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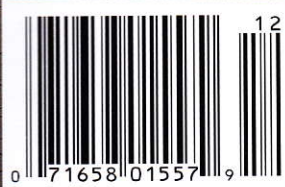
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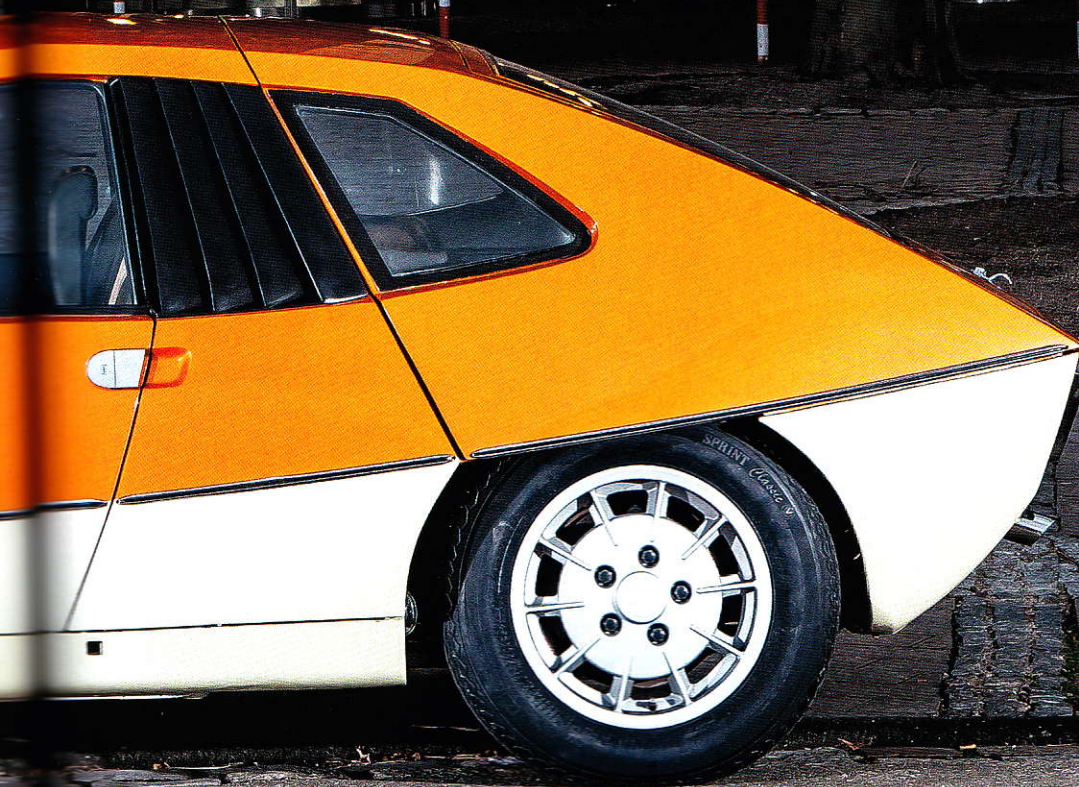


French Dressing

A look at the odd and striking one-off 1970 914-6 Heuliez Murène.

STORY BY JAN-HENRIK MUCHÉ
PHOTOS BY ETIENNE CRÉBESSÈGUES

Some independent auto designers thought they could do a better job of styling the 914 than Porsche's Heinrich Klie had. The lines of the mid-engined sports car generated polarizing opinions on just whether or not it was appealing to the eye. Several ambitious designers who disliked its looks set out to redesign the bodywork of the Volkswagen/Porsche-developed machine. While there were lots of independent aesthetic ideas put forward, none of them made it into production. And only one study, which was built in France, made it onto the street. Meet the eccentric 914-6 Heuliez Murène.



Redesigning a Porsche

By the late 1960s, it seemed that the mid-engine, rear-wheel-drive layout was the future for sports cars. That's because virtually every successful racing machine at Le Mans, Indianapolis, and Monaco had its engine located in the middle by that point. Although Porsche had been building *mittelmotor* sports cars since the 1950s in the form of the 550 and 718 (and indeed the original 356 prototype was mid-engined), the 914 would be its first regular production car with this setup.

But, again, since the 914's lines weren't as classically beautiful as some observers perhaps would have liked, there were some critics who wanted to rework them. Established designers like Pietro Frua (who styled Maserati's Mistral), Giorgetto Giugiaro (who later became famous for penning the lines of the BMW M1, Lotus Esprit, and DeLorean DMC-12), and Albrecht von Goertz (of BMW 507 fame) all drew up alternative 914 designs shortly after its first appearance.

There were also less well-known characters who sought to change the Porsche's look, like Jacques Cooper, a French industrial designer with an English name who reimagined the 914 at his drawing table. Cooper was no stranger to automotive design. He studied at the Paris College of Applied Arts before going to work for industrial designer Raymond Loewy (who designed, among many things, the Exxon and Shell logos, as well as Greyhound's Scenicruiser bus and the Studebaker Avanti), Renault, and General Motors before moving on to design Frigidaire refrigerators from GM.

When the 914 was introduced in 1969 for the 1970 model year, Cooper was working at Brissonneau & Lotz (B&L), an engineering firm in Creil, near Paris. B&L had previously earned a commission from the GM-owned German carmaker Opel to build the bodies for its GT sports car, but its core business was designing and engineering locomotives and train cars. The company had its own design team

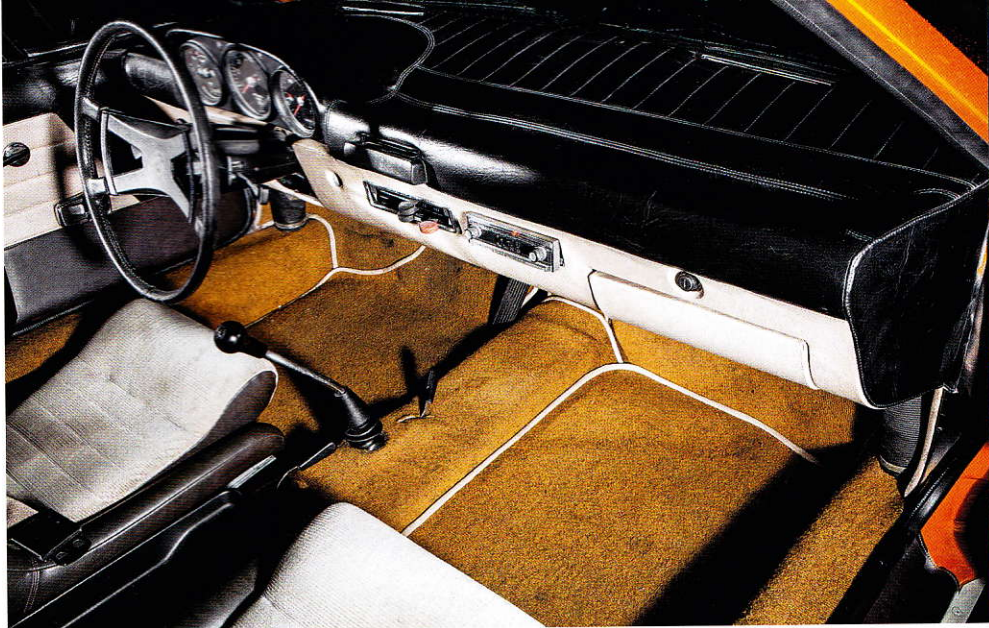
that included Paul Bracq, who later became BMW's head of design. The last contract that Cooper and Bracq worked on together was the "train that should not look like a train," which became the TGV (Train à Grande Vitesse), France's high-speed intercity train.

Cooper proposed his idea for a new, different, more dynamic 914 to his employer. The sketches showed a car that would have a longer and flatter wedge-shaped nose, a distinctive waist belt, and a high rear. But Brissonneau & Lotz couldn't commit to backing the idea, as they lacked the money for such a project. But with the blessing of B&L management and his own drawings, Cooper visited Heuliez, a commercial vehicle specialist and coachbuilder in Cerizay, France. With a modern vehicle concept and a finished design, this pitch held the potential for Heuliez to gain a foothold in the automotive construction industry, and maybe even the prospect of a small series order from VW or Porsche.



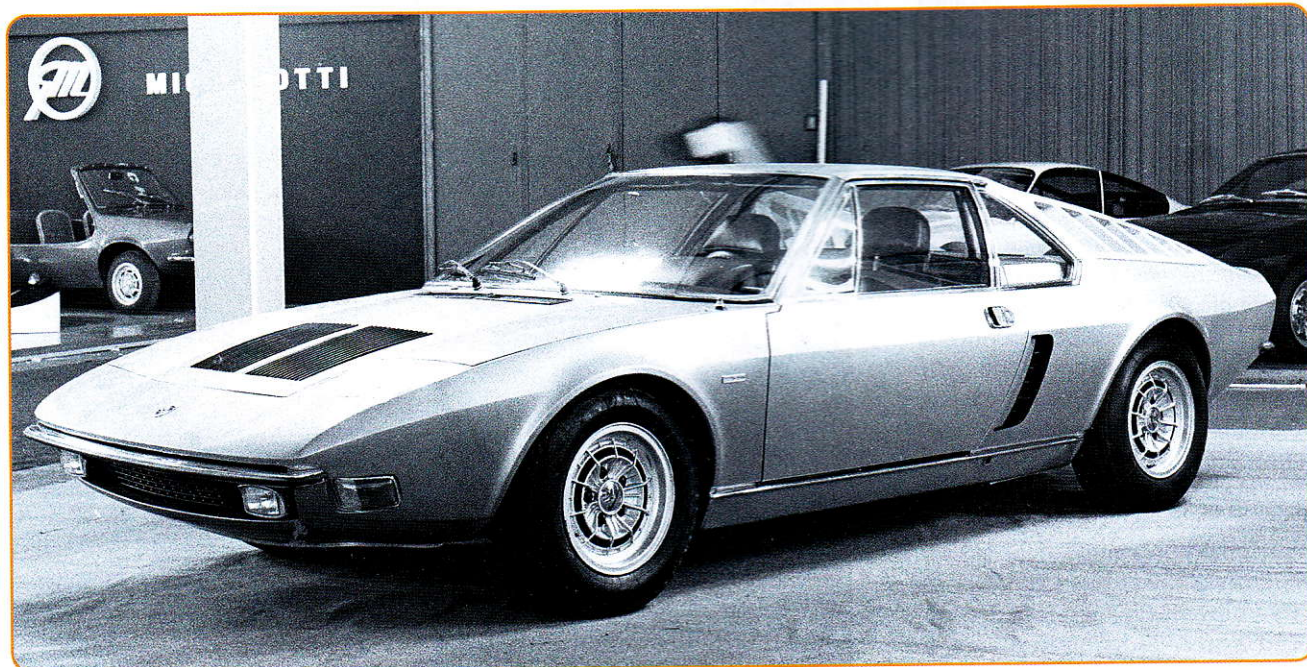
Of course, the basis of this futuristic Cooper design was not the 80-horsepower 1.7-liter flat-four-powered 914-4. Heuliez wanted the stronger 914-6, officially called a Porsche rather than a VW-Porsche (in Europe, as all 914s were badged as Porsches in the U.S.) and powered by the 110-hp 2.0-liter flat six from the 911T. While the 914-6's engine, chassis, and interior remained virtually unchanged, its original steel body with its distinctive Targa roof was removed to make way for a new glass-reinforced plastic (GRP) skin.

The rebodied 914-6 debuted in 1970 as the Heuliez Murène (French for Moray, as in the eel) in a striking two-tone light brown and cream finish at the Paris Salon. (The light brown was changed to orange later on in the '70s. It also originally had custom wheels that were swapped out for the magnesium Mahle "Gas Burner" rims seen on it today.) Compared to the factory 914, the front sloped longer and deeper, the Targa bow was integrated into the body, and the rear bodywork consisted of



Clockwise from top: The Murène's interior is all 914-6. Looking especially unusual with the rear hatch and engine cover open. The stock 2.0-liter six makes 110 hp. Only the headlights and door handles are VW/Porsche factory body parts. This Heuliez VIN tag calls the car the "Porsche Murène." How the sports car of the future looked in 1970.





AS NOTED in this feature, many design grandmasters put their alternate 914 design proposals in the limelight of the car shows. Albrecht von Goertz made the first. His version of the 914 combined the flat, sharp front of a race car of that era with an edgy rear in shooting-brake style. The result, exhibited by the coachbuilder Eurostyle at the Turin Salon in 1970, looked like a sharper and more angular Lotus Europa.

Further on, at the ItalDesign booth, the 914-6 Tapiro shone. This machine was actually a pure show car, or a style study. Gullwing doors hinged on a wide central bridge gave way to the bright orange interior and engine. Giorgetto Giugiaro gave himself away immediately: You could see echoes of the De

Tomaso Mangusta when looking at it from the side.

The Hispano-Alemán Vizcaya (above), which debuted at the Geneva Motor Show in 1971, was a joint venture between the German-born Spanish Porsche importer Verne Ben Heiderich and Pietro Frua. Heiderich disliked the original design and instructed Frua to dress the 914 again. The result even found favor with Porsche management, who considered producing a small batch of cars. Unfortunately, Heiderich and Frua could not agree on the ownership of the design, so only the show car was ever built. Over 118,000 examples of the 914 were made before production ceased after 1976, the year Heiderich and Frua finally settled their case.



SPECS

1970 914-6 Heuliez Murène

Drive	Rear-wheel drive
Layout	Mid-engine
Wheelbase	96.46 inches
Engine	2.0-liter flat-six
Transmission	5-speed manual
Horsepower	110 hp
Torque	116 lb-ft
Weight	1,970 lbs
Power-to-Weight	17.9 lbs/hp
0-60 mph	8.8 seconds
Top Speed	123 mph

a single, hinged segment, under which the engine and the rear, clearly larger, trunk were found. Of the external parts, only the stock VW/Porsche door handles and headlights survived.

The Murène gained acclaim, but then resounding silence. Neither Porsche nor Volkswagen ultimately wanted to put any outside variation of the 914 into production. Jacques Cooper went on to have a successful career as a designer, and he became famous for his work on the TGV train project. Heuliez entered the auto industry in the later 1970s and went on to assemble various Citroëns, Opels, Peugeots, and Renaults. But in 2007, Heuliez entered into bankruptcy, and in

2012, the company's collection was auctioned off. A collector bought the Murène and had it readied for the road.

From behind the wheel, this one-off machine is not that different from a standard 914-6. Yes, the view out of the Murène is dramatically changed thanks to the sloping back window, unique quarter glass, and fender-mounted mirrors. But there is still nothing but Porsche's sports car engineering underneath the striking bodywork. This rebodied 914-6 illustrates what the lines of the 914 could have been had Porsche contracted it styling out. The Murène may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it is an excellent example of what was possible for Porsche's mid-engined platform back in the 1970s. ■