

Gresham firm plays a part in car of the future

by JIM HAYS
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At first glance, The Exar-1 looks like a typical European sports car.

Low-slung and sleek in design, the car looks like it would be perfectly at home hurtling down the freeway at 100 mph. Nice, but hardly unusual.

It's not until you notice the custom-made tires that you suspect this might not be a run-of-the-mill sports machine. There, in raised white lettering, is the word "Electric."

That's what the Exar-1 is all about.

Powered by 24 six-volt lead-acid batteries, the Exar-1 is a totally electric-powered automobile, and may be the first of a coming trend in transportation. It was developed by Amectran Inc., a Dallas-based company, and is expected to go into production later this year.

The car was in Gresham recently at Pacifico Inc., which is developing the tooling for production models of the car.

"We're creating molds for the entire exterior of the car," says Gary Ramlow, Pacifico marketing director.

The Exar-1 is the brainchild of Edmond Ramirez, president of Amectran, an acronym for American Ecological Transportation. It originated in an idea Ramirez had for developing a toy electric car for his children while serving as president of a computer company.

"Somehow or another, we started thinking in terms of a real automobile," he says.

Electric automobiles are an idea almost as old as the auto industry. They have been revived a number of times in this century but not since the Baker Electric of 1918 has a practical electric car been produced. Several companies have attempted to develop electric cars in the last two decades, including General Motors, which developed an electric-powered Corvair in the mid-60s.

For his prototype, Ramirez more or less discarded previous ideas on the subject and started from scratch with Amectran, which he formed in 1974.

Ramirez designed the first prototype of the car, which was built in 1975. Dubbed the "Yellow Car," it was a square vehicle with a wedge-shaped front end.

Ramirez originally intended for this to be his production model, but on a fundraising tour of Europe in 1977, he determined that the design was not commercially marketable and sought a more saleable body.



The plastic-bodied Exar is powered by batteries.

He then commissioned Pietro Frua, an Italian auto designer. Frua modified a body had been rejected by BMW, which gives the Exar-1 its European look.

The Exar-1 runs noiselessly on its 19-horsepower General Electric motor and has a top speed of 85 mph, with a maximum speed of 75 on a 15 percent grade. It has a cruising range of 100 miles at 55 mph. With computer-controlled instruments, the car has digital dashboard displays that monitor voltage, charging, battery condition, brake conditions and other information.

Although the prototype body is steel, the production model will have a lightweight material known as Kevlar, for which Pacifico is making the molds. The production model is expected to sell for \$7,000 and according to Amectran officials, will pay for itself in saved operating expenses within three

years.

Pacifico made its reputation through its highly-advanced computer design and mold manufacturing facilities. The company's plant on Hogan Road already produces a motorcycle fairing that is recognized as both technically advanced and highly marketable.

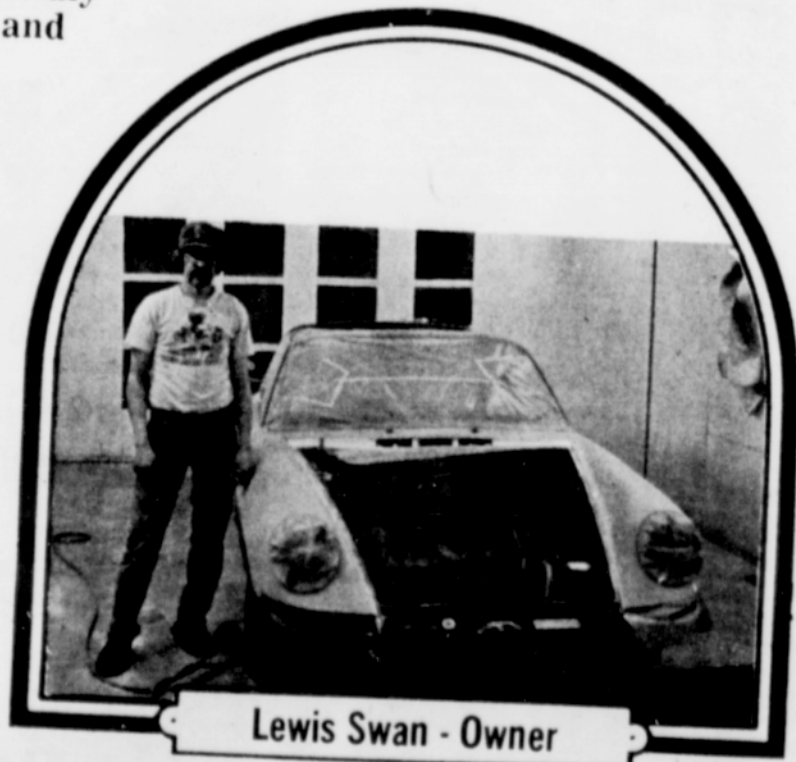
"We found out about the Exar-1 in a magazine," Ramlow admits. "We contacted them and when they saw our capabilities here, they contracted with us to build the tooling."

Ramirez is planning on selling and servicing the Exar-1 directly, through a chain of regional production plants and service centers. "If we don't control it, you will find them sold through dealers and that will raise the price of the car instead of lowering it," he says.

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