4. Lamborghini

Automobili Lamborghini was founded in 1963 by manufacturing magnate Ferruccio Lamborghini. A former mechanic during World War II, Lamborghini built a tractor business using leftover military hardware. By 1955, his tractor company was one of Italy's largest farming equipment manufacturers. Finding himself in a position to indulge his passion for luxury cars, Lamborghini began buying Alfa Romeos, Lancias, Maseratis, and Ferarris. He decided to build the perfect grand touring car, and after several years of working with top designers, the Lamborghini 350GTV was unveiled at the 1963 Turin Motor Show.

But after a decade of impressive growth, the 1973 oil crisis had a devastating effect on sales. In 1972, Lamborghini had sold his ailing tractor business to a rival company and offloaded 51% of Automobili Lamborghini, although he continued working at the factory. Then in 1974, he sold his remaining shares and walked away from the company he founded.

Bankruptcy in 1978 was followed by three changes in ownership. Lamborghini continued to falter until it was acquired in 1998 by a subsidiary of the Volkswagen Group.

5. Lancia

Lancia Automobiles was founded in 1906 by racing drivers Vincenzo Lancia and Claudio Fogolin. The

company has a long history of producing distinctive cars and also performing well at motor rallies. Upon Vincenzo's death in 1937, his wife and son took charge of the company. Lancia became famous for its many innovations in the automobile industry. These include:

- the first complete electrical system as standard equipment (in 1913)
- the first car body that supported structural load by using the car's exterior, rather than an internal frame or truss (in 1922)
- the first independent front suspension (in 1922)
- the first 5 speed gearbox fitted to a road car (in 1948)
- the first full-production V6 engine
- the first V4 engine
- the first rear trans-axles

Lancia always enjoyed a reputation as a high-end luxury car, but because of their stringent manufacturing standards, production was ultimately not cost-effective. In 1969 Fiat purchased the company, but elected to preserve the Lancia brand.

6. Maserati

Maserati was founded in 1914, in Bologna by the Maserati brothers, Alfieri, Bindo, Carlo, Ettore, and Ernesto. Three of the brothers had built Grand Prix cars for Diatto, and in 1926, they created the first Maserati. One of their early models, driven by Alfieri Maserati, won the 1926 Targa Florio. In 1937, the brothers sold their shares to Adolfo Orsi, although

they continued working for the company as engineers. Ten years later, they finally left the company and founded a rival company, OSCA. After 1957, Maserati began focusing on building road cars.

Like several other Italian car manufacturers, Maserati has a long history of takeovers and reinvention. In 1968, the French car manufacturer, Citroën, purchased the company. After Citroën went bankrupt in 1974, Italian government funds kept the company afloat. In 1975 Argentinean Alessandro de Tomaso took over the company. Later, Chrysler purchased part of Maserati, and, in 1993, it was sold to Fiat. Fiat later relinquished control to Ferrari, also a Fiat-owned company, and Maserati cars regained the popularity they had lost in the intervening years. In 2005 Fiat Auto regained control of Maserati and merged it with Alfa Romeo.

Maserati cars performed well at motor racing events in the 1940s and 50s. Maserati won the Indianapolis 500 twice, in 1939 and 1940, the only Italian car manufacturer to achieve this distinction. Racing victories in the 1950s included the world championship in 1957.