

## Vincenzo Lancia's last masterpieces

If Fiat continued to pursue widespread distribution with models sold in the hundreds of thousands, first with the Italia and later with the Topolino, Lancia remained a sign of quality elegance and exclusivity on four wheels, combined with cutting-edge technology and revolutionary innovations. These unrepeatable features of each car leaving the Turinese brand's factories were the reason why it remained unaffected by the difficult economic and financial times. Despite this, Vincenzo Lancia was aware of the scars left by the economic crisis on the wallets

of the Italian people and asked his design engineers to create an affordable model without compromising the brand's quality. The market needed compact models, both in terms of dimension and engine size, which could provide adequate performance combined with contained consumption and lower maintenance costs, all without sacrificing space in the driver and passenger compartments or in the trunk. The answer from the Lancia technicians was originally called the Progetto 231 and later became the *veturo leggero* Lancia (light Lancia vehicle). Following

tradition, it was presented at the Paris Auto Show in 1932 to get a feel for the audience's reaction and those involved in the project. The following year the project was renamed Auguste in its permanent version at the Milan Auto Show. This was another milestone for the brand and the automobile itself, as it was the first sedan in the world with a monocoque body. The body, engine compartment, roof and trunk were all one; it was so solid that the central upright was eliminated, allowing the mounting of pillarless doors. Other innovations from a mechanical perspective included hydraulic brakes, which Vincenzo tested personally making Lancia the first company in Europe to mount them. The Auguste met the affordability requirement without giving up style and excellent manufacturing, as expected by Lancia's demanding clientele. Certainly the Auguste was an example of the modern, compact economy car (12

feet or 3.81 m long) at an affordable price (19,500 Lira) and provided interesting performance and consumption (65 mph, 105 km/h and 51 miles or 9 km with 0.22 gal or 1 L) thanks to its 1.1 L (1,100 cc) engine. Before the Auguste, Lancia also presented the Ardena and Astura in 1931. These were mid-range models at affordable prices (31,45,000 Lira) whose names no longer referred to the Greek Volsians and a famous castle close to Nemuno. They were the first models to have pillarless doors thanks to their rigid body. The Astura was like a big sister to the Ardena, and despite the difficult economic times and a road tax based not only on engine size but also on the number of cylinders, it was offered with an eight-cylinder engine and a chassis to the delight of all coachbuilders, who were up to their necks in requests to personalize this elegant and reliable ve-

hicle. Touring, Farina and Pinin Farina and Castagna created sedans and convertibles and even a very long six-seater coupe. For its part, the Ardena stood out for its reliability so much so that its four-cylinder, narrow V engine was guaranteed to run 62,135 miles (100,000 km) without the need for servicing. And then there was the Aprilia, which, at the will of its founder had to be a light, aerodynamic five-door sedan, provide excellent performance, be stable, easy to handle and suitable for those looking for affordable sportiness and elegance, not weigh more than 1,984 lbs (900 kg) and be equipped with a contained engine size. Once again, the results were extraordinary. The vehicle was presented in 1937 with modern, round shapes, a sloping tail end and rounded top in addition to pillarless doors, independent suspension and an engine size slightly bigger than that of the Auguste (1.2 L or 1,200 cc). It was a success. Sales took off and continued until 1949 when it was replaced by the Aurelia. Coachbuilders once again had a great time personalizing them, sporting successes were countless and the second series in 1939 boasted a bigger engine. However, Vincenzo Lancia could not enjoy any of this. He died in 1937 at the age of only 56, before the Aprilia was ever marketed.

122-123 The Lancia Auguste made its debut in 1932, as unveiled at the Paris Auto Show although it was named the *veturo leggero* Lancia (light Lancia vehicle) at the time. Its official name only appeared the next year at the Milan Auto Show.

