



Proposals for the '89 Fiero drawn in 1985 continued to move it away from its early "commuter car" roots. A sleeky GTP model (above and right) suggested a racing heritage, and would have been the top Fiero model. A 2M4 (below), also done in 1985, showed other design ideas intended to move the Fiero more into the sports car realm.



But in 1984—actually, beginning on September 22, 1983—the Fiero was greeted with wild enthusiasm and a flood of firm orders. When the model year was over, the Pontiac, Michigan, plant had produced 136,840 Fieros. This number represented a modern-day record for a two-passenger car, and some of the early production cars were purchased for thousands of dollars above the sticker price, which ranged from \$5,349 to \$10,699 without options.

Although Fiero's first year was an astounding success, problems lay on the horizon. Engine fires in the early four-cylinder cars were at the top of the list, resulting in a 1987 recall to fix some 20 percent of the '84 Fieros. The fours were also underpowered as far as many owners or would-be owners were concerned, although this situation was remedied by the availability of a fuel-injected, 2.8-liter V-6 option beginning in 1985, upping horsepower from 92 with the four to a far more satisfying 150 with the six. The availability of a Getrag-designed, GM-built five-speed manual gearbox in June of 1986 also pleased enthusiasts.

Back in the spring of 1981, Ford Motor Company had fielded two versions of a

two-passenger, Escort-based coupe: the 1982 Ford EXP and Mercury LN7 (CA, April 1993). However, anemic performance and controversial styling—particularly the "frog-eyed" front end—prevented them from being a competitive threat to the Fiero. After a good first year, sales plummeted and then remained low.

Much stiffer two-seater competition appeared in 1985 in the form of the Toyota MR2 ("Mister Two"). Like Fiero, it was a mid-engine sports car, but it came with a 112-hp, multi-valve four and weighed nearly 300 pounds less. Base price was \$10,999. CONSUMER GUIDE<sup>®</sup>, in its 1985 Car Comparisons, took an obvious jab at the Fiero when it commented that "Toyota doesn't need any 'wait-till-next-year' promises for the first-year MR2. Mister Two came ready to play." A 145-hp supercharged version bowed in 1988. It was capable of very impressive performance figures combined with excellent fuel mileage, but the base price was moving upward to a hefty \$16,418, although this included a T-top roof. In any case, Toyota considered U.S. sales for a car of this type to be adequate at many thousands of units below Pontiac's expectations—8044 in

1988 for example—and geared production accordingly (and built the car for Japan and other export markets as well).

Certainly on any aesthetic comparison between the Fiero and the MR2, the Fiero was superior. MR2 styling was upright, angular, stiff, and stubby. Fiero, on the other hand, was developed around a smooth, well-proportioned, wedge-shaped profile that unfortunately promised more than the base four-cylinder versions could deliver in the way of performance excitement.

This situation came about primarily because GM's top-level management accepted the Fiero concept initially as a high-mileage economy commuter car only. The lack of a clear and correct focus on Fiero marketing strategy would end up plaguing the car's development and success throughout its all-too-short five-year life span. Toyota, meanwhile, must have been very impressed with Fiero's outstanding visual appeal, because its completely redesigned '91 MR2 appears to have been heavily influenced by Fiero GT styling themes.

Toyota is still producing the MR2, which now has the playing field for this market segment pretty much to itself. Ironically, however, sales have dwindled