

# A Concept of the Future (And the Past)

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Pininfarina, an Italian car company founded by Battista "Pinin" Farina in 1930, has long been a symbol of creative extremes in the automotive industry. In its early years Pininfarina operated on a small scale, producing a handful of prototypes and very limited runs of production cars. Soon the company began to incorporate aerodynamics into its designs and the Pininfarina name quickly became famous in the automotive industry.

The company continued to expand long after Battista's death in 1966. Pininfarina partnered with manufacturers such as Ferrari, Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Lancia and more to create mass production cars as well as some of the most stunning concepts ever built.

To commemorate Pininfarina's 75th anniversary, the company has partnered with Maserati and Motorola to create the Pininfarina Birdcage 75th Concept, a high-tech design with inspired styling and twelve cylinders. The name "Birdcage" is in reference to the Maserati racing legends of the past which feature some of the same tube construction styling that can be found in the concept.

The Birdcage 75th is based on the same carbon fiber chassis as the Maserati supercar, the MC12, and shares its 6.0 liter V-12 engine that puts out more than 700 hp. The mid-mounted engine is mated to the car's rear drive wheels by a 6-speed sequential manual gearbox. With a weight of approximately 3300 pounds, the Birdcage 75th should have no problem getting up some serious speed.

On a recent trip to the 2005 SEMA convention in Las Vegas, I had an opportunity to inspect the new Pininfarina concept first hand. What makes most concept cars special is its styling, and the Birdcage 75th has plenty to look at. The basic shape of the car is based upon the most effective aerodynamic shapes in racing. The entire car has a tear drop shape to it and the roofline is low and unobtrusive. The exterior surfaces are low and uncluttered to give it a streamlined look. The upper half of the Pininfarina's cabin is transparent, offering as clear a view of the road as possible.

Up front, the nose has the familiar Maserati styling as seen on current models such as the Quattroporte. The front grille feeds cool air to the engine and the brakes and is flanked by stylish LED headlights. The rear of the Birdcage 75th boasts thin rectangular LED taillights that fit nicely with the overall design. The entire package sits on top of 20" front wheels and 22" rear wheels styled in the tradition of the Maserati trident (the company's logo).

There are no doors on the new Pininfarina. To access the interior the entire front section of the car opens. Inside, the interior has been seamlessly mated to the carbon fiber construction of the body. A heads-up display is mounted on a triangular tube structure that is reminiscent of the historic Birdcage Tipo 63. The Birdcage 75th has a host of new technological gizmos (as is to be expected with any concept) including infrared cameras that allow you to enhance vision at night, a central computer that performs many tasks, and more. But what I found most impressive is something a little more subtle. There are now side mirrors on the Birdcage 75th, instead cameras relay images to screens inside the car. The screens are placed at the very outer edges of the dashboard so it is almost as if you are looking at mirrors, like a traditional automobile. The lack of side mirrors also adds to the aerodynamics and styling of the Pininfarina.

The Birdcage 75th hosts a number of Motorola designed communication features based on Motorola's iDEN cell phones. Some of the features are a bit over my head and are probably not likely to be used by many people aside from hardcore techno-buffs. But then again, this Pininfarina is a concept, and concept cars don't have to make sense.

Overall the Pininfarina Birdcage 75th Concept is an impressive beast that succeeds in blending technology and good old fashion racing heritage together in a seamless and stylish way. If this is the future of the modern sports car, I like it. We can only hope that one day it will make it to the mass production line. Zack Engel is the Lead Event Correspondent for The Driver's Seat, a bi-weekly e-zine produced by Nuts for Cars.

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