# Yugo set for comeback with electric model and modern design after decades of decline



In the early 1980s, the UK motoring landscape encountered a curious entrant: the Zastava Yugo. Launched at an eye-catching price of £3,000, this budget car aimed to disrupt a market dominated by more reputable brands, such as the Austin Metro and Ford Fiesta, especially during a time when British consumers were grappling with economic woes. However, despite its affordability, the Yugo rapidly garnered a reputation for poor build quality and a lack of reliability, ultimately becoming infamous as one of the worst cars in history.

Though initial sales numbers were encouraging, with around 3,000 units sold each year, the car's flaws soon became apparent. By the late 1990s, as records from the DVLA illustrate, the number of Yugos still operational dwindled dramatically. Today's figures are stark, with only seven remaining on British roads, a testament to the notoriously flimsy construction that defined the vehicle. Anecdotes of the Yugo's downfall are numerous, including one where a Yugo was destroyed in a trebuchet demonstration, symbolising both its perceived worthlessness and the disdain it faced.

Originally produced by Zastava Automobiles in what was then Yugoslavia, the Yugo 45 was a product of collaboration with Fiat, sharing platforms and components with models like the Fiat 127. However, even a low price point, which dropped to as little as £2,795 before imports ceased in 1991 due to the Yugoslav Wars, could not compensate for its myriad issues, including mechanical failures and safety defects. Despite this, the Yugo's accessibility did appeal to a segment of the market, being touted in the US as "the least expensive new car" and making a notable, albeit brief, splash across the Atlantic before being panned as a national joke.

Fast-forward to the present, and the Yugo is poised for a dramatic resurgence. Dr Aleksandar Bjelić, a Serbian university professor, has acquired the rights to the Yugo name and is spearheading a revival project aimed at launching the new model by 2027. In a modern twist, this reincarnation debuted in scaled-down form at the recent Car Design Event in Munich, revealing a design that retains the boxy aesthetic of its predecessor while incorporating contemporary features such as LED lights and more robust materials aimed at ensuring compliance with modern safety standards.

Bjelić and Serbian designer Darko Marčeta are adamant that the new Yugo will not only keep its cost-effective nature but will also offer possible electrified versions, reflecting a broader trend within the automotive industry towards sustainability. With plans to showcase a fully functioning prototype at the Belgrade Expo in 2027, the team aims to address previous criticisms head-on: a commitment to quality and a promise of a "fun-to-drive" vehicle suggests lessons learned from the past.

As nostalgia for bygone automotive eras grows, particularly for models from Eastern Europe, the Yugo's remarkable story comes full circle. Enthusiasts in the US market have shown renewed interest in such vehicles, with a demand for affordable vintage options rising significantly. In this context, the Yugo may no longer simply represent failure but could emerge as a symbol of resilience and reinvention. It presents an intriguing question: can the name once synonymous with mediocrity be transformed into a vibrant player in the modern automotive landscape?

What remains clear is that the new Yugo has some formidable legacies to tackle. Dr Bjelić and his team are set on redefining the car's narrative, proving that perhaps the only way is up for a brand that has spent decades at the bottom. As they cultivate a new chapter for an old name, the Yugo may yet regain a place in the hearts and driveways of automotive enthusiasts and novices alike.

### Reference Map

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/cars/article-14696027/The-worst-car-history-set-return-Cheap-1980s-model-making-dramatic-comeback.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/6d3279e1-4219-4b02-ac42-75ccc80863d2> - Actor Tom Hanks developed a fascination for the Polski Fiat 126p during a visit to Budapest, frequently sharing his fondness on social media. This led the residents of Bielsko-Biała, Poland, to gift him a restored version of the car in 2017. Americans have since shown an increased interest in communist-era cars, driven by nostalgia and a desire for unique vintage vehicles. Garages in Eastern Europe are responding to this demand by restoring and selling these classic models, including the Lada Riva, Trabants, and Zastavas. Collectors appreciate these cars for their historic charm, distinctive aesthetics, and cultural significance. Enthusiasts like Serbian tattoo artist Jovana Ninković and Upstate New York’s Philip Pameri exemplify the passion for these charming yet robust machines from a bygone era. The revival reflects a broader trend of Cold War nostalgia and fascination with objects that were once inaccessible to Westerners.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugo> - The Yugo, produced by the now-defunct Zastava Automobiles in Yugoslavia (present-day Serbia), was introduced in the 1980s as a budget-friendly vehicle based on the Fiat 127 and 128 platforms, with production having ceased in 2008. In 2025, Serbian university professor Dr. Aleksandar Bjelić secured the rights to the Yugo name to revive the brand. He collaborated with Serbian designer Darko Marčeta to conceptualize a modern iteration of the classic Yugo. The new Yugo's design retains the boxy aesthetic of its predecessor while integrating modern elements. Key features include slim LED headlights and taillights, large alloy wheels, flush-fitting door handles, a distinctive front grille, and an angular rear hatch. The classic 'Y' emblem remains a prominent detail. The vehicle will utilize an "established platform" from a cooperation partner, ensuring modernity, cost-effectiveness, and compliance with current safety standards. A design model of the new Yugo is anticipated to be unveiled later in 2025, with a finished prototype expected to debut at the Belgrade Expo 2027.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_automobiles_known_for_negative_reception> - The Yugo from Yugoslavia sold in the United States was roundly panned for its poor performance, poor build quality, and numerous safety defects, becoming the frequent butt of jokes. The cover of the February 1986 issue of Consumer Reports featured a Yugo getting stared down by a Peterbilt truck with the caption "How much car do you get for $3990?" The included review described the car as a "barely assembled bag of nuts and bolts", saying that a used car was a better buy. In the year 2000, Car Talk voted it the "Worst Car of the Millennium". The Yugo was also included on Time magazine's list of the 50 worst cars of all time and CNN's list of the "10 Most Questionable Cars of All Time". Dan Neil called the Yugo the "Mona Lisa of bad cars", with "the distinct feeling of being assembled at gunpoint." CNN said "Chinese car companies are now talking about entering the U.S. market, so you'll see the Yugo cited frequently as an example of how not to do it.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malcolm_Bricklin> - Bricklin had his own people at the plant to monitor the effort, stressing high quality. A team of British quality experts sent a cadre to Kragujevac to study the factory and recommend improvements. The first shipment of the Yugos arrived via ship from Bar, Montenegro in Baltimore, Maryland in July 1985. The Yugo was the fastest-selling car ever in the US from Europe, 163,000 in three years, and was the least expensive new car sold in the United States. At first, five models of Yugo were marketed in the United States for model year 1987: the basic entry-level $3,990-($9,363.69 in 2020) GV (for "Great Value"), the GVC with a glass sunroof, the nearly identical GVL and GVS with minor trim and upholstery upgrades, and the sportier GVX with the 1300 cc engine, five-speed manual transmission and standard equipment including a plush interior, ground-effects package, alloy wheels, rally lights, and a centre high mount stop lamp. The Cabrio convertible was introduced in 1988. Bricklin sold his interest in Yugo in 1988 for $20 million.
6. <https://www.startribune.com/no-go-yugo-a-history-of-the-worst-car-in-the-history-of-the-world/86426187> - Though the carmaker sold a relatively small number of cars here during its mid-1980s heyday -- it occupied "a tiny .35 percent of the U.S. market," Vuic writes -- the Yugo's many mechanical problems and safety issues made it a national joke. It was, Vuic reminds us, a comedic prop in movies and an easy laugh for comedians. "It was a bad car for the ages," Vuic writes. But American car buyers liked the idea of the Yugo, at least initially. It surely wasn't a luxury car, but at that price -- $3,990 in 1985 -- its limitations were tolerable. They sold quickly in that summer of '85 -- so fast, Vuic notes, that major newspapers, TV networks and car magazines made "Yugomania" a regular staple of their coverage. Other carmakers tried to mimic the early success enjoyed by Yugo, which "had demonstrated that ... U.S. consumers would buy even the obscurest of automobiles as long as they were cheap," Vuic writes. Before long, Hyundai, from Korea, was offering its Excel for less than $5,000, and Volkswagen, Chrysler, GM and Ford were also selling similarly priced models.
7. <https://dal-motors.com/car-news/how-the-yugo-car-became-americas-favorite-worst-car/> - On August 25, 1985, the Yugo launched in 50 Northeastern dealerships at a jaw-dropping price of $3,990 (about $9,600 today). The car sold out almost instantly, with 1,050 units sold in just one day. For the next six months, media coverage and advertising kept the Yugo in the spotlight. It became a popular choice for first-time drivers, families in need of a second car, and bargain hunters across the country. However, the honeymoon didn’t last long. Once Americans started driving their new Yugos, it became clear why the car was so cheap. It was slow, unreliable, and dangerously unsafe, earning a reputation as the worst car ever made. The Yugo’s faults were numerous, and by 1992, Yugo of America had gone under. Despite being mocked and derided, the Yugo’s sales figures tell a different story. Nearly 140,000 units were sold during its eight-year run in the American market. The Yugo’s quick rise and dramatic fall turned it into a historical footnote and a cultural phenomenon. For a car that was fundamentally flawed, it still captured the public’s imagination.