

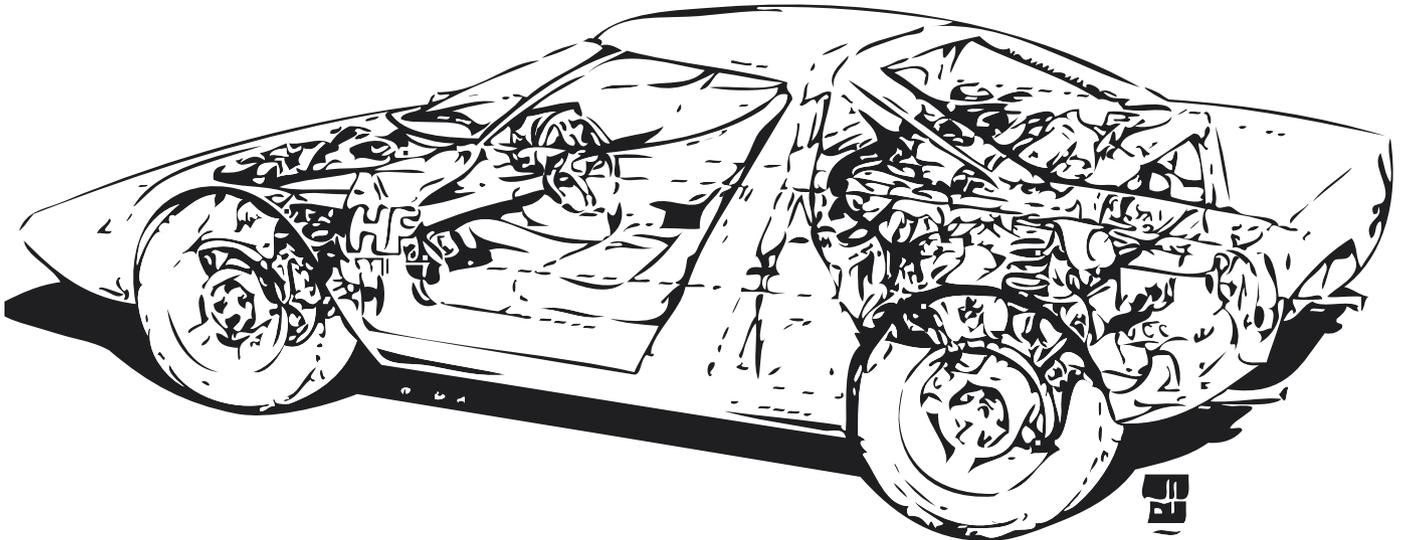
Foreword

What is a rally? Today's events, for sure, are completely different from those of a hundred or even fifty years ago. What was once a test of reliability is now a test of speed and strength. What was once a long-distance trial is now a series of short-distance races.

In the beginning, rallying was all about using standard cars in long-distance road events, but by the 1950s the events were toughening up. Routes became rougher, target speeds were raised, point-to-point speed tests on special stages were introduced, and high-performance machines were needed to ensure victory.

Starting in the late 1950s, too, teams began developing extra-special versions of standard cars, these were built in small numbers, and were meant only to go rallying or motor racing. These 'homologation specials' now dominate the sport. The first of these, unquestionably, was the Austin-Healey 3000, and the latest is any one of the ten-off World Rally Cars which we see on our TV screens or on the special stages of the world.

Although rally regulations changed persistently over the years, the two most important events were four-wheel drive being authorised from 1980, and the 'World Rally



This was the astonishingly-styled 'Stratos' project car unveiled by Bertone at the Turin Show of 1970. The name and the intent, if nothing else, inspired Lancia to develop the rally car.

very low – it measured only 33in/84cm from ground to the top of the roof – but it had two steeply reclined seats and all-independent suspension. There were no conventional doors, incidentally, and access to those seats could only be gained by opening up a vast, full width, glass windscreen, which was hinged above the occupants' heads: quite impractical for everyday use (and, in hindsight, potentially dangerous in case of an accident which might distort the door/screen frame), but eye-catching to say the least. Not only that, but the car was so short, and the driving position so far forward, that the occupants' legs and feet found themselves well ahead of the 'axle' line of the front wheels, very close indeed to the extremely sharp-profiled nose.

This futuristically-styled machine, named Stratos, appeared at the Turin Motor Show of November 1970, where it caused a real stir. Yet its launch came as a real surprise to almost everyone who saw it. Cesare Fiorio himself once

The only way to gain access to the 1970 Stratos project car was to unlatch the front windscreen glass, which was hinged at its rear. This was totally impractical for road use, but looked sensational.



Beautiful, yes, but would the Ferrari Dino have been a practical rally car?
Cesare Fiorio thought not.

As requested, the ever-practical Cesare Fiorio tested the mid-engined Ferrari Dino, but ace-driver Sandro Munari found it too long, too heavy and not nearly agile enough to turn into a rally car.





First time out in a World Championship rally, and Sandro Munari's Marlboro-liveried Stratos won comfortably. For the next few months, it seemed the Stratos was invincible. (Martin Holmes Rallying)

Monte master

If ever there was an event tailor-made for the Stratos, it was the most famous of all, the Monte Carlo. Run in January, on sinuous mountain stages which might be clean tarmac, snow, ice, slush, or a combination of all these, it was an event which had to be matched by nimble cars with great traction.

The Stratos, therefore, was ideal. Helped along by the dedicated works team, and backed by weeks of assiduous practice, Sandro Munari won the event three times in succession – 1975, 1976 and 1977.

Munari had already won the Monte once, in 1972 (in a Lancia Fulvia 1600HF), but the Stratos was new to the event in 1975. Setting an immaculate performance, Munari's 12-valve car (TOL 65176) defeated a fleet of his own team rivals in Fiat 124 Abarth Rallyes, along with other Stratos types, to win by a comfortable three minutes.

One year later, and this time using the more powerful 24-valve model (TOM 54374), he had to fight much harder to win the event outright, for his team-mate, Björn Waldegård, was just 87 seconds behind him (team orders, they say, were applied, for Lancia wanted its favourite son to win ...), and Bernard Darniche's privately-entered 12-valve car (TON 14329) took third place. No other team came close, with Ford's Escorts, in particular, humiliated.

In January 1977, Munari once again won the Monte, this time with the 24-valve TON 41468. *Autocar's* rally report was headlined: "Munari - who else?" which signalled just how dominant the Stratos was at this time. Once again, Munari seemed to have no problem winning, for he beat Andruet's Fiat 131 Abarth by a comfortable 2min 16sec, with the rest of the field a long way behind.

Since Lancia's works rally effort was about to be wound down, this was exactly the way for the works Stratos to say goodbye to the world's most famous winter rally.

car was fast until tyre problems were followed by an open-road accident with a non-competing car. Christine Dacremont, though, not only finished sixth, but took the Ladies' prize in her privately-entered car.

Although Mike Parkes and Sandro Munari had been testing for weeks in advance of the Safari, any hope that Lancia had of finally winning the event was, literally, drowned out, when it turned into the wettest East African classic on

Sandro Munari and the Stratos, it seemed, were almost joined at the hip; his three victories in the Monte Carlo rally (this was 1977) surely prove that point.

