



MAUTO - Museo Nazionale dell'Automobile di Torino MICHELOTTI WORLD

NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

The freelance designer from Turin who won the world

The cars designed by Giovanni Michelotti could easily fill up all the National Museum halls. Just think that he designed as many as three hundred fifty-seven projects for carrozzeria Vignale only. However, even in a summary overview, as in this temporary exhibition, you can easily perceive the eclectic, rich and quality production of a designer who represents an extraordinary season, which is so distant from today, better than anyone else

In particular, there are two sections that best summarize this man's spirit and the reasons why he should be remembered. One is called "Il carrozziere dei carrozzieri" ("The coachbuilders' coachbuilder") and shows, through dozens of original drawings and a few iconic cars, the skill of a freelance who provided many car builders of those years with ideas. All those ideas were undoubtedly adjusted by Michelotti and rather easy to recognize, however they were also calibrated on each firm, customized as much as possible, so that a 1100 Allemano was different from a Monviso, a Canta prototype clearly different from Siata, Balbo, Moretti or Fissore prototypes, just to mention a few names of small and big car-makers, although unknown to most of us today, who were scattered in Turin, the Italian car capital. Among all of them, the role played for Vignale stands out, with spectacular, sometimes extreme, unique specimens assembled to the most refined mechanical structures. Many of them have become remarkable icons in the history of cars.

The other key section, which gives the exhibition its name not by chance, is "Michelotti World". Fantasy and global talent join in the period after the season of small car builders. Thirteen years, from 1958 (initial studies for the Triumph Herald and the BMW-Denzel) till 1971 (launch of the BMW Touring), plus other minor projects that are still ongoing. They draw the attention of the biggest foreign car makers to Michelotti. A design monopoly and a successful commercial collaboration was almost established with England, and Triumph in particular (Herald, Tr4, Spitfire, Stag, 2000, Dolomite). The designer will present Renault with the Alpine wonder (A106 cabriolet, A108, and A110), and Japan with three of its earliest presentable cars (the Prince, the Hino Motors Contessa and the cute Sprint). But it was BMW that benefited most from the talent of Michelotti, who helped the company's survival with the small 700 coupé, and then took it into modernity with the 1500 "neue klasse". In the same period, he was also called by Holland-based DAF and Australian Leyland, while General Motors prepared an offer to take the Turin-based freelance to Detroit.

The number of drawings on display is truly remarkable, even if it was a sad task to have to choose ninety examples from among hundreds of works kept in the Michelotti Historical Archive. This abundance is rare among designers, who almost always left their works to the car makers they worked for or directly to their clients. Here, on the other hand, thanks to the designer's professional background, most sketches, renderings and technical drawings have remained in the custody of his heirs and a complete history can be traced.

Of great interest and peculiar to Michelotti's method are the many sketches in a dramatic perspective, often made with tempera on a black background, which enhance the silhouettes and give more contrast to the colors. The cars look extreme, their lines exaggerated, dynamic and almost elusive. The master does, for his sculptures in motion, what good architects did with bird's eye perspectives. The objective is to intrigue, convince and sell to the customer, regardless whether it is a castle or a custom-built car. Giovanni Moretti, for whom Michelotti designed some thirty models, one day told him, kidding, if in the tight frontal perspective of a spider you could also glimpse the tail.

However, the other side of the car builder, that is the technical and conceptual side, stands alongside suggestion. The three-view drawings, the interiors, the bodywork details are all beautiful and demonstrate his all-round mastery of the ways of thinking, representing and building the car.

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