

Who Remembers...Five Vintage Autos?

For this installment of “Who Remembers?” let’s take a stroll down the automobile memory lane. We’ll only go back a few decades since we have to “remember” and that means we have to be alive! ☐ We’ve revisited past buildings, structures, and businesses, so I thought it time to cover something different. I know there are many automobile buffs, but you certainly don’t have to be an auto geek to enjoy this walk into the past. I have linked videos of the commercials for each automobile for those who want more visuals.

Do you recall these cars or one that is not on the list? Did you own one? Have any anecdotes to share? Please do!

If you want to take any other strolls down memory lane, to the right you will find a categories widget with a drop-down menu. There is a historical category. You’ve been warned though! You will look up at the clock after a few “minutes” and find hours have passed. Like a certain brand of chips, you can’t just “eat” one. A lot of fun, without being boring.

So, let’s see who remembers these vintage autos...

1. Pontiac Fiero

‘Fess up. You know you owned one. Debuting in 1984, the Lamborghini...I, mean the 2 seat, 4-cylinder Pontiac Fiero had a whopping 92 horsepower and could race any moped in the city and crush it. If you were cruising the “Ave” and some hot chicks, you could pretend to hit the headlight switch by accident and reveal the hidden headlights. The girls would see this, flag you down and give you their phone numbers. Easy kills. Right? Guys...hello?! Why’s there an echo in here?

“Fiero” means “proud” in Italian or “ferocious” in Spanish. The only thing ferocious about the Fiero was its attack on your wallet due to repair bills from shoddy engineering. Engine fires abounded, cooling system issues, oil leaks and more seemed to be common anecdotes. It didn’t matter. You had a Rolodex of girls’ phone numbers.



2. Ford Pinto

This subcompact car made by Ford was common throughout the 70s in your choice of a variety of hideous colors. In concept, the Pinto was intended to be direct competition with the growing popularity of imports, particularly the Volkswagen Beetle.

Concerns about the safety of the gas tank design led to a recall in 1978. It turned out that the concerns were unwarranted as the car was shown to be as safe as any other car on the road. Regardless, the damage was done and the recall seemed to be the death knoll as the car was taken from production in less than 2 years. The car cost less than \$2,000 when it was debuted in 1971. In 2004, the big meanies at Forbes “awarded” the Ford Pinto with the dubious honor of being one of the *Worst Cars of All Time* and if that didn’t hurt, in 2009 Business Week named it one of the *Fifty Worst Cars of All Time*. Ouch.



3. Chevrolet El Camino

To compete against the Ford Ranchero, Chevrolet rolled out another chic magnet, the El Camino. The coupe utility vehicle debuted in 1959, ran for another year before going on hiatus. After a hugely successful debut year – beating the Ford Ranchero – its second year was a dismal loss causing it to be discontinued. It returned in 1964 and had a successful run until 1987. However, the Chevrolet Lumina Ute is clearly the modern equivalent of the El Camino. Just take my money Chevrolet, just take my money. Right guys? Guys?!



4. AMC Gremlin

Sticking with the theme of chic magnets, no girl could resist a guy in a Gremlin! Debuting in 1970 it was a competitor of the Ford Pinto and Volkswagon Beetle, but FASTER. It was a downright hot rod. Performance AND beauty!

The dictionary definition of a “Gremlin” is ‘a small gnome held to be responsible for malfunction of equipment.’ Clearly, not a well-thought out model name. AMC execs were unconcerned and began to market the Gremlin as ‘a pal to its friends and an ogre to its enemies.’ Tremble all you foes of the Gremlin, the Ogre on wheels is coming for your soul. In spite of its reputation as a fast car and its use on the auto racing circuit, an attempt by the Houston Police Department to consider the Gremlin as the official car of the force resulted in zero follow up orders. Bewildering. The Gremlin died out in 1978.



5. Yugo GV (Zastava Koral)

Making many “Worst Car Ever” lists, the Zastava Koral or Yugo as it was called colloquially since it originated from Yugoslavia, debuted in 1987. GV meant Great Value. There were such high expectations for the vehicle to take off in the states that full-page ads were taken out in the New York and Los Angeles Times and the prestigious National Enquirer.

The first three Yugos were red, white and blue. Yeah, America was going to love the car that only cost \$3,900 came with FREE maintenance and a 10 year/100,000 mile warranty, right? There's that echo again, this time a 30-year-old echo.

Even when it was unveiled, it was a car that was hazed, picked on and ridiculed for its tiny size, appearance and top speed of 86 mph. Another problem was that no one read the owner's manual. 'Murica! The manual recommended that the owner the engine's timing belt every 40,000 miles or you'd get a blown engine. It's free maintenance, not free parts/engines.

Adding to the poorly structured and marketed automobile, was the tragic story of Yugo owner Leslie Ann Pluhar, who was blown off the Mackinac Bridge in Michigan by a 55 mph wind gust. Audits, failed tests, re-engineering, restructuring certainly weren't helpful, nor were United Nations sanctions on Yugoslavia. That's not even the end of it!

The coup de grace blow that helped kill the little car that couldn't was NATO's 1999 accidental bombing of the company's automotive division, instead of their arms manufacturing

division. Oopies.
