

# SNAKE BITT



## THE NEW MOPAR SUPER CAR THAT'S NOT FROM CHRYSLER!

Every generation seems to have one; or sometimes two or three. Throughout the history of mankind, design has been pushed forward largely through the efforts of a handful of men, and following them, everyone else picks up on what they're doing and runs with it. We're not talking about fashion designers for women's clothing, more precisely to our particular subject, we're talking about the men who were not only designers, but also engineers; two fields that go hand-in-hand outside the world of clothing. It's not enough to make something that looks dif-



ferent, it has to be functional, and it has to be better than whatever it's intended to replace. Go back through the annals of time and you'll find them; names like Frank Lloyd Wright, Nikola Tesla, Gottlieb Daimler, Thomas Andrews, Ferdinand Porsche, Wernher Von Braun, Author Emmons Raymond, and Henry Ford and Thomas Edison for that matter. They're the ones who look at the world as it is and say to themselves, "That could be a whole lot better," then they figure out a way to do it, and in most cases make it look nice as well. In the 1900's, industrial designers became celebrities in their own right. Going back to the thirties, the era of truly iconic mechanical designers was ushered in. Names like Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss, Harley Earl, Gordon Buehring, Virgil Exner, Elwood Engel, Battista Pininfarina, and Howard "Dutch" Darrin just to name a few. From locomotives to airplanes to automobiles, to wrist watches, to toasters, their design and styling ideas touched just about every realm. Today, there's a lot of younger guys struggling to fill those very big shoes with varying degrees of success, but recently we had the pleasure of meeting someone we legitimately consider to be perhaps this generation's version of Raymond Loewy – none other than Hendrik Fisker.

To most of you out there, Hendrik Fisker will undoubtedly be most widely known as the founder of Fisker Automotive, which debuted their plug-in hybrid Fisker Karma exotic super car at the 2008 North American International Auto Show. As most of you know, we've never been huge fans of hybrid of all-electric-powered vehicles here, but the Fisker Karma was something quite a bit different.

Looking more like a Lamborghini than a cracker box roller skate electric car, the Karma was absolutely gorgeous, it's interior was spectacular, and what's more, it was designed to run like a bat-out-of-hades when the go pedal was pushed down. And Hendrik Fisker designed it pretty much from the ground up, inside and out. In 2012, production stopped on the Fisker Karma, amidst major problems with the company providing the batteries for the cars and other suppliers and investors. Highly agitated, Hendrik resigned from the company he had founded and left. The company was soon bought by the Chinese, renamed Karma Automotive, and they're vowing to produce more cars of a similar nature in the near future. That's probably how you've known Hendrik Fisker up until this moment. But believe us, there's a whole lot more to this man than just his sudden desire to produce a hybrid luxury super car. We've been blessed to meet some guys in our lives that we truly consider to be absolute geniuses, and Hendrik certainly ranks pretty high up there.

Hendrik was born back in 1963 in Denmark, but he's lived and worked in Germany, London, and for much of his career, in Southern California. He graduated from California's Art Center College of Design, and having always had a penchant for all things mechanical and a notable eye for style, he secured his first big job back in 1989 with BMW's advanced design studio in Munich. He designed the Z07 BMW concept car, which led directly to him designing the BMW Z8 roadsters, which we're quite certain you've seen zipping around just about everywhere. In 2001, Fisker joined Ford Motor Company, and since they were partnered with Aston

Martin, he became the design director for Aston. Most of those spectacular Aston Martins you've seen for the last fifteen years have varying amounts of Fisker's handiwork in them, with the gorgeous Aston Martin DB9 being his creation entirely. He left Ford in 2004 to form his own design company, Fisker Coachbuild, which specialized in creating exotic bodies and interiors that could be fitted to existing chassis and drivetrains – much the same thing that notables such as Fleetwood, Murphy, and Saoutchik had done back in the prewar golden era of luxury car making. Then came the desire to build his own car from the tires up, which resulted in the Fisker Karma, and since leaving that venture in 2012, Hendrik Fisker has hardly been sitting around doing nothing; that's not the kind of guy he is.

Several years ago, Hendrik was looking at a Dodge Viper and pondering just how much potential the car had for even greater things. Sure, it was built as a Corvette killer and Dodge's version of a "super car," but he didn't believe it was on the same playing field with the elite Ferraris and Lamborghinis of Europe, and Hendrik Fisker kept studying it and scribbling notes, wondering why nobody was pushing the car father. By 2015, Hendrik decided if nobody else was going to do it, he would, so he began looking to the foremost authorities in the Viper field and that naturally led him to Viper racing specialist Ben Keating of The Viper Exchange down in Texas. Having raced Vipers and designed suspension and high-performance engine components for Vipers since Dodge first released them, there's no one on the planet who knows more about making a Viper go faster and handle better than Ben Keating. When they sat down together, Hendrik showed him his initial sketches for what he had in mind, and it was something none of us would've expected. Rather than just take a Viper and add some body modifications to it, Hendrik had the notion that you could start with a Viper chassis and then build an entirely new car around it. He thought there had really only been one true American "super car" throughout history (arguably) and that one car was the Ford GT40. Hendrik thought that with America's extremely rich automotive history, there was something wrong with that picture, and it was high time the United States had a car that could go out there on the world stage and stand toe-to-toe with anything Europe had to offer. Ben Keating liked that idea quite a bit, and that, in turn, told Hendrik that his idea was not only feasible, he'd already

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made an ally and it could be done. But, it takes more than one or two guys to put together a company to build the ultimate American super car, and knowing he wanted the Viper to be starting point, who better to consult with than his good friend, and former Chrysler executive, Bob Lutz?

Lutz, one of the true icons in the last four decades of the automotive business, began his career with BMW in 1971, and he's the guy who came up with the "Ultimate Driving Machine" tag line for them (bit of free trivia there). Lutz came to America and quickly climbed the corporate ladder, becoming the Executive Vice President of Ford, the head of Chrysler's Global Product Development, then he eventually left to do the same job over at GM until he finally left in 2010 to semi-retire. In 2012, Lutz formed VLF Automotive in Detroit with business partner Gilbert Villareal to build exotic cars without all the hassles of dealing with a giant corporation. Lutz will forever be known to Chrysler fanatics as the man who pushed the Viper program through, along with the Prowler, the PT Cruiser, and the entire LH series of cars. For what it's worth, he also pushed through the modern Camaro we see today and the radicalization of the newer Corvettes. All that aside, Henrik Fisker sat down with Lutz in Detroit in late 2015 and laid out his vision. Both

agreed it needed to be done and the Viper platform was just the ticket, so by the time they had finished a few adult beverages, the gents shook hands, and two of the most legendary figures in the automotive realm as it currently exists had formed a team to make it happen, with Lutz's VLF building the cars at their Michigan facility – and that's how the Force 1 V-10 coupe was born.

Designed by Fisker, the prototype Force 1 V-10 was first shown at the Detroit Auto Show in December, 2016. As this is being written, the first production examples are being assembled. The car features an entirely scratch-built carbon fiber body which rides on 21" custom alloy wheels shod with Pirelli P Zero tires. Having to custom make everything from the windows to the headlights and taillights, and virtually all the interior components, this has literally been a ground-up project and labor of love for everyone involved. The Force 1 V-10 begins as a new production Viper, which is then torn completely apart so only the basic chassis itself and the government-approved safety equipment can be retained. Bob Keating builds the entire suspension system for the Force 1 V-10, assuring it will handle as good as any race-tuned Viper currently running on road courses all over the world. Keating also takes each one of the new V-10 engines and goes through them from the crankshaft up, rebuilding and

tweaking them to perfection, and he built a new induction system that aligns itself with the Force 1's hood to allow for no less than six cold forced air inlets. The end result is a reliable V-10 that idles smooth and pumps out a dyno tested 745 horsepower! There are elements of the old and the new in the Force 1 V-10. One can see something of a progression from the vintage Shelby racing coupes of the early sixties, but the design blends Fisker's bold styling with distinctly American elements. The windshield wraps around, while the hood stretches out with bold sharp edges, serving to feed the giant engine beneath. The cabin is pushed as far back as possible, but the car's balance is absolutely remarkable, in large part thanks to its extremely lightweight body. The luxurious interior consists of extremely soft hand-stitched leather with the "VLF" logo strategically placed, and the shifter is machined aluminum, the gauges are custom-made, and among its other amenities, the car has Wi-Fi, and a built-in champagne holder (no kidding)!

The Force 1 V-10 is not to be taken as just a pretty face, however, as Fisker and Lutz will readily attest to, and the prototype has already more than proven itself. Running on pump gas, the VLF Force 1 V-10 goes from zero-to-sixty in three seconds flat, it packs 638 ft. lbs. of torque, and the car doesn't stop pulling

until it reaches 218 miles-per-hour! If that's not fast enough for you, join NASA, we don't know what else to tell you. Best of all, it's not a pipe dream, this is real and it's happening now. Obviously, this is not a cheap car, and they are made one-at-a-time, by hand, each one made to order in whatever color combination your heart may desire. The cars can be ordered through The Viper Exchange, with Ben Keating handling your order's details. Or, you can contact VLF Automotive directly and they'll instruct you on how to get one of these gorgeous monsters parked in your garage.

Personally for us, we find it wonderfully amusing that two guys who got their big breaks in the automotive industry both started off working for BMW; Bob Lutz and Henrik Fisker, are the guys responsible for something Americans haven't seen the likes of before and likely never will again. Having known Bob Lutz since he was at Chrysler, we can assure you, he's an amazing guy, and once he puts his mind to something, it tends to get done. Having recently met Henrik Fisker, we're struck with the same "can do" attitude. These are hardcore car guys and they like to dream big. When you put their combined talents together, you can't help but end up with a phenomenal result; and you're now looking at it. We've seen the future gold standard of American performance cars, and it's unlike anything we've ever seen before. ☒



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