

MY WORST CAR(s) - submitted by Art Midgette – It's difficult to decide which one was the worst. The 1970 Fiat 850 Sport Spider convertible or what I traded it in for, the 1973 AMC Hornet hatchback.

About the 1970 Fiat 850 Sport Spider Convertible

Somewhere along the way in the summer of 1972 I apparently encountered a lapse in sound judgment when I saw the slightly used 1970 FIAT 850 Spider on the display stand in front of a local new car dealer. I should have known it was a bad decision when the used car salesman did an even swap for my 1970 Chevrolet Nova, which I should admit had been in more than one accident.

I have to say that the Fiat was probably the most fun car I have ever owned when it actually ran and pieces of it were not falling off as I was driving. Fiat 850 Spiders were about the size of a large golf-cart at about 1,600lbs empty, with a more or less 58hp engine and an advertised top speed of 93 mph but I doubt it could ever make that speed before disintegrating.

There were also the problems of the coating inside the gas tank breaking down and clogging the fuel line; the rear brakes locking up while doing 45mph and stopping in the middle of the road; the accelerator cable exposed under the car, breaking while sitting at a stop light; the persistent overheating no matter the weather and the night the bolts holding the convertible top frame together came loose causing the top to collapse while I was driving the car. The only thing keeping the top up was my head and since it was raining at the time, that was the best option. I should also mention that Fiat 850 Spider convertible tops, even when up, did not keep rain out.



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However, even with all of these problems and perfecting the necessary skill of pushing the car by the driver side window frame (top down), jumping in and popping the clutch to get it started when the starter did not want to take on the task, it was really, really fun to drive, but I would never want another one.

About the 1973 AMC Hornet Hatchback 258 Torque-Command Automatic

So in the fall of 1973 when my confidence in the Fiat 850 Sport Spider convertible was at its lowest, I drove into the local AMC dealer and found a brand new blue AMC Hornet Hatchback. All that it needed was the dealer installed air conditioner and I figured I was in great shape for a long time.



However, as I found out, some AMC cars were not so great. The first encounter with problems was the glass on the driver's side falling to the bottom of the door. Then came the broken door hinges and one by one, the rusting freeze plugs leading to multiple trips for repairs. The carburetor kept coming loose and the hood hinges stopped working one day when I was trying to close the hood after checking on yet another leaking freeze plug. That resulted in the hood actually bending when trying to close it. The Hornet did last until 1977 when I was able to sell it and buy a new Chevrolet Impala and the Impala was still running very well when I bought the 1984 Cadillac Seville that I still have today. The Seville has its own unique set of issues...but more about that some other time.

The Decision I think the AMC Hornet was better than the Fiat since it did start, stop and kept me dry in the rain, but boy was it boring. This feature by Art Midgette.