

The birth of a new car

Merkur Club of America

In September 1982, Ford unveiled the Ford Sierra at the Frankfurt Motor show. The Sierra was the long awaited replacement for the highly successful Cortina, which had been in production for over 20 years. Over 4.2 million Cortinas were built during its 20 year life span and it was the Mk 3 Cortina, which was launched in 1970, that was the first Euro Ford to use the 4-cylinder Pinto engine.



Work on a replacement for the Cortina started in the late 1970s under the code name Project Toni. The car was designed to be a mid-size, versatile model to fill the slot between the Escort and the Granada.

The energy crisis of 1978-79 influenced greatly the design of the car and extreme care was taken with breaking the sharp lines of the Cortina and in the aerodynamics. The resulting bodyform resulted in a Cd of .34 verses .45 for its predecessor, the Cortina. In fact the Sierra diverged from the successful Cortina in a number of ways the hatchback, the Independent Rear Suspension, MacPherson struts; all these were a breakaway from tradition. The Sierra was to be a 1980s car whereas the Cortina was a 1960s car. This was a great risk for Ford and public opinion was widely varied.

" odds are that any two people picked randomly off the street would disagree about the styling"

Car & Driver

In 1981, a full year before the Sierra was unveiled and while the Cortina was still in production, Ford exhibited to the automotive press their Probe III concept vehicle. This car, which was a more rounded ground-effect version of what would later be known as the Sierra, was in fact based on the Sierra tooling which was already in place. Far from being the concept car that the Sierra grew out of, it was a derivation of the basic Sierra, complete with a bi-plane wing, which would find its way onto the XR4 models.

"[the XR4Ti] looks like a geothermal event bulging up through the tarmac"

Unattributed

The Sierra was released with an amazing three different body styles and no fewer than eight different engines. The fastest and most sporty of these was named the XR4i. (The i stood for injection). The XR4i, was instantly recognizable from the bi-plane rear spoiler and unconventional six lite body shell, as well as the contrasting gray plastic cladding on the lower part of the car. The XR4i was powered by the 2.8L Cologne V6 engine which generated a respectable 150bhp. Only a little over 25,000 Sierra XR4i were produced at Fords Genk, Belgium plant and production was halted in 1985. The venerable XR4x4 and Sierra Cosworth were then left to carry the Sierra name.



"Man & high performance machine in perfect harmony"

Ford advertisement 1983

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