

dramatically, to only 5292 units in the U.S. in calendar 1992, compared to 9676 in 1991. This has led to persistent rumors that the MR2 will soon be discontinued. Although not true—a facelifted MR2 will reportedly soldier on for a few more years—this leaves a buyer's options narrowed down to the more traditional Mazda Miata roadster, Mercury's semi-sports-car Capri, or Honda's new-for-'93 Civic del Sol, the CRX successor.

The Honda two-place CRX coupe debuted in 1984 as part of the company's all-new subcompact Civic line, offering low-cost, economical, and fun-to-drive capability that was at the same time commuter sensible and enthusiast oriented. The sportier CRX Si was particularly appealing to enthusiast drivers (CA, December 1987). Honda's ability to bridge both sectors was unique.

The Ford EXP and Mercury LN7 twins, on the other hand, had a small 1.6-liter four-cylinder engine like Honda's CRX, but that's where the similarity ended. The Ford coupes were uninspired performers and lacked the sparkling handling attributes that characterized the CRX. The EXP/LN7 duo seemed to be aimed strictly at the commuter transport role, with no real pretense at pleasing enthusiasts. By 1984, the LN7 was gone, while the EXP picked up the LN7's "bubbleback" glass rear hatch and a conventional Escort front for 1986-87, only to disappear after 1988. Not surprisingly, neither the EXP nor the LN7 developed a loyal following.

The Fiero story has roots in another General Motors product line surrounded by controversy. The compact Corvair, introduced by Chevrolet for the 1960 model year, was the brainchild of Ed Cole, father of the 1949 Cadillac overhead-valve V-8 engine and the phenomenally successful '55 Chevy "small-block" V-8, still in production today. The Corvair was a radically engineered car aimed at the most conservative, dollar-sensitive market segment. The emerging compact car category saw Ford's conventional 1960 Falcon, and even Chrysler Corporation's more stylish 1960 Valiant, achieve large sales volume, while Chevy's air-cooled, rear-engine, flat-six-cylinder Corvair was a great sales disappointment to GM.

Like the Fiero, the Corvair missed its initial marketing target, but was saved by a brilliant strategy of developing the car's unique character to appeal to those who had more interest in unique engi-



More ideas for the '89 Fiero that was not to be. The silver base series Fiero coupe (top and center) indicated an evolutionary styling approach, amplifying and expanding on prior Fiero themes. Hidden headlights remained a feature. A ragtop—or modern-day roadster (above)—was investigated and would have been a welcome, if low-volume, addition to the line.