

Fiero Futures: The '89 That Should Have Been

by Dick Nesbitt

The year 1984 saw two newcomers to the American scene. One was the Pontiac Fiero, the other Collectible Automobile. The two came together in that very first issue in the Future Collectibles department. Both looked forward to a long and bright future, and CA optimistically predicted in May 1984 that the Fiero was "a sure-fire keeper for the year 2000." Little did we know then that we would be writing the Fiero's obituary in the October 1988 issue. But perhaps that was being too hasty. After all, the most desirable models of the Fiero are increasingly being collected, guaranteeing that Pontiac's two-seater will not be forgotten. Further, plans were well along for restyled and reengineered Fieros for 1989 and beyond. Dick Nesbitt, a name familiar to regular CA readers, marks CA's Tenth Anniversary by returning to the Fiero his collectible, ultra-low-mileage '88 Formula coupe and the Fieros that might have been for '89 and beyond—had the little two-seater Pontiac survived.

March 2, 1988, was a day Fiero enthusiasts will not soon forget. Pontiac General Manager, J. Michael Losh, officially announced that Fiero plans would be permanently discontinued. The last Fiero would be built on August 16, 1988, and the plant—which produced only the Fiero—would close the following day.

Many activities were organized for and by Fiero plant employees. The most significant event was a drawing to award the last two Fieros to roll off the assembly line to two lucky employees. Louis Marley and Mike Kelley were the winners of the fully optioned top-of-the-line GTs, with Kelley receiving the very last car off the line.

I remember reading Mike Losh's announcement in *Automotive News*, the industry's weekly newspaper, with astonishment and disbelief. Reflecting on that late March 1988 announcement, I decided that I would order a new '88 Fiero to "put away." My choice was a fully optioned Formula coupe in code number 77U Medium Rod Metallic paint. The Formula performance option was available only in 1988, and for me was the ideal choice. I preferred the base coupe's styling compared that of the more extroverted GT version, but I wanted the V-6 engine, 15-inch diamond-spoke wheels, and upgraded suspension previously limited to GT models.

The Formula combined the GT perfor-

mance equipment with the base coupe to offer a more affordable enthusiast alternative, base priced at \$10,999 (versus \$13,999). This strategy was much like

ful Plymouth Road Runner concept of 1968, two decades earlier. Two options I couldn't order were power sport mirrors and the subwoofer speaker system; these items were restricted to GTs only.

My car now has 247 miles on it as of November 1993. The '88 Fieros were substantially improved over previous models, most notably by completely redesigning the front and rear suspension systems specifically for the Fiero. Formula and GT models got a firmer W56 suspension package than the base coupe. Pontiac claimed that the new underpinnings transformed the Fiero "from a sporty car to a true sports car." The earlier 1984-87 models had utilized front suspension parts from the lowly Chevette and compact X-cars.

The restyled front and rear fascias on the base and Sport Coupe models was a significant improvement for 1987, and the 1986 GT redesign sporting distinct swept-back "flying buttress" sail panels was well received. Unfortunately, none of these upgrades or others could halt the steady decline in sales after 1984.

This '89 Fiero styling proposal was a further evolution of the top-line '88 GT. Note the deep bodyline sculpture ending in an air scoop and the sleek roof sail panel.

