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ROAD TEST

AUTOMOTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

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Gift Guide:
50 great
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Chevy Monza Mirage & Ford Cobra II Starga:

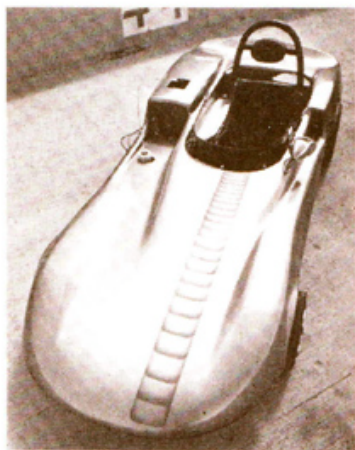
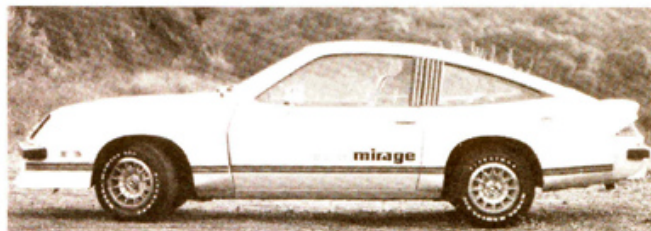
Supercars Reborn!



**32,000 Miles Later:
Chevy Chevette &
Honda Accord**



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Even Santa Claus can't get you better stuff

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Cover: "Capture the new supercars in their lair at dawn," was the command for Larry Griffin, and he did it, proving once and for all that we're not dealing with shoe clerks.

Supercar Re

The dawn of the new generation
with the Monza Mirage and C



by Steve Thompson

It seemed like they were gone for good. Born in the wild, optimistic days of the early '60s, the supercars seemed to reach their zenith of popularity and power at the turn of the decade, and then swiftly faded, to be replaced with vans, the fuel crunch and clean air. No more Superbirds, no more Boss 302s, no more L88 Stingrays.

Performance was dead, at least in the Motor City.

Enter Jack Purcell, Jack Juratovic and BORT Inc., the design team that put together the Pontiac L'il Wide Track Astre. Sensing the need for at least a semblance of performance and excitement in domestic cars, BORT focused its attention on the then-new Mustang II and its flaccid sales. What it saw convinced it that resurrecting the Shelby GT350—at

least in looks—would do wonders for the car's sales.

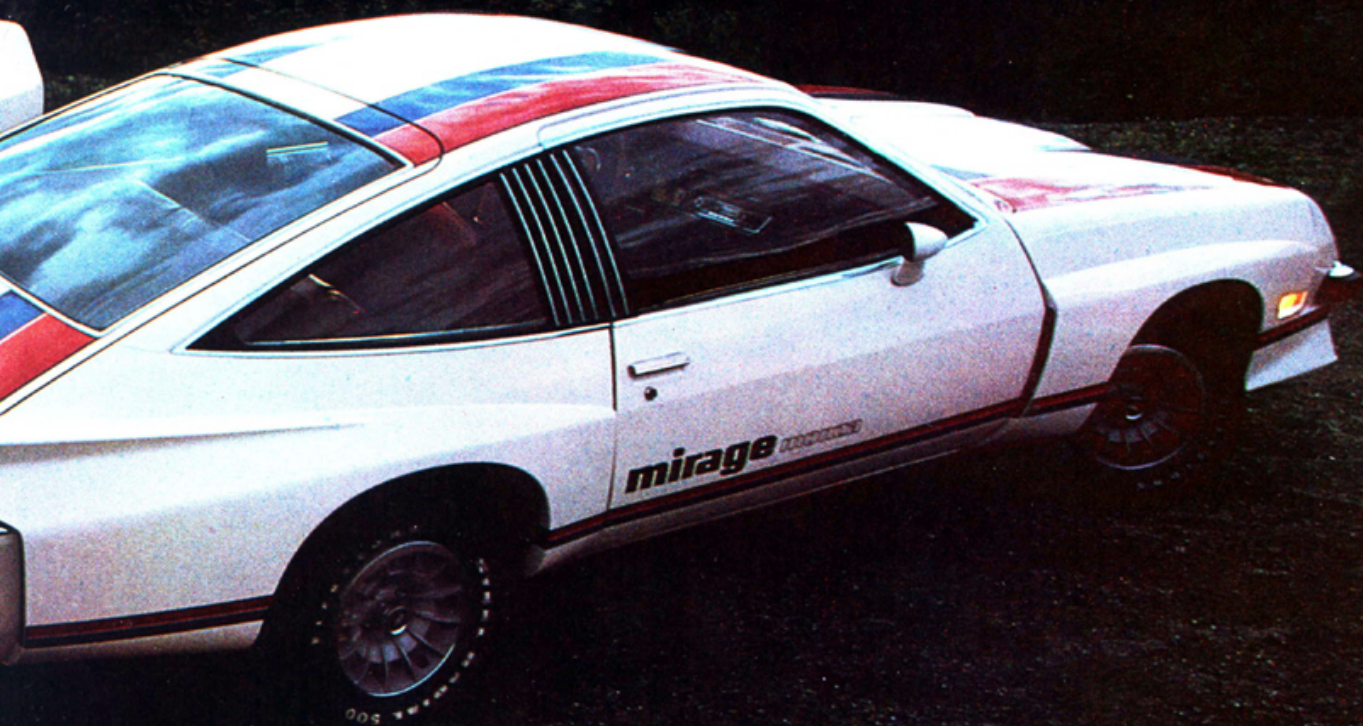
There were plenty of skeptics, but only in the beginning. A year after sales of the Cobra II started, the projected 5000 cars rolled out the doors of the Ford dealers had become an astounding 35,000 and the demand was climbing. Many in Detroit were flabbergasted.

It had all happened before, though, when Jim Wangers put together the original GTO package for Pontiac; PMD had expected to sell 5000 of those too, and as the first wild year ground down, they had sold 55,000. The GTO ushered in the first supercar era, and the Cobra II did the same for the second, but there are significant differences between the two.

The first-generation supercars were essentially stripped sedans and

naissance

of performance cars has arrived,
Cobra II Starga leading the way.



coupes filled to overflowing with huge, powerful V-8 engines and little else. Their chassis were weak and their brakes were almost nonexistent, but neither drawback bothered their buyers, who leaned heavily toward drag racing as their parent sport. And although there were eventually quite a few decent-handling supercars, most retained the big-engine/little-suspension formula.

Today's emerging supercars are altogether different. Their engines will be smaller, more-fuel efficient and cleaner, and their underpinnings feature disc brakes, better steering, better springing and vastly improved tires. They will be better-balanced and easier to drive than the old supercars, because their models in racing come not from the drag

strip, but from the road course.

BORT's latest design, the Monza Mirage, shows this much better than the Cobra II, which, because it was the first of its kind, is more dated. The model for the Mirage was the original Chevy Monza racer, and the replica follows its style faithfully.

But the importance of these cars lies not so much in what they are now but in what they will become when the buyers of America start fiddling with them, and also in what they mean to Detroit. With the kind of success the Cobra II has had, and the certain success of the slippery Monza Mirage, the message to the planners in Motor City will be unmistakable: **Performance is back!**

Supercar Renaissance: Monza Mirage

□ Almost everyone agreed that when Chevy's Monza first appeared back in 1974 it was a slick shape. But it was also immediately obvious that it was too narrow, too tall and had a receding chin. It looked a little muddled, as it should have, since the rotary engine that was to have powered it never appeared.

At the same time the street car was introduced, a racer version was unveiled which became an instant hit. It was red, white and blue, and seemed to be the very embodiment of sleek menace, with its air dams and huge fender flares.

That racer-Monza was the inspiration for the BORT-designed Monza Mirage. Originally conceived with a Porsche-like whale-tail rear deck aerofoil and much wider flares, the Mirage as you see it here is what you can actually buy from your Chevy dealer. The parts that make it a Mirage are the front air dam (fiberglass on our prototype but soft plastic on the production cars), front and rear fender flares, rear deck spoiler and special paint and tape stripes. Right now, the Mirage is available only in white with the red & blue stripes, but BORT acknowledges that it is only a matter of time before other colors are available.

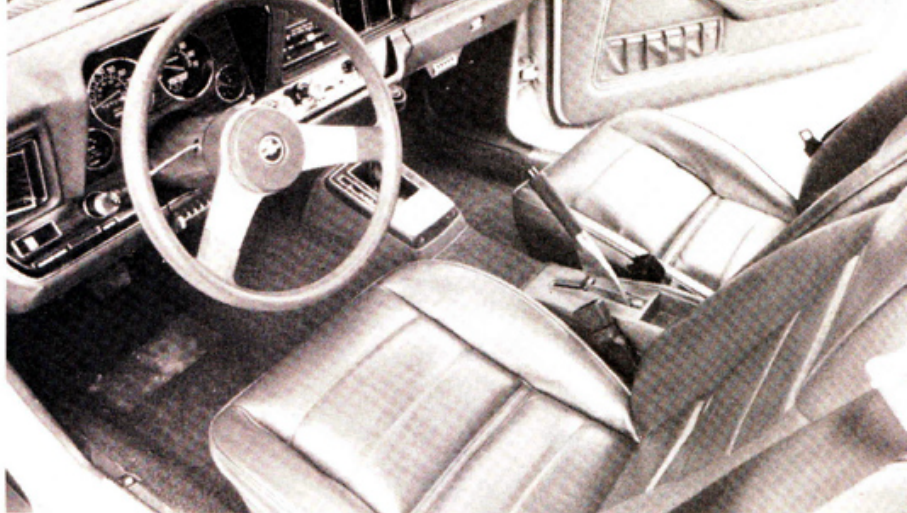
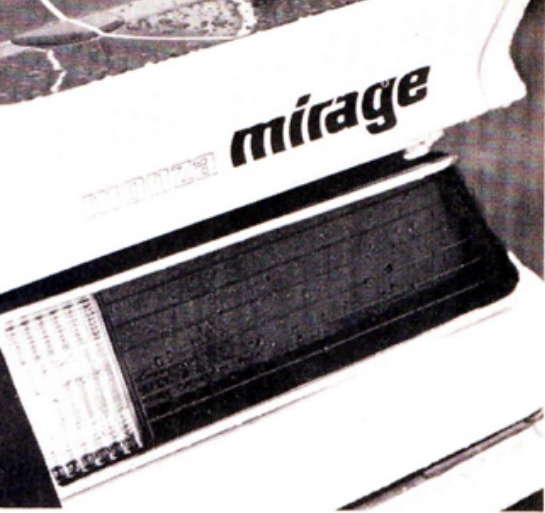
There can be no question that the Mirage effectively corrects some of the deficiencies (from an enthusiast's point of view, anyway) of the Monza's styling, making the car look wider and lower, even with the standard wheels and tires (which our car had). In aerodynamic terms, the Mirage equipment may make less difference, although BORT says that the current IMSA Monza GT racer's aerodynamic aids were followed as closely as possible. Considering that our base Monza was a basic car with a small-block V-8, automatic transmission and no special suspension, we couldn't go fast enough to find out whether or not it all works at speed, but there is no denying the psychological effect. To us, the Mirage is the best-looking American car to come down the pike in a long, long time.

It must have seemed that way to a whole bunch of other people too, because everywhere we went with the car we created an instant traffic jam. And its effect on the police was simple; we might as well have had a huge neon sign on the rear deck that read, "Arrest Me!"

The price for the Mirage kit has not yet been determined, but if you expect something around \$5-600, you probably won't be shocked when it is announced. A sure sign that it will be a success—aside from envious stares on the highway—are the orders already logged by just the western-zone Chevy dealers: a few weeks after they saw the car, they requested 4000 Mirages.

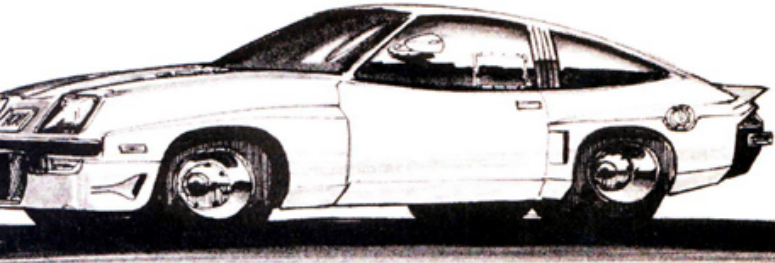
Right now, the Mirage package is being put together for Chevy by the Michigan Auto Techniques Corporation, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but with the success that's sure to come with the Mirage, it's a good bet that you'll see more and more factory Chevys in its style.





LARRY GRIFFIN





Original rough sketch for the Mirage, called at first the Rapide.

Supercar Renaissance: Genesis

□ If you have never heard of BORT, don't feel like you're alone. Even though the intense group of designers and racers behind the name (an acronym, originally, for British Overseas Racing Team) is now in the process of revitalizing the products Detroit brings to your dealer's showroom, they maintain a deliberately low profile.

BORT is the creation of Jack Purcell and Jack Juratovic, both graduates of the Cleveland Institute of Art and veterans of Detroit's design studios. Purcell was a part of the Ford design staff, and Juratovic worked for both Ford and Chrysler before he joined Purcell in setting up BORT as a design studio.

They have kept their company small—no more than five or six designers at any given time—to avoid what Purcell calls the "watering-down" of original design ideas which seems to inevitably happen when a staff grows too large. Since all of the staff members are dyed-in-the-wool car nuts, that's not likely to happen. Moreover, BORT actually provides racers with sponsorship (as in the NHRA title-winning Pro Stock car of Wally Booth), and markets a line of aftermarket pieces for various cars (designed, naturally, by BORT) under the BORT Performance Products label.

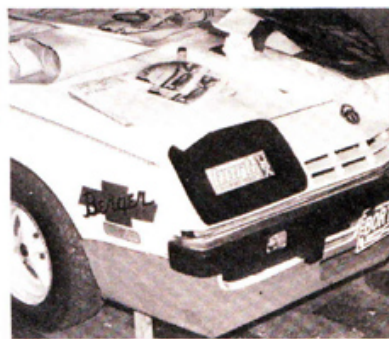
The first major break for the still-young company came with the Pontiac L'il Wide Track Astre, which BORT designed and Motortown Corp. built, and after that, Detroit's Big Three began knocking on BORT's doors more and more frequently, with Hurst Oldsmobiles, T-Tops, the famous Cobra II, the innovative Copper Development Association electric car, and now the Monza Mirage.

BORT has achieved all this because what it sells the automakers is basically excitement . . . excitement on the showroom floor, where interested looks equal rising sales. There is no secret in the fact that Mustang II sales were less than superb until the Cobra II started "re-positioning" the line as "fun" cars, and the Mirage is intended to do the same for the sagging Monza sales.

Thus BORT is really a collection of specialist enthusiasts selling Detroit ways of involving other enthusiasts . . . and in the process setting automotive styles for others to follow. The precedent for all this is easy to find in the specialty coachbuilders of Europe, who have historically performed much the same function for their manufacturers.

BORT uses many of the same techniques. A typical project will involve a request from a manufacturer for a sales-aid design, which results in rough sketches, a clay model, a full-size mockup, and then, if the project is approved and funded, production. In most cases, the actual production is handled by a firm like Motortown or Michigan Automotive Techniques, although in special cases BORT can do it all alone.

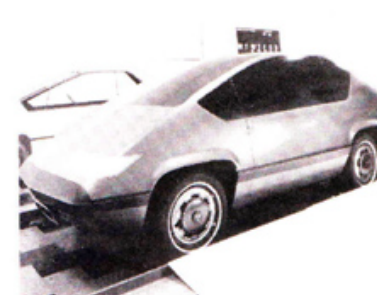
Purcell and Juratovic are optimistic about the future of their small but influential company, and we think they should be. The major automakers must think so too (to judge by the projects already completed and underway), and there is no question that much of the attraction of BORT to them must lie in the undiluted view provided by the company of what the people on the street *really* like, a view not obscured by company policies or partisanism. ■



Under the direction of Design Modeling Manager Doug McNamara, the Mirage's air dam and fender flares were first sculpted in clay. BORT's production process is identical to those of the Big Three.



For 1977, a trick Opel Isuzu is possible; shown here is projected air dam taking shape under Larry Turk.



Clay model and production car designed for Copper Development Association; still undergoing tests, the car may yet see full-scale production.