

LANCIA

Lancia and Pininfarina: a couple that made their combined debut in 1930 as a result of a long antecedent.

Vincenzo Lancia, a successful entrepreneur, had been a regular customer at the Stabilimenti Farina over the two previous decades as Battista Farina.

Lancia decided to back it up through his own direct involvement as a minority partner. This explains why so many Lancia Dilambda Pininfarina car models began to appear within a few months of the inauguration of the new bodybuilding concern: a massive commitment, not least in financial terms, which perhaps Pinin would not have been able to cope with if left to his own resources.

The long and fruitful experience of the Lambda model, then in production for eight years, had clearly demonstrated to Vincenzo Lancia that, at least where top of-the range models were concerned, the time was not ripe for relying solely on a standardized body.

Thus the Dilambda and the Astura, unlike the first Lambdas, were born with a floorpan that set no constraints on the bodybuilders' creativity.

Trying to carve out a market niche for his products Vincenzo Lancia was planning to add a special touch of sober elegance to models that would prove such excellent performers as to represent a valid alternative to sports cars: the latter, in fact, albeit faster in absolute terms, were necessarily more ostentatious and less comfortable.

By proposing such a well balanced and efficient vehicle as the Lambda, Lancia did much to anticipate the winning features of modern cars.

The Lambda was too unwieldy to face up to the demand for diversification expressed by a wealthy and markedly individualistic clientele.

With each new model Vincenzo Lancia was "forced" to come up with a totally unprecedented creation, not only where the bodywork was concerned but also in terms of its merchandising characteristics.

The Lancia Pininfarinas ended up by introducing new criteria of evaluation: anticipating the evolution of fashion they helped to bring into being new patterns of behaviour. In the '30s, to go to the theatre in a car not expressly designed for mundane functions was outright inconceivable. A Lancia could do.

It is an interaction between the product with its formal qualities and users' behaviour, Turin's great bodybuilders, with their long-standing traditions and their ability to set the fashion, played a decisive role.

After the well-mannered and regal Dilambda which revealed Pininfarina's unsurpassed ability to wield the "perpendicolar" shapes inherited from the late '20s, came the nimbler Astura, a model that stayed in production so long it was initially fashioned after a traditional design approach and then employed for the earliest exercises with the new ovoid style that became an irresistible success in 1934 and continued to dominate till 1937.

A small series of streamlined, richly finished cabriolets on Astura floorpans, the so-called "Bocca type" introduced the unprecedented notion of the legitimacy of making a certain number of replicas of a custom built model.

These "multiples" ushered in the practice of producing small - and then gradually no longer-so-small - model series: this process culminated in the production of the Aurelia B20 (1951), a small saloon for which Pininfarina obtained a sizeable order, on a truly industrial scale. Six series of this particular model were eventually produced, to a total of 3,871 units.

While the B20 had all the typical traits of a Lancia-Pininfarina saloon a car that could win you first place in the "Mille Miglia" race and the next day take you to the theatre for a fashionable premiere the Aurelia B24, a two seater convertible, in addition to being one of the best looking cars ever, was eminently suitable for speeding along the Californian highways: a sizeable portion of the 761 units produced were sold in the U.S. opening up a significant export flow.

In 1955, one year after the debut of the Aurelia B24, the company completed the Florida prototypes which resulted in the development of the Flaminia project. Of the countless creations conceived by the Turin bodybuilding industry, the Flaminia was probably the one that had the most far reaching repercussions on car design worldwide.

Meant to replace vehicles with rounded, sweeping contours, the Flaminia marked the onset of a drastically different approach.

Its influence on international car design trends lost none of its vigour until the early '80s when a new scientific outlook on aerodynamic performance prevailed and cars began to look like sculptured solids again. In line with this design approach Pininfarina has produced the "Hit" (High Italian Technology), a prototype with Lancia Delta Integrale mechanicals.

The choice of this successful drive line for an advanced research vehicle was not accidental, but rather the outcome of well thought out decisions. To explore as thoroughly as possible the potential of innovative materials and new assembly systems is another objective that Pininfarina has been pursuing steadily and with conviction, one prototype after another.

Once again, Lancia and Pininfarina are venturing out together on a course alive with promise. Finally, in 1986 was launched the Lancia Thema Station Wagon, designed and produced by Pininfarina, like the Lancia k Station Wagon of 1996.