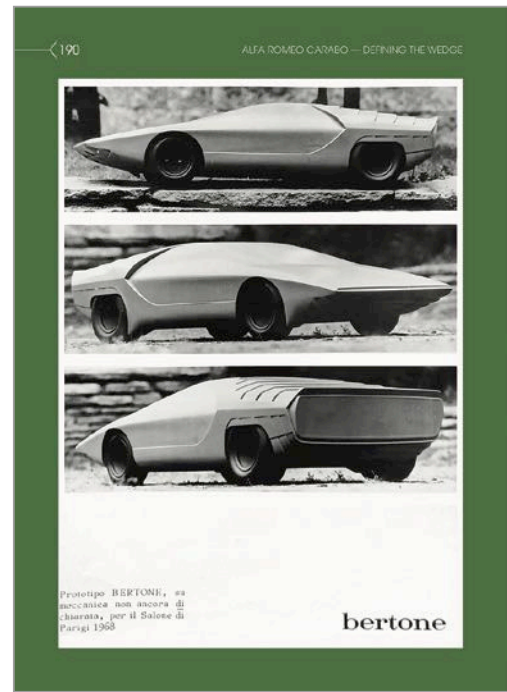
First, Ercole Spada's work for Zagato, in particular for Alfa Romeo, showed how the Kamm-tail concept could challenge general understanding. Then there's the Matra Djet, the development of which would lead to ever lower-nosed cars. America played its part too – Chevrolet's Corvette and Corsair concepts also informed the space-age possibilities of car design. It's all here in Sen's expertly researched book – you really can see the line sharpening, much like the shapes flowing from the design studios during the 1960s.

On that note, you might be wondering what defines a wedge. Well, opinions vary, but Sen seeks to define it as a rising, angled beltline toward the rear of the car. This differs somewhat from some of the cars presented at *Pebble Beach* this year, and some of the cars excluded might surprise you – the Lamborghini Miura and Ferrari 365GTB/4 Daytona are not wedges for this precise reason. However, cars such as the Alfa Romeo Milano are.

Though Sen tracks the story of the wedge's climb to dominate car design, from supercars to everyday saloons, this is far more than a model guide. Over the years the author has had access to the leading lights of the wedge philosophy, and as such there are fascinating insights from Gandini, Giorgetto Giugiaro, Tom Tjaarda, Leonardo Fioravanti and Paolo Martin, among many others.

However, there is far more to the wedge story than just the Italian (and American-Italian) vanguard. While the work of British stylists such as William Towns and Oliver Winterbottom might not be as well known, or even as appreciated, as that of Gandini or Giugiaro, their designs did just as much to develop the wedge concept into new realms. Though Gandini and Giugiaro both experimented with extreme four-door wedges in the 1970s, it was William Towns who persisted with his vision for the Aston Martin Lagonda. At the time he was criticized and pilloried for it, but fast forward to today and we can see the wedge aesthetic applied almost everywhere – though perhaps not quite as controversially as the Lagonda.

*Cont'd next page.*



**Top left:** Elements of wedge design, such as pointy noses, were on display years before the Alfa Romeo Carabo.

**Top center:** The car that launched it all: the Alfa Romeo Carabo, designed by the late, great Marcello Gandini.

**Top right:** It took a long while before mainstream designs would show overt wedge motifs. In the meantime, Giugiaro et al. continued to challenge with designs such as the VW-Porsche Tapiro.

**Right:** One of the heroes of the *Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance* this year, the Bertone Zero sired one of the most successful rally cars ever made.

**Far right:** However wild cars such as Giugiaro's Maserati Boomerang might have been, you really can spot cues in production cars that were made not long afterwards.



That the wedge aesthetic has survived is testament to just how innovative the style was. It's a design style that rewards the daring, and it shows just how poisonous retro-themed curves and chrome can be if left to the whims of "design by committee."

One great example of this was the mid-1990s restyle of the Ford Scorpio, the '80s version of which was sold as the Merkur Scorpio in the USA. Rather than follow one designer's vision, this car was extensively put before customer clinics. One of the questions asked was what their favorite car was, to which the most common response was the Austin-Healey 3000. Cue an enormous oval grille stuck over a sedan frame – it looked like a yawning whale. The Scorpio tanked so hard it was never replaced.

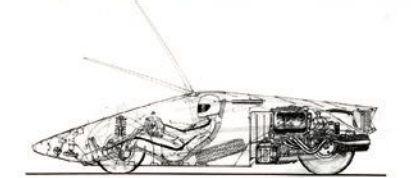
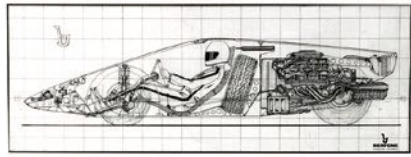
However, to show the power of the wedge, only a few years later the Blue Oval introduced the Focus as the replacement for its Escort model. Though wedgy hatchbacks weren't new, replacing the bustleback shape for Ford's volume seller was certainly brave. However, as the late, great Ford engineering head Richard Parry-Jones once told me, those who embrace new design will end up influencing the naysayers. The sharply styled Focus went on to become one of the greatest everyday Fords ever made.

What this convoluted tale illustrates is that curves and chrome are magnificent in context, but when applied to the cars of the 1990s – let alone today – the results are often awkward-

OPPOSITE: Side model of the Carabo. JACOPO CONTALDO (TOP) AND STEVE BERTONE



THIS PAGE: Gradient from the zero 50 for the Lancia Sirato's HF Zero at the Designing 50th exhibition, Berlin, Germany, in 1971, where the car was shown as an example of modern and futuristic design. E. DELLO STATO/STYLING BERTONE



Argemiro Ghignone's sleek styling design design was joined the V8 Maserati Boomerang concept car. ITALDESIGN GUGLIEMO

The name "Tapino" came from its front end, as it resembled the long nose of a tapir. Despite the success, the Tapino never went into production, as VW and Porsche abandoned the 914.6. After being purchased by a Spanish industrialist and later destroyed in an accident, the wreckage was salvaged by Italdesign, and around August 2000, was acquired by American collector Philip Sarofim.

Sarofim also acquired a concept that was an even bigger star than the Tapino at the 1970 Turin Motor Show, the one that may have been the wedge of them all.

RIGHT: It was a pity that the Tapino did not get converted into a series production vehicle, as it would have surely seen greater success than the car it was based on. ITALDESIGN GUGLIEMO



BELOW: The gullwing doors might have been replaced by conventional ones (or maybe not, as seen in the Delormeau) but adding the design for series production was very much feasible. ITALDESIGN GUGLIEMO



THIS PAGE: Rear three-quarter for shows the powerful horizontal and a perfect shape up in independent design design. It really has a dramatic shape, the Boomerang is a practical long distance grand tourer. ITALDESIGN GUGLIEMO

OPPOSITE TOP: The closed roof and was as much as it could get. ITALDESIGN GUGLIEMO

OPPOSITE MIDDLE: Designing Ghignone's influence also resulting in the success of the Boomerang's design. ITALDESIGN GUGLIEMO

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The rear view that will work at the time, showing the shape highlighted by accident. ITALDESIGN GUGLIEMO



looking and strange. The wedge revolutionized how we view cars, and while some complain that modern cars all look the same, arguably that's more down to safety regulations rather than the natural instinct of modern car designers. That and the apparent need for every car to be an SUV/crossover.

The current aesthetic, in turn, is why the purest interpretations of the wedge design – from supercars such as the DeTomaso Pantera and Lamborghini Countach to the saloons and hatchbacks that translated such inspiration to our everyday lives – are so fascinating now through the prism of classic cars. Such vehicles are a tantalizing vision of a future which could have been, but was denied.

This book is a magnificent guide to the wedge phenomenon. Measuring 219mm x 304mm (approx. 8.622"x 11.975"), with 653 illustrations over 480 pages, this is well worth the \$150 entry price. The picture quality – though largely archive images rather than bespoke photography – is excellent, as is the paper finish.

There are those who will continue to sniff at the lack of curves and chrome. However, leave a little space in the display area – the way things are going, today's renewed interest in this styling vanguard could be the thin edge of the wedge.

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Photos cont'd next page.

"THE WEDGE REVOLUTIONIZED HOW WE VIEW CARS, AND WHILE SOME COMPLAIN THAT MODERN CARS ALL LOOK THE SAME, ARGUABLY THAT'S MORE DOWN TO SAFETY REGULATIONS RATHER THAN THE NATURAL INSTINCT OF MODERN CAR DESIGNERS."



WHEN THE WEDGES CAME MARCHING DOWN



ABOVE: Nine years before the Lotus got its parents, Citroën got its, as the Angier-Baker designer Theo Flors developed a somewhat wedge concept, the Klein 1. PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL NEUBERT

OPPOSITE: Restored and running beautifully, the Buick Wildcat at the 2013 Concours d'Elegance. View it here, where it won the class. PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL NEUBERT

WHEN THE WEDGES CAME MARCHING DOWN

managed to not only amplify the wedge style but also was the perfect evolution from the Buick Wildcat via the Lotus K20 (Sport) concept to a form that would do well for a front engine layout.

Except for the occasional concept that tackled issues such as safety or fuel efficiency, most of the stream machines through the rest of the 1970s were designs with the wedge theme. Some of the most memorable were the Lamborghini Bravo by Bertone/Gandini, the Maserati Meccano sports coupe, and the Hyundai Pony. Coupe concept created by Ralston/Youngman, in 1974. Not to be left out, GM came up with the Tom Tjaarda-designed Gila Gila, when the conceptual design house was taken over by Ford Motor Company in March 1974 after buying out Alejandro de Tomaso.

1975 was a quiet year for the wedge concept brigade. But during 1976 and 1977 they were back with a vengeance. Bertone and Marcello Gandini showcased the astounding Alfa Romeo 164 wedge concept for the 1976 Geneva Motor Show, followed by the pointed Ferrari Rainbow for 1976 Turin and then the Jaguar Ascot for 1977 Geneva. All very sharp-edged, or gamy-style wedge machines, which were exercises in aerodynamics and packaging. Italespion showed up at Turin in 1976 with the sleek Karmann Aero 40 Quadri, which would predict the second-generation Volkswagen Scirocco 1. And at the 1977 Geneva Motor Show, British designer Chris Lambertson showcased the Alfa Romeo Tripartite Twenty concept, which managed to seat six in a sleek, wedge-style profile. Gila showed a strange device at the same show, the Ford Megastar, which combined a concept on the lines with an incorporate wedge-like overall profile.

1976 was a good year for the wedge too. In March at Geneva, Japanese specialist manufacturer of sports and racing machines, Dome, turned up with a striking micro-wedge concept for a junior wedge superior that could easily rival the European counterparts for design audacity. Bertone/Gandini showcased the Lucio Stralio-based Silex concept, and Gila the Ford Action at Turin in April. The Action was just a mock-up, an aerodynamic study with an empty space amphitheater where a Cosworth DFV 5-liter V8 should have been.



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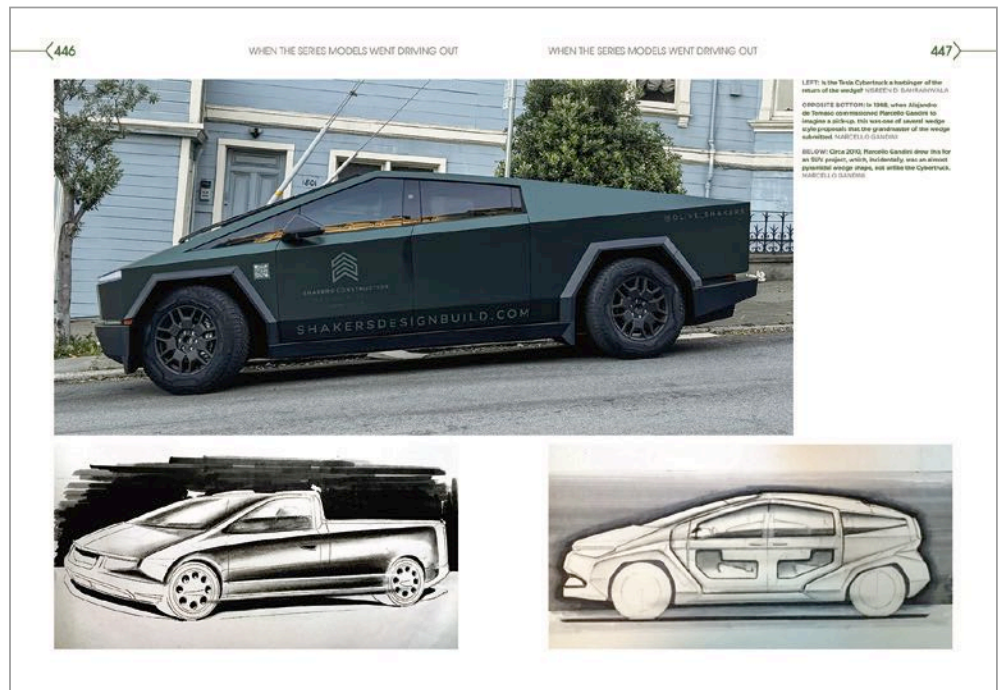
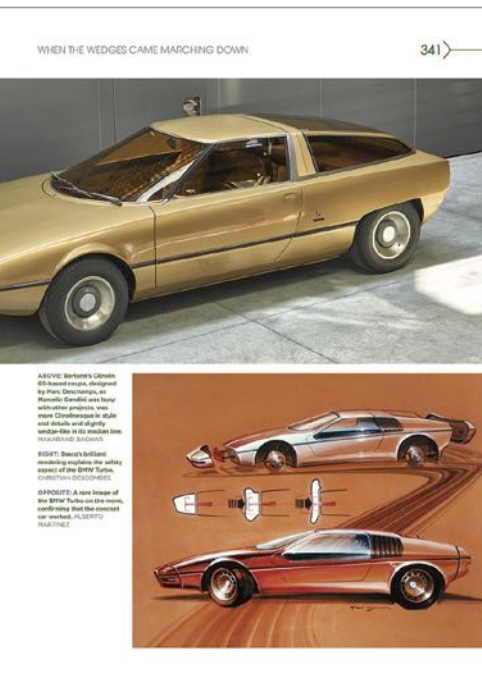
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Left: William Towns' Bulldog and Trevor Fiore's Citroën Karin showed the international approach to wedge design.

Center: One of the stars of the wedge movement was Marcello Gandini. His cars and comments play a key role throughout the book.

Right: Wedge design is still divisive and controversial – witness the Tesla Cybertruck.



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