

# BERTONE X1-9



**R**emember the Fiat X1-9? It was introduced to the Australian market in June 1978, complete with a 1290cc engine and four-speed manual, and at \$9637 (enough for a five-litre HZ Monaro four-door) it was an expensive little car. Little was the operative word, especially if you were travelling with anything more than a toothbrush. But it was fun motoring being, basically, the first mid-engined car that didn't carry an exotic name (like Ferrari or Lamborghini) and an exotic price. It out-handled practically everything this side of a works Yamaha. And with the little 1290cc motor and the lack of an overdrive it had one unique quality. You could drive the hell out of it and not break any laws.

In August 1981 it went up to 1498ccs and an overdrive was added, but by 1983, when the price had climbed to well over \$15,000 (five-litre SL/X Commodore territory) it was quietly removed from the market, and Fiat tucked its tail between its legs and concentrated on selling the Superbrava and introducing the dreadful Argenta.

A lot of people lamented the passing of the X1-9. It was a genuine sports car in an age of plastic. It made no compromises at a time when cars were trying to be all things to all people. And like all sports cars should; it turned heads.

Well, the X1-9 is back again. In fact you can hardly pick the difference between the new one and the old one unless you have an eye for bumpers that can withstand US barrier tests. The surprising thing is that, a full 15 years after it was introduced to the European market in 1973, the car still looks terrific, still turns heads, and is still great fun to drive.

The only difference is that it now wears a new badge.

Just as the designers of the 124 Spider, Pininfarina, took over its production from Fiat in the early 80s, so the X1-9 design house, Bertone, has taken on its production. The sexy little two-seater now wears an angled B front and rear and has no Fiat identification at all (until you go hunting).

So how does an X1-9 shape up 15 years later? To find out we put one up against its most obvious competitor, the Toyota MR2. And it proved to be a most interesting exercise. Although the MR2 is a state of the art car there can be absolutely no doubt that its design roots lie squarely with the X1-9. But the people at Toyota have had a long time to consider the concept of a two-seater with a transverse four-cylinder mounted ahead of the rear wheels and astern of the driver, and it shows. The Toyota goes harder and is a far smoother car to drive, with a better gearshift

# COMPARISON



