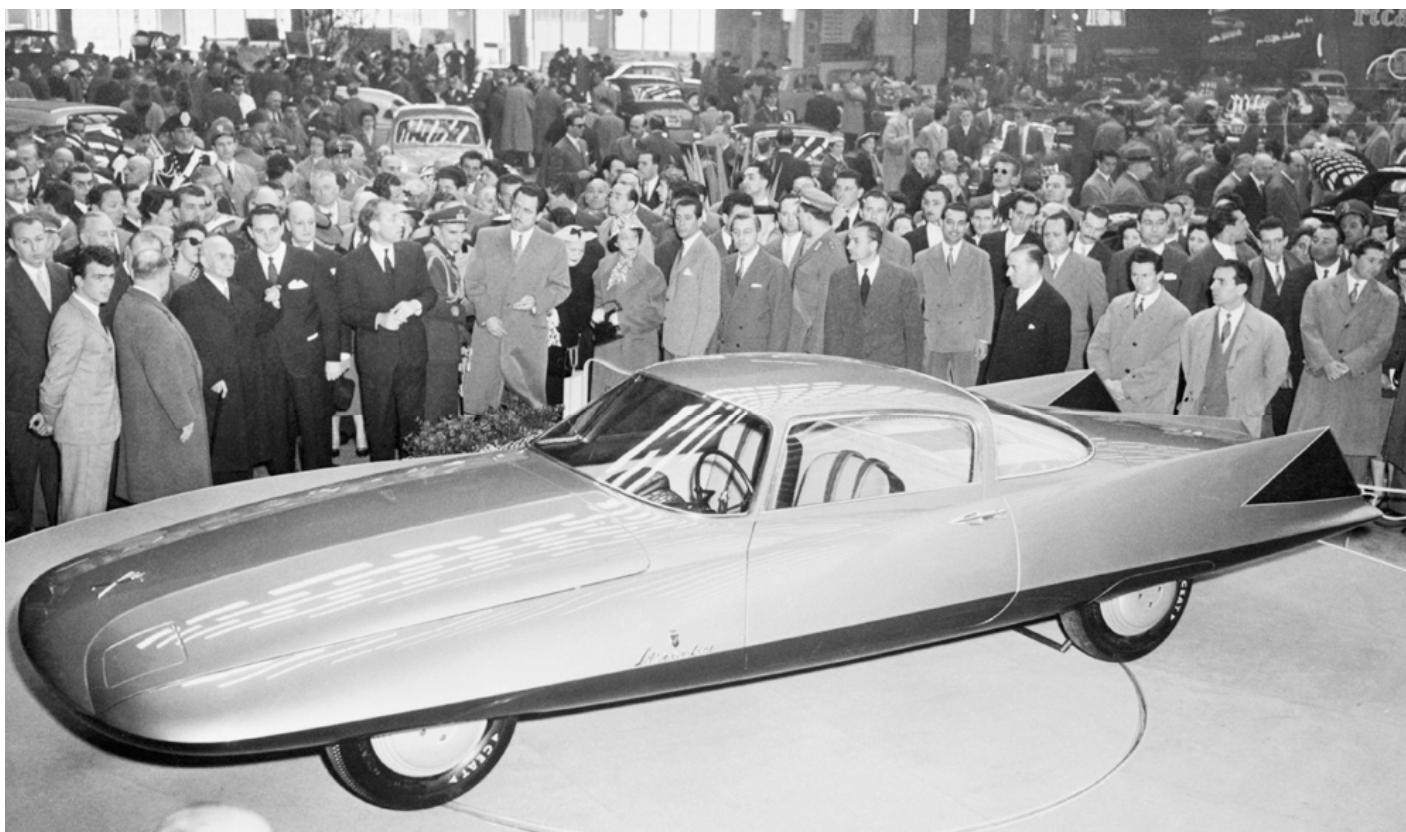


# 1955 Ghia Streamline X "Gilda"

Private Portfolio No. 141



**Above:** The Jet Age is here! 'Gilda' ushers in a new era at the 1955 Turin show. Head of Ghia Luigi Segre (the tall gentleman fifth from left) explains Gilda to Italian President Luigi Einaudi (the older gentleman fourth from left)

Chassis no.  
9967

Price on request

- One-off debuted at 1955 Turin Auto Show
- Carefully conserved within the Ford Museum and later private ownership
- Turbine powered and fully running and functional
- One of the most influential design studies in automotive history

"The Mona Lisa." Automotive writer Michael Lamb.

"At the Turin show that year, I saw Gilda, a prototype that was the sensation of the show. I myself was stunned by it and decided to ask Ghia for a job." Bruno Sacco, longtime director of Mercedes-Benz design.

"One of the ten most significant show cars ever." Strother MacMinn, influential automotive designer, writer and teacher at the Art Center College of Design for 50 years.



## Aerodynamics and Propulsion

From the late 1920s, some manufacturers and designers sought to quantify the benefits of aerodynamic or streamlined styles for automobiles. Chrysler built a wind tunnel of its own to help form the Airflow models of 1935 and, in the same period, the famed Turin Polytechnic Institute in Italy was used for evaluating the shape of the Lancia Aprilia saloon. After World War II, with the new jet aeroplane capturing the imagination of engineers

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and the public alike, the drive to bring turbine propulsion to the road gathered force, with Rover, Fiat and Chrysler building prototype turbine cars in the early 1950s. It was only natural that the two streams of development, aerodynamics and turbine propulsion, would come together.

### Rita Hayworth and Gilda

During the European marketing campaign for the 1946 film noir classic *Gilda*, actress Rita Hayworth was given the nickname 'La Vedette Atomique' or 'the atomic starlet' for her sleek lines and dangerous appeal. It may also have prompted an Italian design firm to name its equally sleek aerodynamic study for a jet-powered car after a character in an American movie. Certainly the glamour of Hayworth in one of her most memorable film roles suits the low, smooth and incredibly dramatic automobile. Its design contains elements which turned out to be a preview of what became Chrysler's "Forward Look".



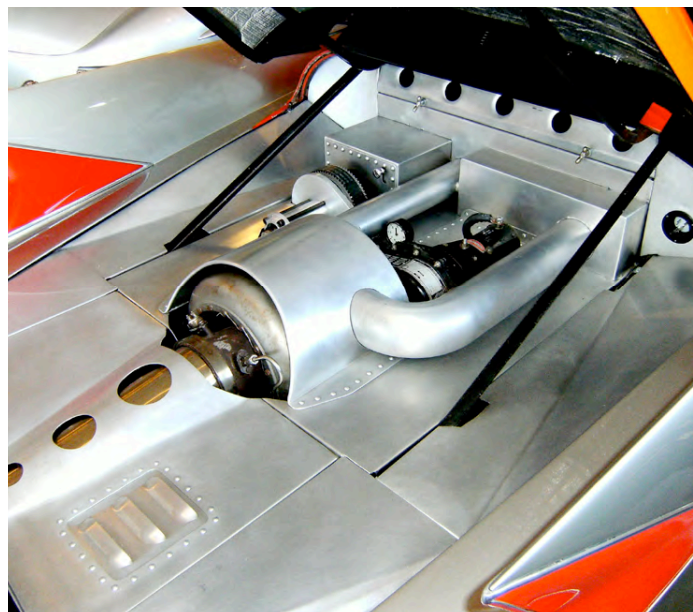
### Jet Aircraft Design

The styling of the Gilda Streamline X is the work of the legendary Giovanni Savonuzzi. A classic example of 'jet aircraft' design, it is a smooth, wing-like shape with practically every surface in curved or angled motion, an expression of speed when literally standing still. The Streamline X was commissioned by Chrysler design chief, Virgil Exner, who wished to explore solutions for cross wind resistance and rear-end grip as well as turbine power. Exner's concern for stability was very real with hemi Chryslers pushing speeds toward 150+ mph. With the 'Forward Look' Exner wrested styling leadership away from General Motors' Harley Earl and put Chrysler at the helm.

### Details – The body and interior

The Gilda Streamline X gives the impression of almost a pure wedge in three dimensions, moving from the leading edge of the front end around the sides, ending at the sharp tips of the rear fins in an unbroken line. The body tapers from front to rear and the greenhouse slopes in all directions

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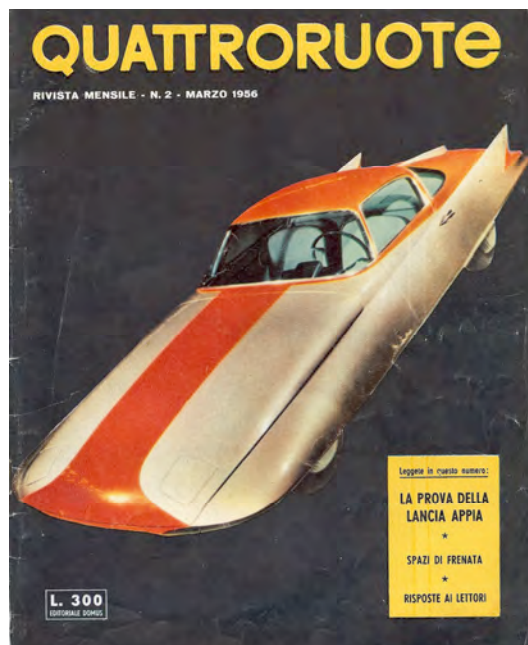


down to the beltline. It is very well constructed, with a sturdy aluminum body atop a square tube chassis, a separate aluminum pan for the passenger compartment and a full belly pan for aerodynamic efficiency.

Inside, it is both stark and stylish. The wool-covered seats have short armrests which also serve as side bolsters to hold you in place during cornering, while the dashboard's two main instruments float underneath a binnacle placed on a simple piece of bodywork sweeping from door to door.

### Preservation

The current owner, a Pebble Beach judge in the Preservation class, has been a conscientious conservator of the Gilda Streamline X and today more than half of the finishes both outside and inside are original. It even still wears its original CEAT tires. He feels strongly that he had a responsibility not to fundamentally alter the car. The work he carried out was minimally invasive – a fine arts approach to conservation and restoration which emphasizes reversible work and visibility to future owners and craftsmen.

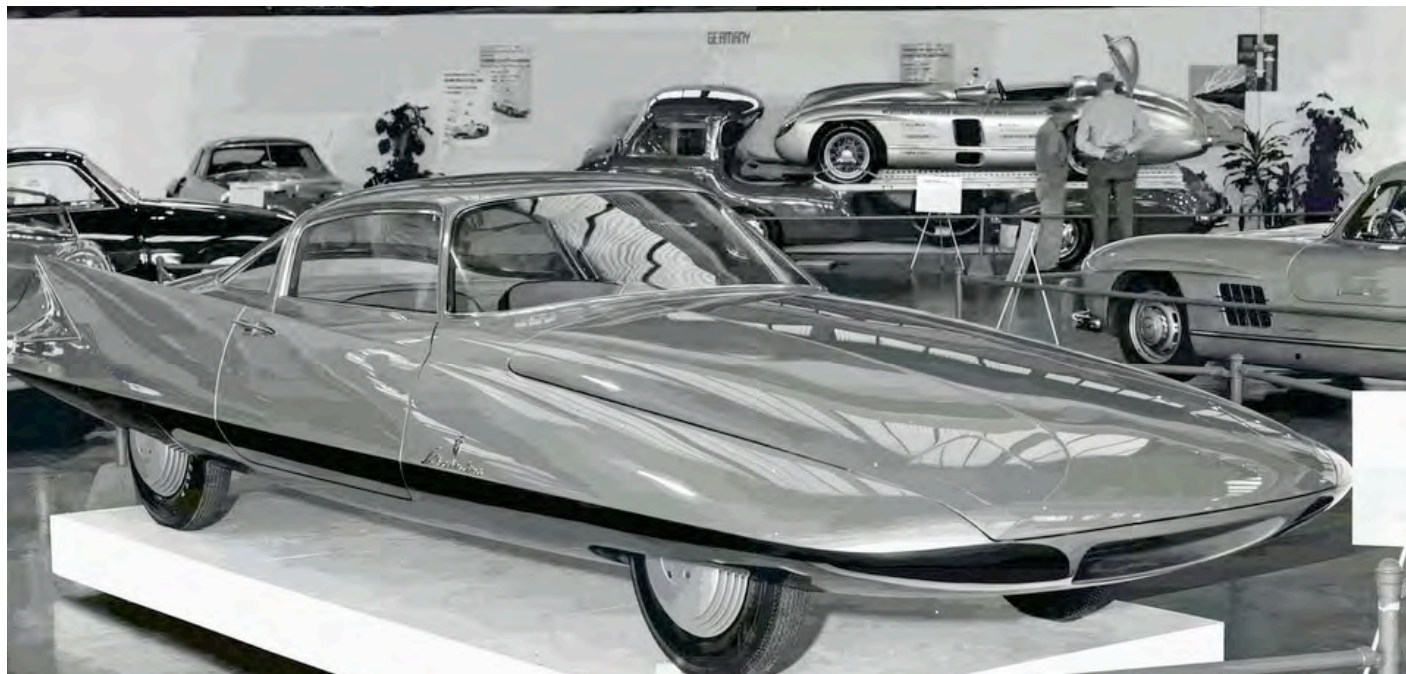


Not surprisingly, the Gilda Streamline X has been a showstopper from the day it was unveiled inside the equally dramatic Luigi Nervi-designed Torino Esposizioni hall in 1955, at that year's *Salone dell'Automobile*. It stood out in a show which also featured such cars as the Lincoln Indianapolis, Nardi Blue Ray and the Alfa Romeo B.A.T. 9.

### Turbine Power

Conceived for turbine power, there was at the time no such engine which would fit in the low-slung body. Some archival material states that the car was once powered by an OSCA 1500cc twin-cam four cylinder engine, however *Auto Italiana* magazine of 20th December 1955 described the Gilda as "without motive power", a common occurrence with Italian concepts. In any case, it is certain that, by the time it left Italy for the Henry Ford Museum in 1955, it was without a drive train.

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**Above:** Centre stage at the Ford Museum with the 300SLR relegated to the background

### Provenance

While it was shown several times in the 1950s, the Gilda Streamline X remained mostly unseen in museum storage until 1969. That year, it was sold to the Harrah collection in Reno, Nevada. It remained there for 16 years when it was purchased by the Blackhawk Museum (then the Behring Auto Museum) to become part of a collection of important Ghia prototypes.

The present owner bought Gilda when the prototypes were de-accessioned following the donation of the museum to the University of California. Under his ownership, the car finally received the motive power for which it was designed. With careful planning and expert engineering, a lightweight, compact single-stage AiResearch turbine was fitted into Gilda and Savonuzzi's vision of decades ago was finally realized. Computer and wind tunnel modeling have determined that the 70 hp turbine would be capable of propelling the car up to 160 mph!

Since its careful restoration, the Gilda Streamline X has appeared to great acclaim at the Art Center College of Design Classic Concours in Pasadena, California, in 2007, at the Milwaukee Masterpiece Concours in 2008, the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and as a centerpiece display at the extraordinary 'Dream Cars' exhibition in Turin, Italy, where it returned to the very hall of its debut in 1955. It has since been on display at

the ItalDesign Museum in Turin and was a feature at the 2009 Concorso Villa d'Este, where it led the Parade of Concepts.

This remarkably original, unique avatar of 1950s jet-age form and function stands as a tribute to Italian design, American confidence and pure Hollywood glamour. It is, like its namesake, a true star and awaits the next stage on which to shine.



**Above:** Gilda's futuristic fins wowed Turin crowds and presaged trends for years