

# TESTUDO

*Rugged, Functional and Highly Streamlined,  
This Experimental Corvair Borrows its  
Name from the Italian for Sea Turtle*

I ARRIVED AT Carrozzeria Bertone expecting only to take pictures of an idea car but was greeted with an eager, "Where do you want to go to shake it down?"

This matter-of-fact approach to things is typical of the Bertone organization and whenever an invitation is extended to sample such a dream of an idea car as the Corvair-engined *Testudo*, I always accept in a split second. Testudo is Italian for a sea-going tortoise, which the car resembles because of its low, rounded streamlining.

With just fingertip pressure on the roof latch, the counterbalanced canopy swings forward and you step over the frame and down into the interior. Inconvenience is neither more nor less than, for example, maneuvering into a Mercedes-Benz 300-SL coupe. The steeply reclining, deeply padded seats are superbly comfortable and when you snap the canopy down over your head you have a rare sense of being snugly packaged to do a job efficiently well. You are part of a machine for

transportation, in a sense that has been all but lost in the transportation car field.

The Corvair Monza engine gives a husky roar at a touch of the key, and you're on your way. The car weighs only 1980 lb. and it accelerates in all gears like a shot. The engine's noise level is not low, but the sound is good and it permits easy conversation at all speeds. The ride is on the hard side, but over dirt roads it takes deep ruts with an even stride. The seating position and rectangular steering wheel take some getting used to, and cornering, with the wheel banging against your legs, takes a lot of attention. But the overall driving experience is thrilling and most satisfying. You know that you're doing something new, that you're one of the fortunate first to savor an experience that one day may be the norm. That, of course, is the idea behind the car.

Carrozzeria Bertone is one of Italy's, and the world's, biggest builders of special car bodies and has always been

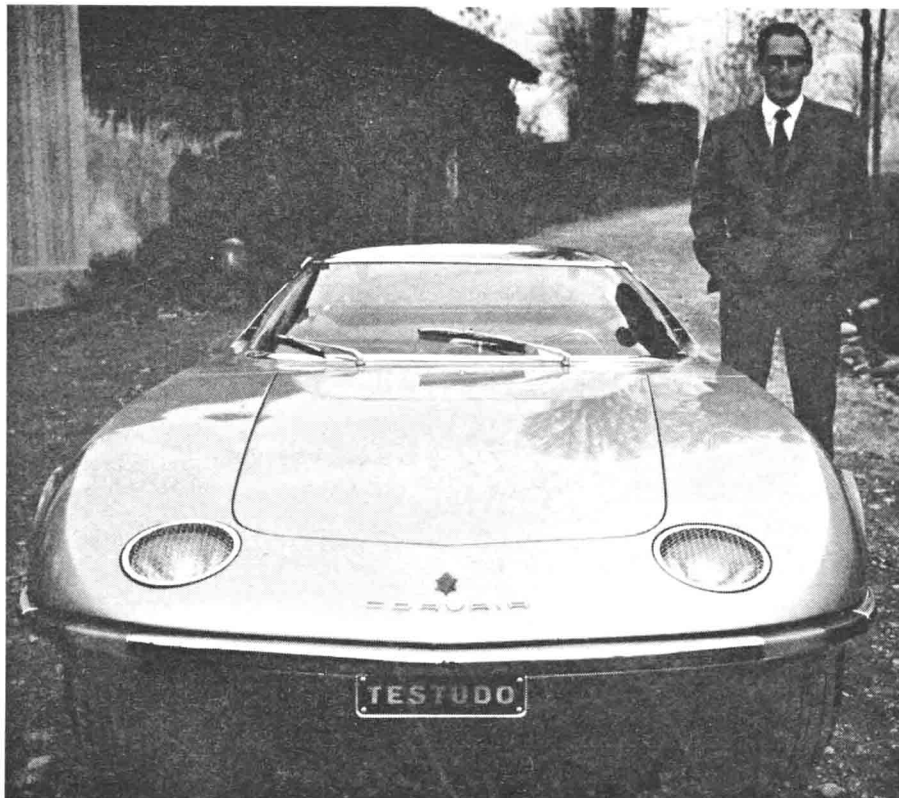
BY GRIFF BORGESON

outstanding for originality, attention to aerodynamics and a characteristic voluptuousness of form. The company's fantastic success with the Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint coupe—it has built over 35,000 of them to date—kept it so busy with production problems that it was forced to neglect any major experimental activities for several years. Now the Testudo is proof that the touch behind the brilliant and bizarre Alfa B.A.T. designs of the 1950s is stronger than ever.

Nuccio Bertone does not claim to be a designer. But his knowledge of, and insistence on, what he likes gives a family look to his products. Most of his recent creations have been designed by Giorgio Giugiaro and it was on this designer that he laid the Testudo problem.

Independent coachbuilders once had a massive outlet for their creativity in designing one-off bodies for individual clients. This outlet has been closed both by vastly increased labor costs and by the new preoccupation of coachbuilders with the mass production of special bodies for big automobile manufacturers. This has led to a leveling of creative expression, and to a conservatism and imitation which are fundamentally opposed to the coachbuilder's mission as a creative artist.

So Bertone decided that the time had come to strike out into the unknown once more. He decided to work with a rear-engine chassis and instructed Giugiaro to develop for the body an overall line or form that was radically new, even revolutionary, but



GRIFF BORGESEN PHOTOS

**LOW, LOW** overall height of the Testudo is revealed when Bertone executive Gaveglio stands beside door. Headlights rotate up for nighttime use.

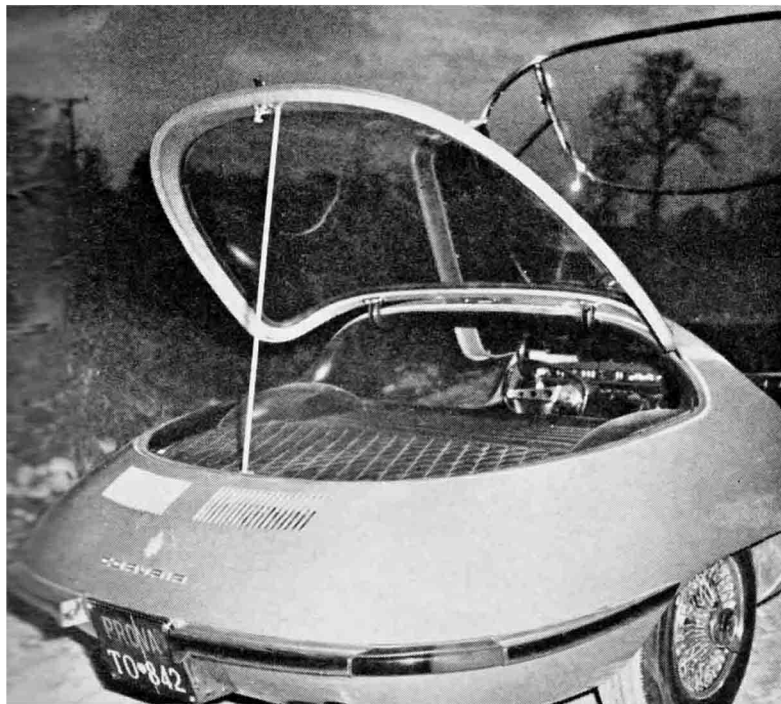
which the public would accept. With the line agreed upon, its originality had to be reflected in details throughout the car, down to the smallest. And this could be no mere dream car; it was to be fully functional, capable of being manufactured and sold to contented and proud customers. Let it be a frank

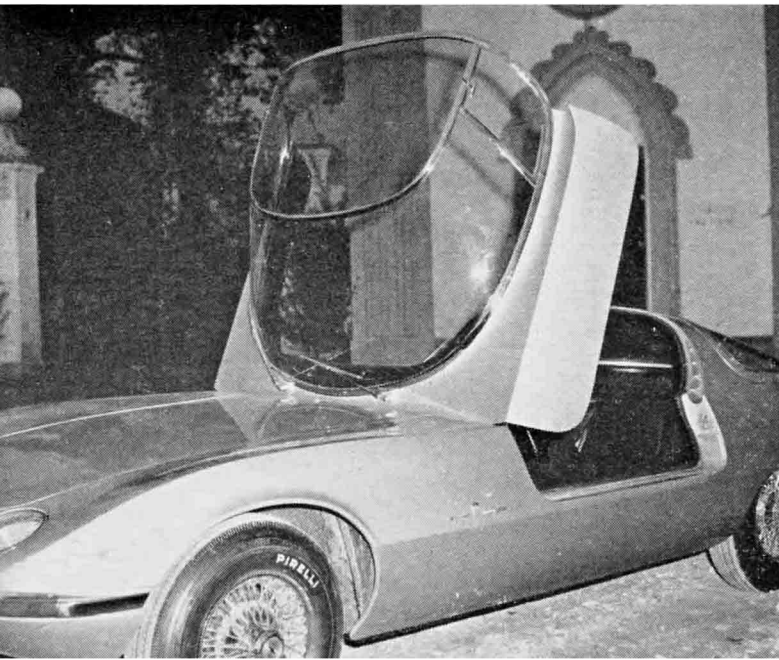
*gran turismo* machine but let all its ideas and solutions to problems be equally applicable to a popular machine for routine travel. The Corvair chassis was chosen and Giugiaro went to work.

The design was in a very advanced stage when L. W. Johnson of the Gen- ▶

**REAR HATCH** swings up to allow access to rear deck area. Engine hatch is under that, also swings up for service.

**AFT VIEW** shows why it was nicknamed "Testudo." Overall height is only 41.8 in., overall width only 67.8 in.





**ENTRANCE CANOPY** is counterbalanced to provide finger-tip control, but tinted dome may give passengers a high temperature.



**DRIVING POSITION** is typically Italian—arms straight out, driver nearly reclining. Rectangular wheel might hamper cornering, though.

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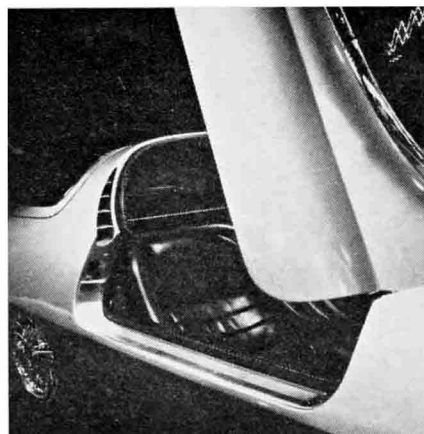
eral Motors Styling staff paid Bertone a visit. Nuccio proudly showed him how the Testudo was shaping up and Jordan broke the news to him about GM's own Monza SS coupe project, which was at least as advanced. This was the first knowledge that either had of the other's work along such similar yet distinctive lines. The Monza's striking resemblance to the Bertone-designed Arnolt-Bristol of about a decade before seems not to have been discussed.

Bertone's insistence upon functionalism demanded optimum vision and comfort, and a minimum of fatigue for driver and passenger. And, for a GT machine—a top-performance tourer—aerodynamic qualities of course were a prime functional consideration. Here Bertone did not have to rely on wind tunnel tests. His own great experience with these matters was enough and minor irregularities were pinpointed by wool-tuft air flow patterns on the road. Aerodynamic considerations, too, ultimately determined the size and shape of the out-of-round steering wheel. The wheel makes possible cutting almost 2 in. from the car's total height.

With road use in mind rather than competition, Bertone elected to mount the car's engine in the rear, rather than centrally, in favor of a short and stiff but roomy chassis. It is more than 13

in. shorter than the Corvair Monza. The Testudo's body consists chiefly of 0.031 in. steel sheet, which is ruggedly reinforced, including a roll bar aft of the occupants. The hood and other minor panels are of aluminum. The windscreen is of safety glass and the rear canopy (which gives access to the engine) and the dark-tinted overhead panel are of Plexiglas. And let it be said here that this is just as brutal a transmitter of solar radiation, as diabolical a failure in warm weather, as it was in the Ford-Mercury experiments with this idea in the mid-1950s.

**AIR INLETS** for engine cooling are in "roll bar" panel behind the driver.



The Testudo was first shown to the public at Geneva in 1963 and the public "bought" it to an extent never approached by earlier Bertone idea cars. It is beautiful from every angle, inside and out, and it moves with excitement and verve. Rumors are as cheap in Italy as elsewhere and the Testudo's future has its share. Porsche and Corvair are the obvious names to toss about and solemn hints are dropped of "production in '65 or '66."

Don't count on anything like this. What can be counted on, it seems clear, is that Bertone continues to stand among the unquestioned leaders in his special field. Certainly his proposal for a very new type of modern vehicle is as beautiful as it is different. And, conforming to the basic requirement, it is fully functional. The Plexiglas dome can be corrected with a stroke of the designer's pencil. ■

**LUGGAGE FITS** under front hood. Car is 169.4 in. long, weighs only 1980 lb.

