

LAMBORGHINI COUNTACH

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*The spaceship, 1974-1990 - the car that invented the supercar template,
and what it takes to run*

~1,983

Built 1974-1990 - records
are a minefield; claims run
1,484 to 2,042

1971 · Geneva

The LP500 concept stunned
the world - the supercar
template starts here

6 × Weber

Twin-choke carburetors -
tuning them is an art, and
the Specialist Rule applies

~€300K-1M+

Anniversary to LP400
Periscopio - restoration
quality sets the tier

01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Some cars date; the Lamborghini Countach landed. When the LP500 concept appeared at Geneva in 1971 it looked like nothing on earth, and the production car of 1974 kept the promise: a spaceship with number plates, so far outside the ordinary that half a century later it still stops every street it appears on - and it appears on very few. Roughly 1,983 were built across sixteen years, though the records are a minefield (claims run from 1,484 to 2,042, the legacy of multiple ownership changes culminating in bankruptcy during the production run), and this series states the uncertainty rather than pretending it away.

This paper reaches further back than anything else in the Lamborghini set, and for one reason: the Countach is the point in the marque's history that cannot be overlooked. It invented the template every flagship since has followed - the cab-forward wedge, the scissor doors, the V12 as spectacle - and it defined the poster wall of a generation. It is also, by any modern standard, a deeply impractical, demanding, hand-built machine from another era. Owning one means detaching completely from modern-car expectations, and buying one safely is impossible without help. That is this paper's defining rule.

Key Finding

The most important Lamborghini ever built - and the least forgiving to buy. Hand-built in small numbers across five distinct variants, with production records that resist precision, wide condition spreads and restoration economics that dwarf purchase prices: the Countach rewards expertise and punishes optimism.

The Specialist Rule decides everything. Nothing on this car is "standard": chassis straightness, six-carburettor tuning, hand-fitted panels, period electrics and forty-year-old fuel lines all require marque-specific knowledge. Never view, buy or run a Countach without a dedicated specialist at your side - the paper outranks the checklist, and the expert outranks both.

The hierarchy runs from icon to entry. The LP400 Periscopio is the collector apex; the low-body LP400 S carries the purist premium; the European carburetted Quattrovalvole is the driver's pick; the 25th Anniversary is the most usable and the value entry - at running costs identical to the million-euro cars.

The structure follows the series: the marque and the car, the design and its theatre - including the true story of the wing - the powertrain, the family ladder, the ownership reality in full, the buying protocol with the longest checklist this series has yet produced, and the market. Research-led throughout, with the author's vantage point declared at the end.

02 THE MARQUE AND THE CAR

The car that saved the company by defining it - through repeated changes of ownership and one bankruptcy.

The Countach began as a Marcello Gandini shape for Bertone, so startling that the story of its name - a Piedmontese exclamation of astonishment - is entirely believable. The 1971 LP500 show car stunned Geneva; the 1974 LP400 production car translated it with remarkable fidelity, and for sixteen years the Countach carried Lamborghini through the most chaotic stretch of its existence:

The departure of Ferruccio himself, successive ownership changes, and bankruptcy in the late 1970s. Through those years the Countach became the commercial backbone that helped keep Lamborghini alive through one of the most turbulent periods in its history. Every scissor-doored V12 flagship in this series descends from it, mechanically in the Diablo's case and spiritually in all of them.

Its cultural reach exceeded its production numbers by orders of magnitude. The black LP400 S that opens The Cannonball Run in 1981 and the white 25th Anniversary of The Wolf of Wall Street bracket its screen career; between them lay the bedroom-wall decade, when the Countach was simply what the word supercar looked like. That poster generation is today's buyer pool, and it is part of why a hand-built car of profound impracticality trades at the prices Section 08 records.

THE LAMBORGHINI CHARACTER

Lamborghini should be judged on its own terms. Where Ferrari has chased technical purity and outright dynamic precision, Lamborghini has traditionally prioritised emotional theatre, visual drama and the sound and feel of a big naturally aspirated engine. The cars are designed to be events first and instruments second. Throughout this series, each Lamborghini is assessed against that philosophy - what it sets out to be - rather than held to Ferrari's different brief. By the house standard, the Countach is the founding document: the car that established theatre as the product. Everything this series has said about the philosophy was invented here, in aluminium, in 1974.

03 DESIGN AND THE THEATRE

A spaceship with number plates - and a wing the factory never wanted.

The original LP400 is the pure statement: Gandini's wedge uncluttered, the roof carrying the shallow channel of the intended periscope mirror that gave the first cars their Periscopio name. What followed was the steady armouring of the shape - flared arches and fat Pirelli P7s on the LP400 S, ever larger intakes as cooling demanded, and finally the 25th Anniversary's strakes, a restyle overseen by a young Horacio Pagani. Collectors have never stopped arguing about which stage is the truest; the market's answer is in Section 08, and it favours purity.

The rear wing deserves its own paragraph, because the most famous accessory in supercar history was never Lamborghini's idea. It entered the story through Walter Wolf, the Austrian-Canadian oil-equipment magnate and Formula 1 team owner, whose special Countaches - built in the mid-1970s with Gianpaolo Dallara's involvement - wore the huge V wing first. Customer demand did the rest: from the LP400 S the wing became a factory option, and the factory's own numbers said everything about what it was for - it added drag, further restricted a rear view that barely existed, and cost roughly 10 mph of top speed. Buyers ordered it anyway, almost universally. Theatre over aerodynamics: no single component in this series expresses the house philosophy more honestly. The NACA ducts carved into the flanks are the quieter legacy: functional, beautiful, and among the most copied styling elements in automotive history.

The theatre charges admission, and this paper defers to the documented record for the bill. The cabin is tiny and the driving position heavily offset; drivers much beyond 1.85 metres struggle, and the author - at 1.92 metres, and never having sat in one - expects to barely fit at all. The unassisted steering is heavy at parking speeds over the wide rear tyres, the clutch demands a strong leg, cabin heat is constant company, and rearward visibility is functionally absent - hence the famous reversing technique, performed in period by test drivers and owners alike: door up, sitting on the wide sill, head over the roof, steering one-handed. It is undignified, universal and, on this car, correct procedure. Detach yourself from every modern expectation; the Countach predates them all.

04 ENGINE AND POWERTRAIN

The Bizzarrini twelve, six Webers, and a gearbox between the seats - engineering as theatre's foundation.

The Countach's layout gave the family its designation and its character. LP stands for longitudinale posteriore - the V12 mounted lengthways behind the cabin - but reversed from convention: the gearbox sits ahead of the engine, between the seats, with drive running back to the differential through a shaft passing through the engine's sump. The benefits were a direct, cable-free gearchange and centralised mass; the cost was cabin width, heat and noise. It is the single most characterful piece of engineering in the car, and it survived unchanged into the Diablo and Murciélago.

Displacement told the story of the decades. The LP400 and LP400 S carried the 3.9-litre four-cam twelve at 375 PS on six Weber sidedraft carburettors; the 1982 LP500 S grew to 4.75 litres for the same power but far stronger torque; and the 1985 Quattrovalvole brought four-valve heads, 5.2 litres and 455 PS on six downdraft Webers - the engine at its European peak - while US federal cars took Bosch injection and roughly 415-420 PS behind heavier bumpers. Six twin-choke carburettors in perfect synchronisation are a glorious thing and an art form to maintain: the Countach's state of tune is only ever as good as the last specialist who set it up, which is the Specialist Rule in a single sentence. The basic V12 architecture originated with Giotto Bizzarrini's design for the 350 GT in the early 1960s and proved so fundamentally sound that it evolved for almost five decades before finally being retired after the Aventador. The engine itself, as everywhere in this series, is the durable heart of the car - a Bizzarrini-lineage unit engineered with margins the chassis never enjoyed - and neglect, not weakness, causes the rare disasters.

Technical specification	
Layout	Mid-engined V12, gearbox forward between the seats, driveshaft through the sump; tubular steel spaceframe, hand-formed aluminium panels
Engine	3.9L, 375 PS (LP400/400 S); 4.75L, 375 PS (LP500 S); 5.2L QV, 455 PS Euro carbs / ~415-420 PS US injection
Induction	Six Weber twin-chokes (sidedraft, then downdraft on the QV); Bosch KE-Jetronic on US Quattrovalvole
Transmission	Five-speed manual only; unassisted steering and heavy clutch throughout
Performance	0-100 km/h ~5-6 s by variant; ~260-295 km/h - modest numbers today, delivered with maximum drama
Production	~1,983 total, 1974-1990 (claims 1,484-2,042; 238 RHD) - the records are a minefield, stated as such

Sources: factory and registry documentation; Classic & Sports Car buyer's guide; specialist compilations. Period figures; production per specialist consensus.

05 THE FAMILY LADDER

Sixteen years, five stages - purity at one end, usability at the other, the same bills throughout.

The variant range	
LP400 'Periscopio'	1974-78 · ~150-157 · the pure Gandini car; narrow body, periscope roof channel - the collector apex
LP400 S (Series 1-2, low-body)	1978-80 · ~155 of 235-238 · P7 tyres, flares, the optional wing arrives; low-body cars carry the purist premium
LP400 S (Series 3)	1980-82 · balance of 400 S run · raised roof for headroom - the usability concession
LP500 S	1982-85 · ~321-323 · 4.75 litres, same power, real torque - the 1980s icon in its prime
5000 Quattrovalvole	1985-88 · ~610-676 · 455 PS, four valves; Euro downdraft-carb cars are the driver's pick; US cars injected, bumpered, softer
25th Anniversary	1988-90 · ~650-658 · the Pagani-restyled send-off: most refined, most usable, best cooled - and the value entry
Walter Wolf specials	mid-1970s · a handful · the cars that invented the wing; historic one-offs outside the factory count

The sub-totals are specialist figures and disagree at the margins - the QV count alone is quoted between 610 and 676 - because Countach record-keeping shared the company's turbulence; the International Lamborghini Registry's chassis-by-chassis work is the closest thing to ground truth, and any purchase at collector money should be checked against it. The practical readings: originality and stage-purity set the tiers, with the LP400 and low-body 400 S detached at the top; the European carburetted Quattrovalvole offers the strongest engine in the rawest usable package; and for most buyers entering the model, the 25th Anniversary is the honest recommendation - the best-developed, best-cooled, most numerous Countach, at the most accessible money, with running costs identical to the seven-figure cars.

In three words each: Collector: the LP400. Driver: the European QV. Entry: the 25th Anniversary.

06 OWNERSHIP, RELIABILITY AND COSTS

A hand-built 1970s exotic, kept alive by a dedicated few - the honest chapter.

Honesty first: the Countach was never built to modern quality standards, and no restoration changes that. It is a hand-assembled, small-series 1970s exotic - tubular spaceframe, hand-formed aluminium, period Italian electrics - and it is kept on the road today by a small community of restorers and specialists who have dedicated themselves to exactly that. The fault map is the map of age and of standing still. The chassis is the existential item: accident straightness is difficult to verify and expensive to correct, corrosion attacks the frame and mounting points, and hand-fitted panels mean gaps tell stories - learn what correct looks like, because correct was never perfect. Cooling was marginal from new and age has not helped: radiators, hoses and fans must be treated as the guardians of the engine, exactly as the Diablo paper argued, and every intake stage the model gained in period was chasing this problem.

The running gear asks for period sympathy. Six Webers demand expert synchronisation and reward it; the gearbox is strong and noisy by design - crunching is wear, whine is character, and a specialist knows the difference; clutch life is respectable when driven correctly but the hydraulics cut it short, and replacement is engine-adjacent labour. Rear brakes and handbrakes seize with disuse; suspension joints and bushes wear quickly by modern standards; forty-year-old rubber fuel lines are a genuine fire risk and belong on every inspection as a renew-by-default item, along with the fuel smell in the cabin that old venting produces. Electrics fail by age, not design: grounds, fuse boxes, pop-up motors, window mechanisms that were weak when new. The 345-section rear tyres are expensive and not always available. Interior trim is scarce and correct restoration costly. And the standing rule applies at maximum strength: a Countach deteriorates faster parked than driven - these cars belong on the street, not under a cover - yet driving one is a physical, attentive, sweaty commitment. The owner it needs is the one who accepts both halves of that sentence.

Typical ownership costs - Europe, mid-2026

Annual service (specialist)	€3,000-6,000 - carb synchronisation and valve checks are skilled labour
Major service	€6,000-12,000 - depth of disassembly is the variable
Clutch, fitted	€8,000-15,000 - engine-adjacent labour; hydraulics renewed with it
Cooling system overhaul	€3,000-8,000 - radiators, hoses, fans; the engine's insurance
Suspension rebuild	€5,000-12,000 - joints and bushes wear fast; standard on stored cars
Fuel system renewal	€2,000-5,000 - lines, hoses, tank attention; a safety item, not an option
Carburettor rebuild (six)	€4,000-8,000 - the art form, priced accordingly
Tyres (set, 345 rears)	€2,500-4,000+ - availability varies; date codes matter
Body / paint restoration	€50,000-150,000+ - hand-formed aluminium; quality decides the car's tier

THE SPECIALIST RULE

On a Countach, the specialist decides the purchase the way the clutch printout decides a Gallardo, the cooling system a Diablo and the specification a Murciélago. Nothing on this car is standard: every example is a single case shaped by fifty years of use, storage and restoration of varying honesty. Never view, buy or run a Countach without a dedicated marque specialist at your side - their inspection is worth more than any discount, their network is your parts supply, and their judgment is the only instrument that reads this car correctly. Detach from every modern-car expectation; bring the expert instead.

07 THE BUYING PROTOCOL

Three levels, run in order - with the longest checklist in this series, and an expert beside you throughout.

Level one - at the viewing, expert in tow. The Specialist Rule starts here, not at the PPI: bring the marque expert to the first viewing. A start from completely cold, confirmed by touch - smoke, oil pressure, charging behaviour, idle quality as the Webers wake. Watch the temperature climb and the fans cycle. Panel gaps read as history against what hand-built correct looks like; paint depth measured; chassis number checked against the registry record. Every electrical function exercised - pop-ups, windows, gauges - and priced, not excused. The cabin smelled honestly: fuel odour means the lines and venting bill. Documentation weighed as the asset it is - books, tools, invoices decades deep, ownership chain, restoration photographs; on a car this age, the file is the biography.

Level two - the specialist PPI, at a marque workshop. Compression and leak-down on all twelve. Chassis measurement and corrosion inspection at the frame and mounting points - the existential check, done on a lift with the undertrays off. Carburettor condition and synchronisation state. Cooling pressure test and radiator/fan assessment. Clutch wear and hydraulic condition. Gearbox assessed by someone who knows which noises are design and which are damage.

Brake function including the seize-prone rears and handbrake; fuel lines and tank inspected by age, not appearance; suspension play catalogued; electrics surveyed for bodes. And the originality report: matching numbers, correct-stage components, restoration quality graded in writing - because on a Countach the quality of past work sets the tier more than the odometer ever will.

Level three - walk away. Chassis accident evidence or corrosion at the structure. A restoration that photographs better than it measures. Missing ownership chain on collector money. Bodged electrics or non-specialist maintenance history. Fuel smell plus original lines. Any seller who resists the marque-specialist inspection - on this car, that refusal is the answer.

WHY BUYERS CHOOSE THE WRONG COUNTACH

Mistake one: buying the cheap Anniversary as an entry ticket. The purchase price is the only thing that scales down. Running costs, restoration economics and the Specialist Rule are identical across the range - a €300,000 Countach costs exactly as much to keep alive as a million-euro one, and a neglected example costs more.

Mistake two: buying shine over substance. A fresh respray over filler, a glossy retrim over wrong materials, an engine bay detailed past its own history: cosmetic restorations are this market's classic trap. Documented, honest, expert-maintained substance outranks show condition every time - the photographs of the restoration matter more than the result.

Mistake three: buying with modern expectations. The buyer who expects usable ergonomics, light controls, cold air conditioning and predictable bills has chosen the wrong car and will sell it badly within two years - a familiar market pattern. The Countach rewards exactly one buyer: the one who wanted a Countach, knowing everything this chapter says.

08 MARKET - EUROPE AND THE US

The poster generation is buying its wall back - purity at the top, usability at the entry.

The Countach market rewards purity and originality above all. The LP400 Periscopio is detached at the top, with guide values around £700,000-900,000 and the best cars past the million mark; low-body LP400 S examples occupy roughly £450,000-650,000; Series 3 and LP500 S cars roughly £300,000-500,000; European Quattrovalvoles roughly £400,000-600,000 with the carburetted cars preferred; and the 25th Anniversary, the most numerous and most usable, enters around £250,000-400,000. Condition spreads are enormous, restoration quality moves cars across whole bands, and matching numbers with a documented chain is worth more than any cosmetic state - and the market is now increasingly driven by Polo Storico certification, factory documentation and matching numbers rather than by mileage. The famous outliers confirm rather than set the market: the Wolf of Wall Street's crashed 25th Anniversary made USD 1.35 million on provenance alone - a ceiling with a film credit, not a median.

Demand is structural and generational: the bedroom-wall buyers of the 1980s are in their peak collecting years, exactly the dynamic Lamborghini's own classic division describes for the Diablo, one car later. Against it stands the honest caveat that the pool of people able and willing to run a hand-built 1970s exotic properly is finite and ages with the cars - the specialists themselves call it a dying breed kept alive by dedication.

The likely resolution, visible already, is museum-grade money for the pure early cars and enthusiast money for the usable late ones, with channel and restoration quality mattering more than model year. Records are ceilings, not medians, as ever.

Market reference points (approximate, mid-2026; guide values, mixed currencies as quoted)

LP400 'Periscopio'	~£700-900K, best cars £1M+ · the apex; originality is everything
LP400 S, low-body	~£450-650K · the purist premium; Series 1 Bravo-wheel cars lead
LP400 S S3 / LP500 S	~£300-500K · the 1980s icon at accessible collector money
5000 QV (Euro, carbs)	~£400-600K · the driver's pick; US injected cars below
25th Anniversary	~£250-400K · the value entry and the most usable - same running costs as the apex
Provenance outliers	Wolf of Wall Street car USD 1.35M · ceilings with film credits, not medians
Trend	purity-led; restoration quality moves cars across bands; documentation is the asset

METHODOLOGY AND A NOTE ON VALUES

Values reflect European, UK and US guide and asking prices as of mid-2026, anchored on the Classic & Sports Car buyer's-guide bands and cross-checked against auction records and specialist commentary; they are directional, not appraisals, and condition and restoration-quality spreads on this model exceed those of any other car in this series. Production figures are specialist consensus around 1,983 with documented claims from 1,484 to 2,042; sub-splits disagree at the margins and are stated as ranges. Records describe the ceiling, not the median. Forward-looking remarks are the author's reading of a moving collector market, not a forecast. Nothing here is investment advice.

09 SYNTHESIS

The founding document - impractical, demanding, irreplaceable, and worth every bit of the trouble to the right owner.

The Countach is where everything this series has described began: the theatre-first philosophy, the scissor doors, the V12 as event, the wing that costs speed and sells anyway. As a machine it is exactly what a hand-built 1970s exotic is - marginal cooling, heavy controls, a cabin that fights anyone tall, electrics of their period - and none of that is the point. It is the most significant Lamborghini ever made, it still looks like the future fifty years on, and it is kept alive by a small community of specialists whose expertise is the single most valuable component in any purchase. The 2021 Countach LPI 800-4 is addressed separately within this series as a modern halo model.

The buyer's task is the strictest in this series. Engage the specialist before the search, not after it. Choose the stage honestly - the LP400 to collect, the Euro QV to drive, the Anniversary to enter - and buy documented substance over restored shine. Then use the car, because a driven Countach outlives a stored one. Do all of that, and what you own is not transport and was never meant to be: it is the spaceship, with your name in the logbook.

WHO SHOULD BUY THIS CAR

Ideal buyer: the experienced collector with a marque specialist already engaged; the mechanically sympathetic owner who accepts period engineering on its own terms; the driver of average height or considerable flexibility; the long-term keeper who will use the car and document everything.

Less suitable: anyone expecting modern usability, predictable bills or independent-workshop convenience; tall drivers who have not sat in one first; a first exotic of any kind; and any buyer whose budget ends at the purchase price - on this car, that is where the spending begins.

BOTTOM LINE

The most important Lamborghini ever built and the founding document of the supercar template: ~1,983 hand-built cars, five stages from the million-pound LP400 Periscopio to the £250-400K 25th Anniversary, all sharing identical running costs and the same non-negotiable requirement. One rule decides every deal: never buy or run a Countach without a dedicated specialist at your side. Detach from every modern expectation, buy documented substance over restored shine, and drive it - the spaceship deteriorates parked and comes alive on the road, which is where it has always belonged.

SOURCES

Classic & Sports Car Countach buyer's guide (production history, fault record, value bands); the International Lamborghini Registry (chassis records, LP400 S series breakdown, production figures); Lamborghini factory and Polo Storico documentation; specialist compilations and owner-community records (Lamborghini Talk) for production sub-splits, quoted as ranges where sources disagree; period road tests and the documented owner record for driving, ergonomics and the reversing technique; auction records including the 2023 sale of the Wolf of Wall Street 25th Anniversary; Walter Wolf special-car history via registry and specialist documentation (Dallara involvement, factory wing option from LP400 S, ≈ 10 mph top-speed cost per period data); film record: The Cannonball Run (1981), The Wolf of Wall Street (2013). Values cross-checked against current European, UK and US listings and results, mid-2026.

Author. Uwe Riemeyer, Marque Intelligence (an IMP InterMediaPartners venture, est. 1976). Disclosed bias: the author is a Ferrari owner and enthusiast - currently a Ferrari 488 GTB and GTC4Lusso T, previously an FF - not a Lamborghini owner or specialist; he has never seen a Countach in the flesh, let alone sat in one, and at 1.92 metres expects the fit to be marginal at best. Driving, ergonomics and ownership assessments are accordingly drawn entirely from the documented specialist, owner and road-test record. Even so, the author states his position plainly: the Countach is a spaceship, and every enthusiast alive stops for it. This paper is research and commentary, not investment advice; collector-car values are volatile and illiquid, and any purchase decision is the reader's own.