

I Prelude

Running throughout the history of Italians in motor sport, there has been a rich vein of innovation and ingenuity, and the ability to rapidly translate both of these into successful finite forms. The case of the Lancia Stratos in rallying is not only a good example of this, but is also a timely moment to use as the springboard for this story.

At that time, the two main Groups of modified cars allowed to take part in international rallies under FISA's homologation rules were Groups 2 and 4. The latter required that a minimum of 500 examples of a planned vehicle be built to gain acceptance. At this time, Lancia was slowly struggling to its feet after its takeover by Fiat in 1969, and both Piero Gobbato (the new managing director) and Cesare Fiorio (the competitions manager) saw in this Fulvia V4-powered concept car the potential to build a world champion rally car.

The original concept car, the Zero, had been unveiled by Bertone at the 1970 Turin Motor Show. Sandro Munari recalled that "in late 1970/early 1971, myself and the other Lancia-contracted crews were all asked to describe what we would most like to drive in future rallies – what we felt would enable us to win. We each described a rear/mid-engined car with racing style responses and the co-drivers even got to say what space they would like inside the cockpit and what form it should take."

Whether they were asked this before or after Gobbato and Fiorio saw the potential of the Stratos Zero has been lost now in the mists of time, but the net result of the combined ideas of team and management was a request to Nuccio Bertone to develop his rather impractical

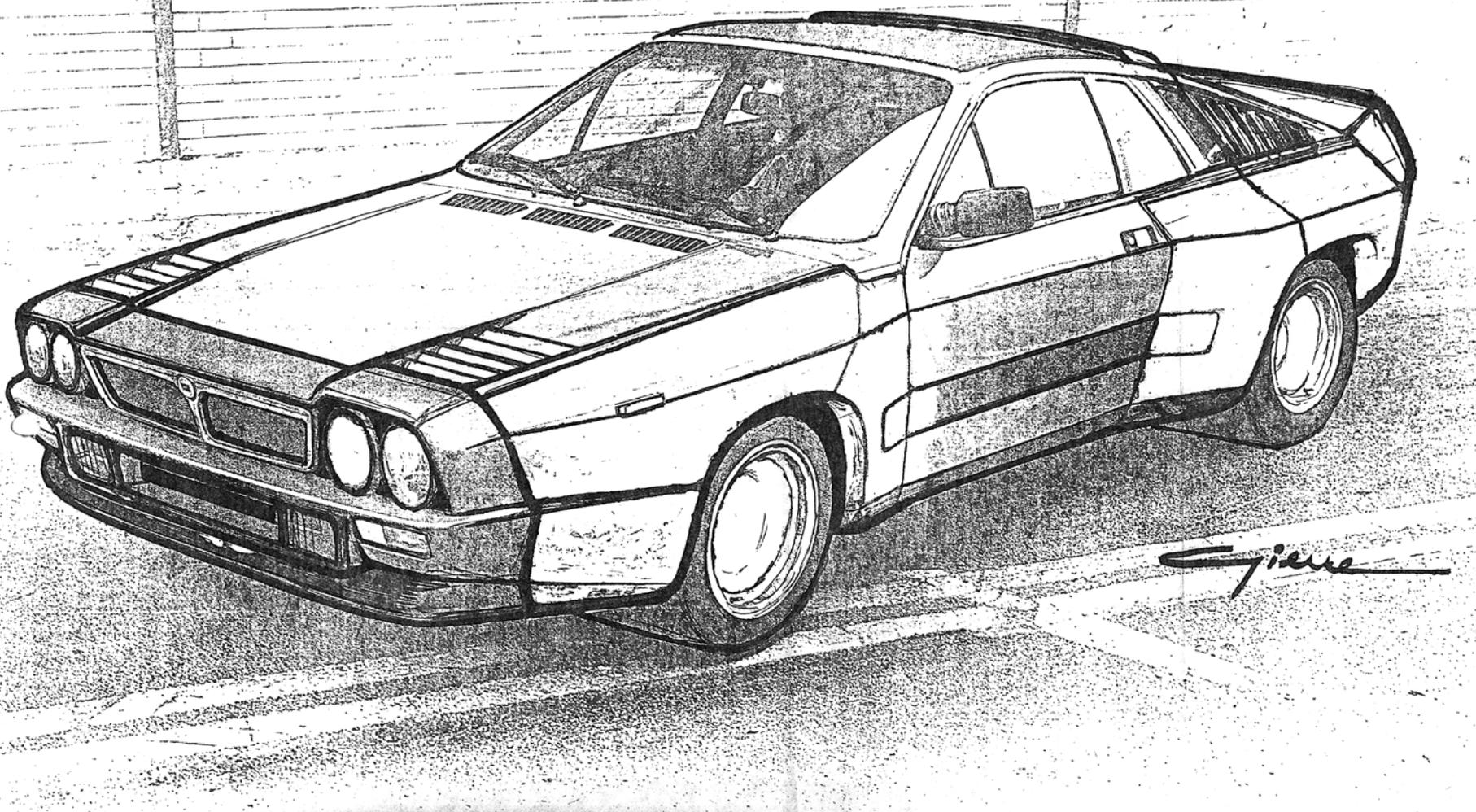
coupé concept into something that would compete – and win – on the special stages of the World Rally Championship.

For manufacturers, especially Lancia, the publicity and marketing potential attached to the newly announced rally series was substantial. It had been elevated in status from a European Challenge for Makes in 1968 to an International Championship for Makes in 1970, and was now undergoing further enhancement to become a full World Rally Championship for both drivers and makes from 1973, in similar fashion to Formula One Grand Prix racing.

The attraction for Lancia (and any other manufacturer, should it decide to take up the challenge) was that it could come up with any purpose-designed and built car that it wished, so long as it was built in the required quantity. It didn't even need to find purchasers so long as the cars were offered for sale, so effectively it had carte-blanche. With an adequate budget from, at first, Marlboro, and later Alitalia, Lancia pushed the boundaries to the limit, making use of every possible design feature that this freedom allowed.

*Sandro Munari at the wheel of a Stratos, at Goodwood. Driver and car have become synonymous.
(Author collection)*





By late spring of 1980, Sergio had produced drawings of how he saw the finished car.

with a completely new chassis. This latter point was also likely to be a disadvantage, as a completely new car would be expensive and time consuming to develop. Also, Sergio Limone pointed out that the engine was 'huge'. Work on this car stopped after a "few drawings and a model of the spaceframe chassis were made."

As 1979 turned into 1980, Fiat announced its rally plans for the coming year. Giving nothing away, "a limited programme continuing to develop the Ritmo and a substantially reduced number of rallies for the 131" was the official comment.

Meanwhile, back in the UK, Ford was busy trying to persuade the press that the upcoming Group B was "wrong", in the words of Stuart Turner, director of public relations. "It will lead to a more expensive car on the stages," he said, and how right he was – but instead of complaining, Fiat was getting on with finding a solution to the problem, and Ford was later to regret not doing the same.

On the same page as all this, in the January 10 issue of *Autosport* magazine, there was a report that Audi was hoping



The rear wing grows even bigger.



First crash test for the homologation car at Centro Sicurezza Orbassano.

spoiler on a rally car. This first version, on April 6, looked very similar to that on the rear deck of the Evoluzione Ferrari 288 GTO. It was mounted on two uprights totally unlike the final design. It was quite large and by the end of the month it had grown even bigger, although this was to change in appearance quite considerably by the time homologation inspection happened.

Crash testing was now mandatory. The mock-up car had moved back to Abarth for preparation and was ready for some evaluation tests by April 24, when the results were generally good, but there was a problem with chassis movement inwards to the leg space. However, steering wheel displacement was only 20mm against an acceptable limit of 127 mm. Sergio commented that "the chassis was very strong for 1980 – but not today!" The day



Developed by Tonti at Lancia's Via Caraglio workshop, this is a 1750cc turbo engine fitted to 001.



The original ugly duckling has grown into a swan. The rear spoilers were usually specified by clients as an optional extra supplied separately. (Author collection)



Röhrl obliges the photographers at the jump on the St Auban stage. (Courtesy Ferret Fotografic)

get in the car on the starting-ramp and it would have the right steering-wheel, the right seat and the handling would be just how I like it. One day Ing. Limone asked me to test and it was the only time I was faster than Giorgio. We changed very little, maybe some front-wheel camber and spring-rates. It was a perfect arrangement for me."

Also in great part responsible for the little car's success was Pirelli. After a two year absence from rallying, the tyre company

– in conjunction with Giorgio's testing abilities – had developed six different types of tyre for the use of the Martini team. In total, 1500 tyres were available at the event. From the Winter Rally, with narrow blocked tread for the front and wider pattern for the rear, to a P7-based tyre with varying degrees of softness across the width of the tread, the team was ready for most eventualities. In fact, the conditions were so ideal for a slick-type tyre that by the end of the event the ten tyre trucks and 24 fitters had just about