

The Pontiac Fiero was only in production for four years. GM discontinued it, citing lack of interest — and then the popular Mazda Miata was introduced and sparked a buying frenzy.

Rise and fall of legendary Pontiac Fiero

SPORTS CAR: GM's classic two-seater had a short life but its legacy lives on in the new Pontiac Solstice

BY NIGEL MATTHEWS

Pontiac is about to do what it should have done 22 years ago — build a two-seater convertible sports car.

The new Pontiac Solstice is very reminiscent of the Fiero, in that it uses a four-cylinder engine, has a 50/50 weight distribution, four-wheel disc brakes and rear-wheel drive.

Naturally, it has the newer technology available to us today such as air bags, ABS brakes, On-Star, cruise control, etc. The Fiero was discontinued at the end of the 1988 model year. GM denied that it had anything to do with quality problems and blamed the situation on Americans having lost interest in two-seater cars.

However, Mazda was at the same time launching the Miata and a buying frenzy was taking place. People were prepared to pay \$4,000 over the MSRP just

to get their hands on one. If GM had corrected some of the niggling problems and worked on introducing a convertible Fiero, they might have done well.

The Fiero was Pontiac's first production two-seater economy-commuter sports car. The driveable metal space frame was a first of its kind for GM, weighing just 600 pounds, made of high-strength low-alloy steel.

The outer panels, weighing just 175 pounds, were made of Enduraflex and were easily removable — very similar to the Saturn we are familiar with today.

In 1985, the Fiero GI was introduced — it looked like it had just come off the racetrack from an IMSA race. Much more aerodynamic, with side skirts, ground effects and a rear spoiler, the shape was pleasing to the eye.

Fitted with the V6 engine it sounded great. The gutless four-cylinder economy two-seater sports car finally had

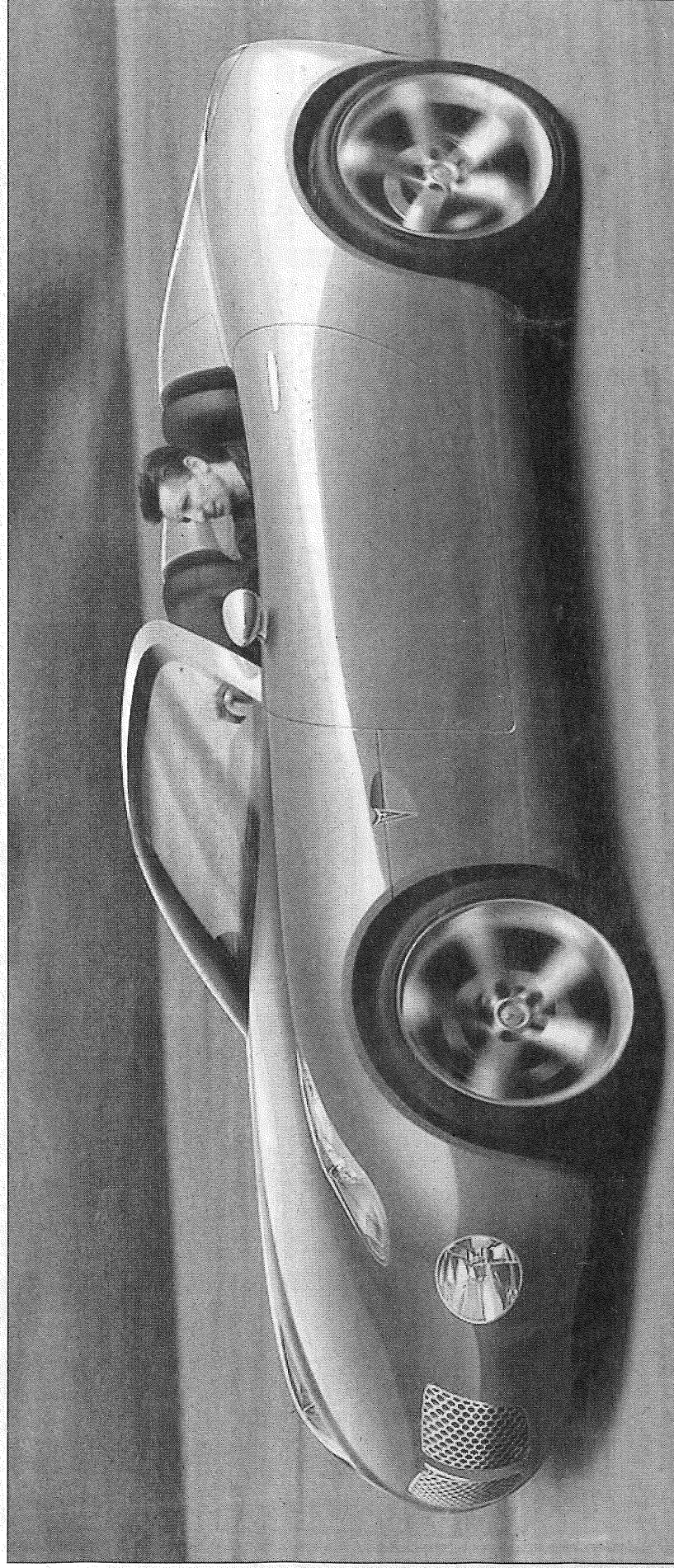
some get-up-and-go and even looked good.

In 1986, a new semi-fastback was introduced with wrap-around taillights. In my opinion, this is the one to own.

In 1988, some suspension changes were made and then it all came to an abrupt end. I have seen this happen many times. Just when a car is getting better and better and seems to be sorted out, they pull the plug on it, just like the Corvair, TR7 and now the Fiero.

Some 370,167 Fieros were produced. If you regretted not buying a 1966 Shelby Mustang or a 1967 Austin-Healey Mk III when they were affordable, perhaps you should consider looking for a nice late-model Fiero GI. Have some fun now and over time the value could go through the roof.

Nigel Matthews is the appraiser of vintage and collector cars for the Insurance Corporation of B.C. as well as a regular contributor to Driving.



The new Pontiac Solstice is reminiscent of the Fiero when it comes to engineering, but it also has all of the latest technology features, such as cruise control and On-Star.