

CLASSIC DRIVER

Lancia Stratos 'Stradale'

Lead

Although marginally less dramatic to look at than the Project Zero concept car from which it evolved, the road-going Stratos was a wild and theatrical machine, hugely desirable but one which – when new – quickly built a reputation as being challenging to drive.

It was created alongside the Stratos rally cars intended to beat the Renault Alpine, Ford GT70 and other mid-engined lightweights which were ruling the World Rally Championship at the time. The 'Stradale' road cars were built as homologation specials: cars which only existed to meet the regulations of the WRC, and they were hurriedly put together, with debatable build quality, not helped by the Italian strikes of 1974. But that wasn't going to deter buyers eager to own this sharply wedged slice of Italian design – and, well, that reputation for requiring a skilled driver only added to the mystery and kudos.





The original Stradale versions (never mind the rally cars) demanded well-above-average driving skills and very fast reactions. The main problem was that the cars had a tendency to spin in corners, and many customers had accidents. But the good news was that – thanks to suspension that was extremely adjustable – this rally car for the road could be hugely improved, and given much more predictable handling once specialists got to grips with it.



As for the rally versions, their success is well known. The Stratos brought Lancia victory in the WRC from 1974 to 1976, until Lancia's untimely withdrawal from world rallying to make way for the Fiat 131 Abarth.

How many road-going versions of the Stratos were made is open to all the usual suspect claims, but it's generally agreed that there were fewer than 500. Finding a genuine example today is not easy. There are a great many reproductions, but very few 'real' ones.





So, if you fancy owning your own wedge of Italian motoring history, you might want to check out the example that RM Auctions is offering for sale at its Monaco sale on 11 and 12 May 2012.

Originally delivered to Dr Rudolf Wiespointner of Wels, Austria in 1976, and with only two registered owners from new, the car has spent its whole life in Austria. It has just 43,000km on the clock and has been recently restored.

Photos: RM Auctions

Gallery

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