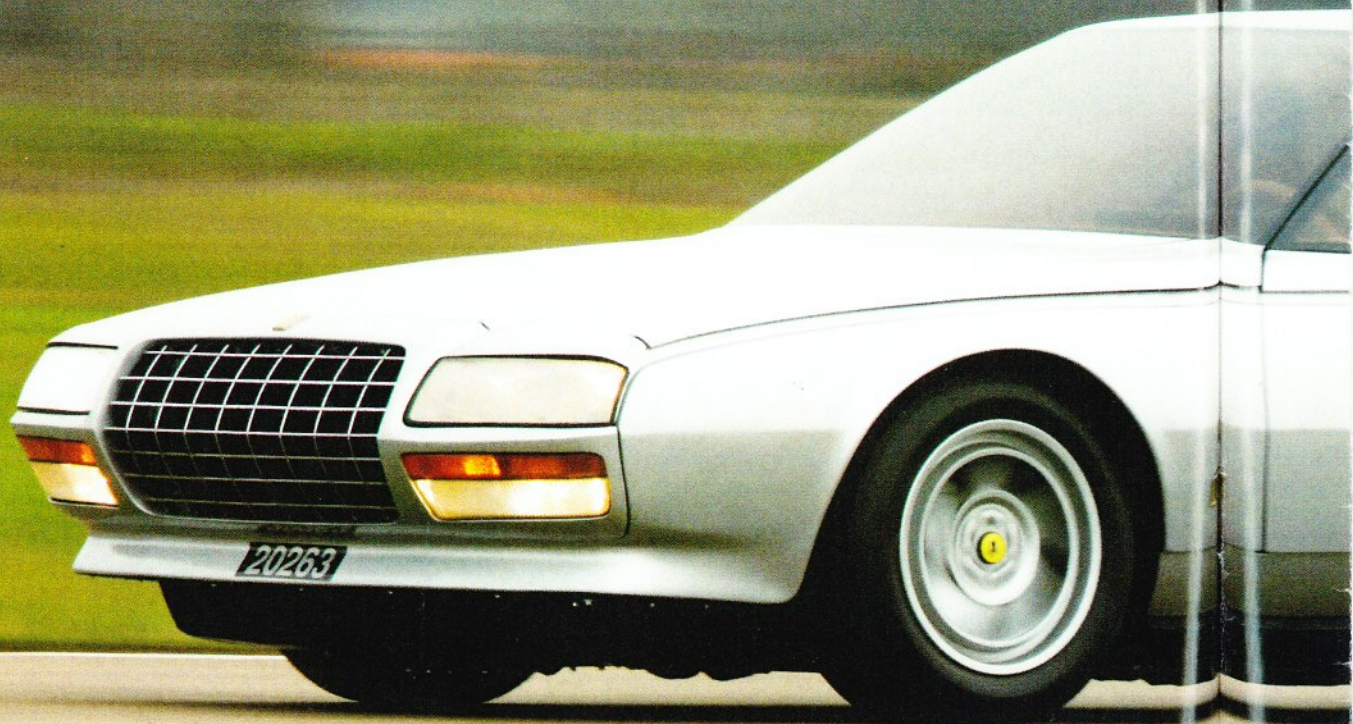


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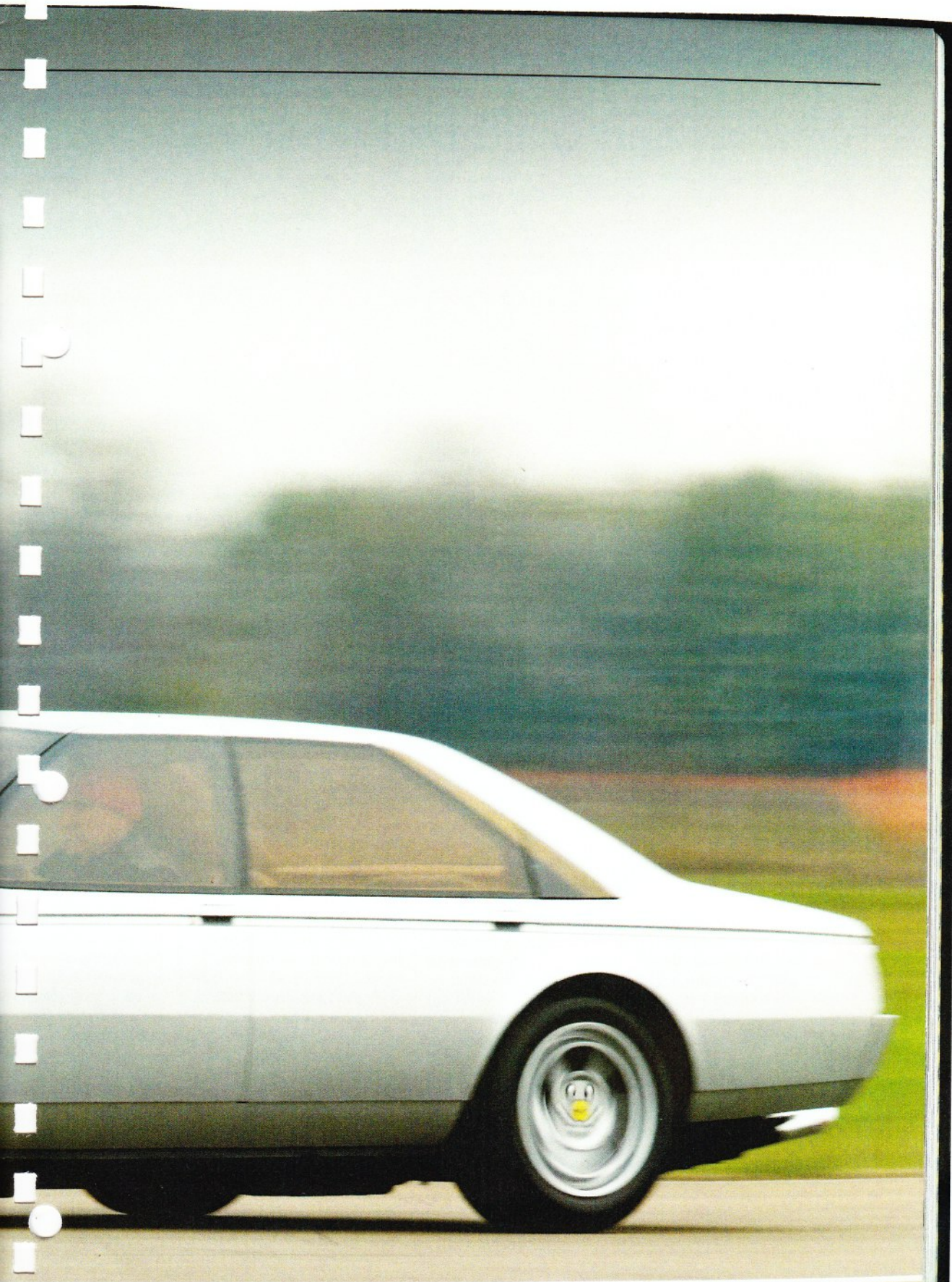
# GEPPETTO'S DREAM

Like an automotive Pinocchio, the 1980 Pinin show car has been transformed into a real runner—a fitting tribute for a car that almost became Ferrari's first sedan.

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY JOHANN LEMERCIER











Panoramic outward view combines with upper and lower consoles to give interior an aircraft-like feel.

A four-door Ferrari? Never gonna happen, according to the factory today. But it almost did, back in 1980.

That's when the Pinin show car debuted at the Turin Auto Show. Designed and built by Pininfarina, the Pinin was based on the then-current 400 GT. It was a non-runner, with a dummy 512 BB flat-12 shoe-horned into its engine bay, but the powers that be in Maranello strongly considered it for production. In the end, though, it came to nothing.

This story has a strange twist, however. Some 30 years after its launch, the Pinin has finally been developed into a fully running car, with help from former Ferrari technical director Mauro Forghieri, the father of the flat-12 engine. *FORZA* was there on the day of its awakening, witnessing and participating in a very rare occurrence: the first drive of a unique Ferrari prototype.

Pinin, in Piemontese slang, means tiny or minute. The nickname fit Battista Farina, the vertically challenged founder of the famous coachbuilding concern that has become synonymous with Ferrari design. Whatever Battista was lacking in physical stature, he more than made up for in charisma and entrepreneurial clout—and after he passed away, it was only a matter of time before a Prancing Horse was named after him in tribute. This happened on the 50th anniversary of Pininfarina, but, paradoxically, in the form of a nearly 16-foot-long, four-door sedan.

"The Pinin was a project initiated by Pininfarina," explains *Ingegnere* Eugenio Alzati, Ferrari's General Manager from 1979 to '86. "I wanted to develop the Pinin [for production] because there weren't any real luxury four-door sedans built in Italy any more. I started

to push for it, and Enzo Ferrari was actually quite fond of the idea. He always liked projects that were different and that somehow pushed the envelope.

"The thing was, as a representative of the Fiat Group, he had to drive around in one of the group's cars, and the highest-level Fiat available then was the 131. It wasn't quite the standard he favored."

At this time, Enzo Ferrari was still very involved with running the company, but his sole approval wasn't enough to push the Pinin project forward. For that, Alzati needed to convince the Ferrari board, most significantly Vittorio Ghidella, the president of Fiat. "Ghidella was a very pragmatic man," says Alzati. "Even with [Ferrari's] backing, I simply could not risk triggering any internal wars. Any battle had to be won, else it couldn't be fought. Perhaps nobody in my position would

have been foolish enough to face those 'big wigs.'"

The Pinin was voted on at Ferrari's annual board meeting in 1980, where, says Alzati, it was clear that Ghidella didn't support it. "At that point, reluctantly, Enzo Ferrari had to sacrifice me and the Pinin, in the name of internal politics. When he did not put his hand up in favor of the project, of course nobody else did!"

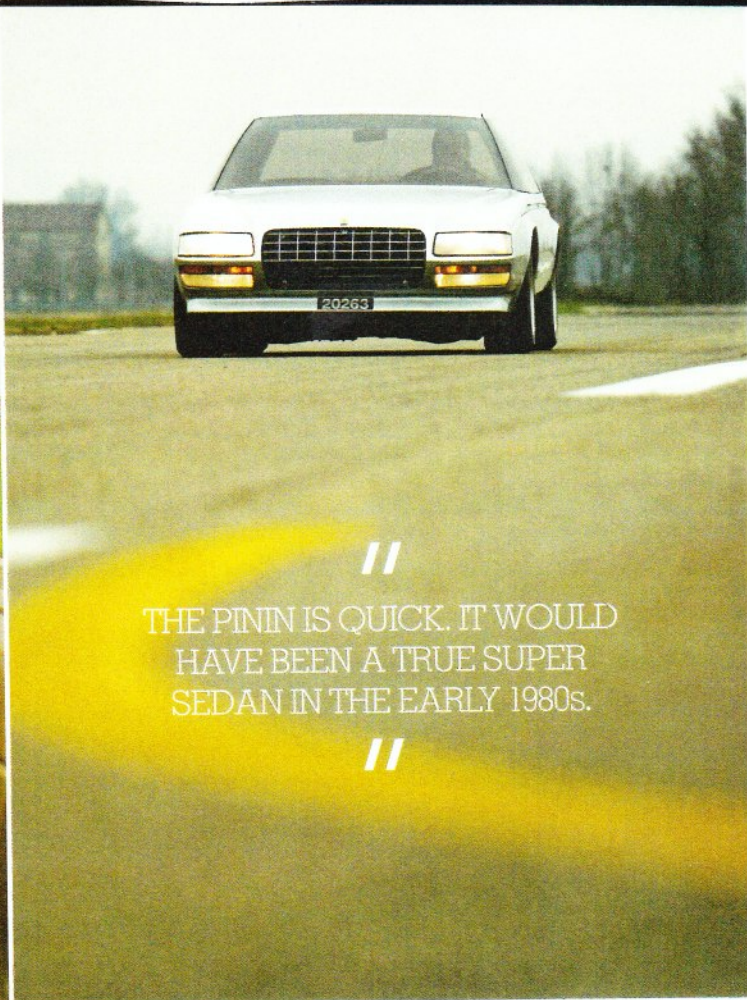
According to Alzati, the problem was timing. "Ghidella was put in charge of Fiat with a clear mission: to steer it in the clear and stabilize it financially," he explains. "His priority was on large-scale projects, such as the Fiat Uno, and the Pinin would have distracted him from his all-important, make-or-break targets.

"Besides that, there weren't that many people inside Ferrari with the necessary know-how to put the car together. I would

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project of making the Pinin road-worthy.

Oral's first step was to assess exactly what the car was. As it turned out, the Pinin's chassis was pure 400 aft of the firewall—aside from a straightforward stretch job—complete with transmission, differential and rear suspension. Up front, the engine bay seemed to have been adapted from the rear sub-frame of a 512 BB. The motor was an empty block, deprived of any moving parts and set unrealistically far back. A proper front suspension with short wishbones had been fitted, along with brakes and halfshafts, but the springs had been welded in place all around.

"Aside from putting in a complete 512 BB engine, we basically raided the 400 GT parts bin," says Oral's Paolo Bianchi. "The mounting points had to be tweaked to bring the engine further up and forward. Then we fitted a 400 GT gearbox behind the engine, created a spacer to fit the clutch and re-routed the oil flow. Instead of driving the halfshafts directly, as when the engine was in the mid position on the BB, here we are driving the rear wheels."

The Oral technicians also had to design a fuel tank to fit in the limited space behind and underneath the rear seats, strengthen the chassis and sort the electrical system—none of which had been contemplated when the show car was built. A fuel-filler cap was neatly fitted aft of the left rear door, behind a now cleverly hinged decorative panel.

Another challenge was keeping the Pinin's ideal ride height.

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Some years later, the Pinin was sold through Adolfo Orsi to Jacques Swaters, Ferrari's long-standing Belgian importer. Visitors to Garage Francorchamps could see the lifeless car exhibited in the showroom's basement, guarding the entrance to Swaters' massive Ferrari archives.

That may well have been the end of the Pinin, but in 2008, Swaters decided to part

with a huge amount of the marque memorabilia he had amassed during his 60-year involvement with Ferrari. At that year's RM auction in Maranello, the Pinin was sold. Its new owner, unlike Swaters, didn't want a static model; he wanted a runner. So he turned to Oral Engineering near Modena, the consultancy set up by Forghieri shortly after he left Ferrari, to take on the mad





# MODE



There was little room underneath the floorpan, but with a long exhaust line and some insulation, a minimal, if adequate, ground clearance was achieved.

Needless to say, a job like this is neither inexpensive nor quick. All told, the project stretched over a year and a half. But on a bitterly cold morning last March, I was invited to a disused airport runway in Marzàglia, southwest of Modena, as the Pinin moved under its own power for the very first time.

In person, the Pinin does not look as large as the measurements claim. Its sleek lines were penned by Diego Ottina, working under the direction of Leonardo Fioravanti, and the

slender proportions trick the eye into thinking that this is a much more slight automobile—as its name would suggest.

The illusion of size is helped by the sleek, low-profile, multiparabolic headlights. The airy greenhouse, with wraparound windshield, flush-mounted windows and concealed windshield wipers, contributes to an overall impression of lightness. High-contrast taillights are finished in body color, and only fully reveal themselves when lit. Even three decades after its creation, the Pinin's polished appearance remains quite up to date—it is still daring and stylish.

The handsome interior was designed by Giuseppe Randazzo. "This was one of my first jobs when I joined Pininfarina," says

Randazzo. "The main theme was the center-console element, which stretched from front to rear and was mirrored by a ceiling console, both incorporating various services and electronic widgets. The display unit mounted just above the steering column in perfect sight for the driver was another feature we worked quite a lot on. It was a smoked plastic casing backlit with LEDs, very pure and, I believe, fully functional."

The airport test day was simply a shakedown to check that all systems functioned properly, with no timing rig involved nor any real-world assessment of the car's dynamics in mind. I was nonetheless exhilarated to have the opportunity to drive the car—at least until a snow storm

interrupted the proceedings—and get a few impressions.

First, the Pinin is quick. Its 340-horsepower flat-12 engine is unfazed by the car's heft, even though a 512 BB weighs nearly 600 pounds less. This would have been a true super sedan in the early 1980s.

Second, while the Pinin was never intended to be more than a show car, Orali's engineering has made it feel much like a "real" car. That said, it hasn't yet been fully realized. For example, the turning radius is enormous, a function of compromised steering geometry due to the extremely tight engine bay. Bianchi says a more efficient setup is already in the works.

Finally, taking the wheel was simply exhilarating—if more

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# PININ

THE AIRY GREENHOUSE  
CONTRIBUTES TO AN OVERALL  
IMPRESSION OF LIGHTNESS.



accompanying the car includes internal Pininfarina technical drawings from 1983 of a "Pinin 2," as well as a study by the I.De.A styling and engineering consultancy that evaluated the torsional rigidity of several proposed chassis. While this was likely commissioned by someone high up inside Fiat, after these studies the idea apparently faded away completely.

So should Ferrari have built a production Pinin? While the company today is adamant that four-doors aren't part of its DNA, there are those who wish the marque would expand its range to include a sedan with uncompromising performance. Alzati, who in the 1990s went on to lead Maserati, certainly agrees with this point of view. "Our customers enjoy driving so much, if we had offered them a refined sporting car they would have gladly done away with chauffeurs and bodyguards to drive themselves," he says. "Strategically for us, it would have been a plus to have that kind of product in our range."

Enzo Ferrari, lacking support from Fiat, had to vote against the Pinin, and that was that. Today, however, thanks to an enthusiastic owner, we have been able to experience what might have been. ●

**Pinin's chassis is based on 400 GT, while 340-horsepower flat-12 engine comes from 512 BB.**

