



OPINION

AM Opinion

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EU DESIGN RIGHTS POLICY FLAWED

Unlike the UK, 16 EU member states allow car manufacturers to register the design of visible replacement parts, i.e. body panels, lights and automotive glass. Such registration confers design rights on carmakers and enables them to prevent independent manufacturers from selling spare parts in EU countries where the design is registered.

Last September, the European Commission announced a proposal to amend the EU design directive adopted in 1998. This directive gave Member States the option to maintain design rights for visible spare parts.

If the Commission's proposal is adopted by the European Parliament and the European Council of Ministers, this option will cease and the EU market for such parts will open to competition by independents. The annual value of this market is approximately 10 billion Euros.

This change is almost inevitable. An essential policy goal of the EU is to create a European internal market within which goods flow freely. Yet, a UK-based independent parts manufacturer is currently free



to sell a replacement bumper in Belgium but not in France. And the ban on sales of independently manufactured must-match parts in place in many European countries means key provisions of the 2000 block exemption Regulation remain dead letter.

But the economic rationale for the proposal is less satisfactory. There are no clear indications that the abolition of design rights will have the dramatic impact some expect on the prices paid by car owners for spare parts.

The Commission itself seems

sceptical, stating that prices "should" decrease.

If the aim of the proposed reform is to create a level playing field between carmakers and independent parts manufacturers, then one cannot ignore the fact that carmakers bear the additional costs of designing the parts in the first place. The Commission retorts that only 0.7% of a vehicle manufacturer's revenues on average is spent on developing body designs.

However, when one is dealing with complex products, each cost that is required to achieve the finished product can be made to appear minimal by juxtaposing it with overall income. In real terms, design costs are significant and it is highly regrettable that the Commission did not include in its proposal a plan for the fair financial compensation of car manufacturers.

Catriona Hatton, partner, and Aymeric Dumas-Eymard, associate, Hogan & Hartson, LLP



Got an opinion you'd like to share? Don't keep it to yourself, email the AM editor at stephen.briers@emap.com

THE BIG PICTURE

STEPHEN BRIERS (stephen.briers@emap.com)

Catch up with AM online

Yes, I know, we're not even half way through December and already I'm wishing you all Merry Christmas and informing you that this is our last issue until January (some of you might be asking whether we actually do any work at all in December - we do, I promise).

So how are you - and how are we - going to make it through the increasingly cold and dark days up to, over and beyond the Christmas and New Year breaks? Where will you get your fortnightly fix of the latest news, analysis and product information?

Well, you might not be getting a paper product from us through your letterbox, but we will be staying in touch thanks to the internet (after all, we preach to you about maintaining contact with your customers).

AM-online is gathering a growing fanbase among retailers, manufacturers and the aftermarket - almost 4,000 of you have registered with us since the site's relaunch in June - and we will be using this facility to keep you informed over the next four weeks.

"We will be emailing you in the New Year to gauge opinions - we need your views"

But you won't necessarily have to keep logging on to the website (www.am-online.com), although that option is available. We will be sending out regular email bulletins each week, proactively updating you with the latest happenings in the automotive industry.

If you want to receive these bulletins, but don't think we currently have your email details, please let us know. You can also register on the website and send us your feedback on any issue concerning you. And while you're at it, why not send us your views on AM and how you believe we can better fulfill your needs.

To view AM-online you have to register by giving some basic details about yourself and your job. Our daily and weekly news updates are proving popular as are the recruitment emails and the Trade Stock section where AM-online acts as an intermediary between used car retailers and stock locators.

We recognise the need for both AM and AM-online to continue developing. To help us achieve this, we are planning to send out an email survey early in the New Year to gauge users' opinions of www.am-online.com and to enable them to put forward suggestions for improvement. Please help us by completing the survey - we need your views.

So, Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year to all our readers. Our next issue will arrive at your businesses on January 14, 2005. Until then, to stay up-to-date with what's going on in your industry, log on to our website or simply wait for our news bulletins to arrive on your desktop via email.

AM THE LITTLE PICTURE



LAST ISSUE: FIAT 1100

We thought we'd have to keep the AM bottle of Champagne on ice over the Christmas break - but an 11th-hour fax from Robert Cooper of Cooper Bros, Wishaw, secured the prize for the December 3 Little Picture.

The car featured was a Fiat 1100, circa 1953 pictured on the Turin test track. It was one of scores of 1100s spawned since the late 1930s, but a major new generation known as the 'nuova 1100' or 103, was introduced at the Geneva Motor Show in 1953.

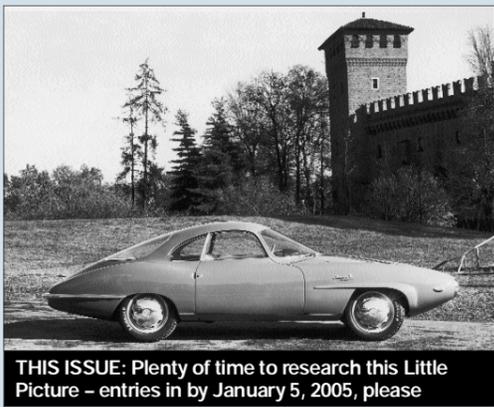
While the body was monocoque the rest was pretty conventional for the time - 36bhp 1,089cc four-cylinder engine driving the

rear wheels through a four-speed gearbox with column mounted shift. By all accounts it handled fairly well, thanks to independent front suspension with anti-roll bar, compensating for the rear leaf springs.

The first major revision to the 1100 range came in 1956 when the second series, 103E/D, was released in saloon (40bhp), Trasformabile convertible, estate Familiare and Turismo Veloce (50bhp) variants.

Later evolutions of the 103E/D family were 103H or 1100 Lusso (1959-60) or 1100 Special and 1100 Export (1960-62), but not 1100D (1962-66) nor 1100R (1966-69). The last Italian 1100 made way for the front-wheel drive Fiat 128 in 1969 after a run of 340,000 units - but it's still being built in India, mainly for taxi work.

Meanwhile, we'll need your educated guesses for the oddball below by January 5.



THIS ISSUE: Plenty of time to research this Little Picture - entries in by January 5, 2005, please

Media watch

Another tasteful calendar

The WI has a lot to answer for since it pioneered - for charitable purposes - the use of ordinary folk wearing little more than an enigmatic smile.

As a follow-up to the press office nudes in the SMMT Press and PR Guide 2004, Volkswagen Group has got every Audi, Seat, Skoda and VW department - including Finance and Legal - to pose in the buff for its 2005 calendar. Its title is 'Nice Lemons - the juicy personalities of the Volkswagen Group'.

Pirelli it is not, but for every copy shifted, £5 is donated to BBC Children in Need. Phwooaarrr - Sprung Durch Technik, indeed...



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