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LEMON LINES

These cars are so ugly, they make taking the bus look good

BY MISTY HARRIS

The much-maligned AMC Pacer, a 1970s icon and pop culture punchline, has a new blight on its resume after being voted the worst car design of all time.

According to an online survey of nearly 2,500 car enthusiasts, the discontinued Pacer — most familiar to the post-production generation as the Mirthmobile from the 1992 movie *Wayne's World* — is the most ill-conceived vehicle in automotive history.

Survey respondents likened the Pacer to a “pregnant roller skate” that went “0-to-60 in 4½ hours,” with one person observing that “AMC’s only conceivable excuse for this engineering and stylistic horror would be if their 1970s design crew was tripping on massive quantities of acid.”

The survey was conducted by Hagerty Insurance, the largest U.S. provider of insurance to classic-car collectors. Respondents were all policyholders with the company.

“This is the ugly duckling list of cars,” says McKeel Hagerty, chief executive of Hagerty Insurance. “Look at the ’70s cars — the Pacer, the Pinto, the Matador and, to a degree, the Corvair — and you see why it was generally not considered a great era of design.”

Hagerty acknowledges he’s the proud owner of a 1976 Pacer,

which he says has “significantly” increased in value since its production.

According to Jeni Panhorst, founder of the Internet’s longest-running Pacer enthusiast Web site, the car’s divisive nature is what makes it memorable more than three decades after its introduction.

“People either love it or they hate it,” says Panhorst, who has owned three Pacers since she was a teenager in the mid-’90s. “It’s so round and bulbous and admittedly odd-looking, especially in the context of its time. It turns heads wherever you go.”

Ranking second on the “ugly duckling” list was the Zastava-manufactured Yugo. One survey respondent, writing about the universally ridiculed car, wrote: “I used to work for a dealer and the last [Yugo] on the lot was an ’88 model that never got sold. It was there until 1991, when it was given away as a promotional gift on a radio show.”

Rounding out the top three was the Ford Pinto, a subcompact that earned a dubious reputation as “the barbecue that seats four” thanks to a design that made it possible for the fuel tank to be easily damaged in a rear-end collision.

Taking fourth and fifth place respectively were the Pontiac Aztek and Chevrolet Vega. The

former is the newest model on the list, having been introduced in late 2000 and discontinued a handful of years later. One survey respondent remarked of Pontiac’s crossover vehicle: “There must have been a front-end design team and a rear-end design team. And the two teams never spoke to each other!”

The Vega inspired similar amounts of criticism, drawing such comments as: “A car that began to rust on the showroom floor brought a whole new meaning to the term ‘planned obsolescence.’”

Ranking sixth through 10th were the AMC Gremlin, described as “the most hideously ill-proportioned car of all time;” the Chevrolet Corvair, derided by respondents as underpowered and unsafe; the AMC Matador, which one person thought looked like a spaceship; Ford’s Edsel, described as a “gas-guzzling, three-ton behemoth with a toilet-seat grill;” and the Chevrolet Chevette, which made the list more for poor performance than esthetics.

“These are mostly cars that had a bad reputation,” says Hagerty. “Corvairs, for example, were not bad looking. Some were even kind of cute, but having fumes coming into the driver’s compartment doesn’t help the success of a car.”

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Clockwise from top, the 1958 Ford Edsel, a 1964 Chevrolet Corvair, a 2001 Pontiac Aztek, a 1978 Ford Pinto, a 1976 Chevrolet Chevette, a 1974 AMC Matador and a 1958 Ford Edsel were all on a recent list of the ugliest cars ever designed.



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