Full Speed Ahead: Evolution of CALTY’s Sports Cars

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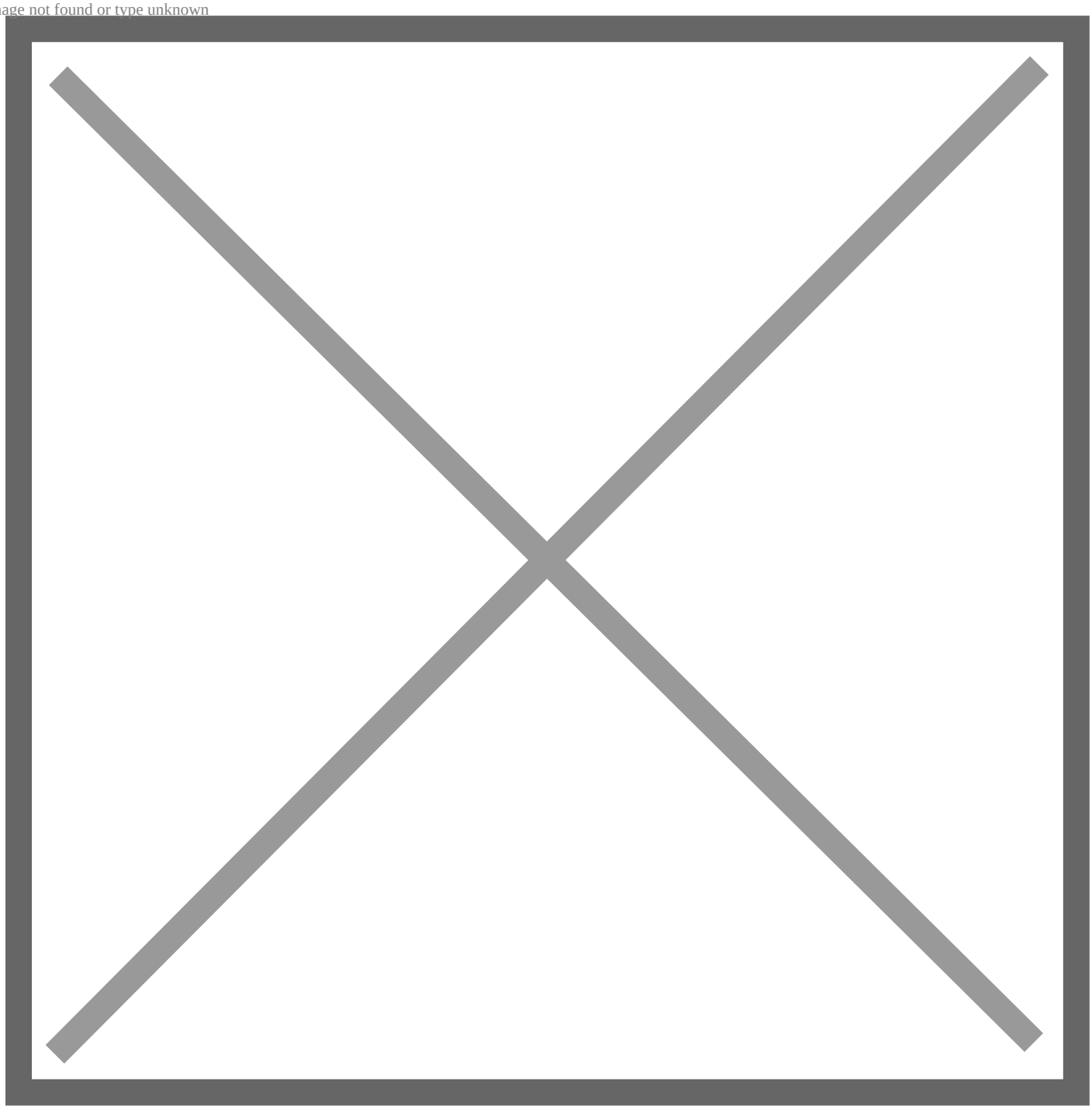
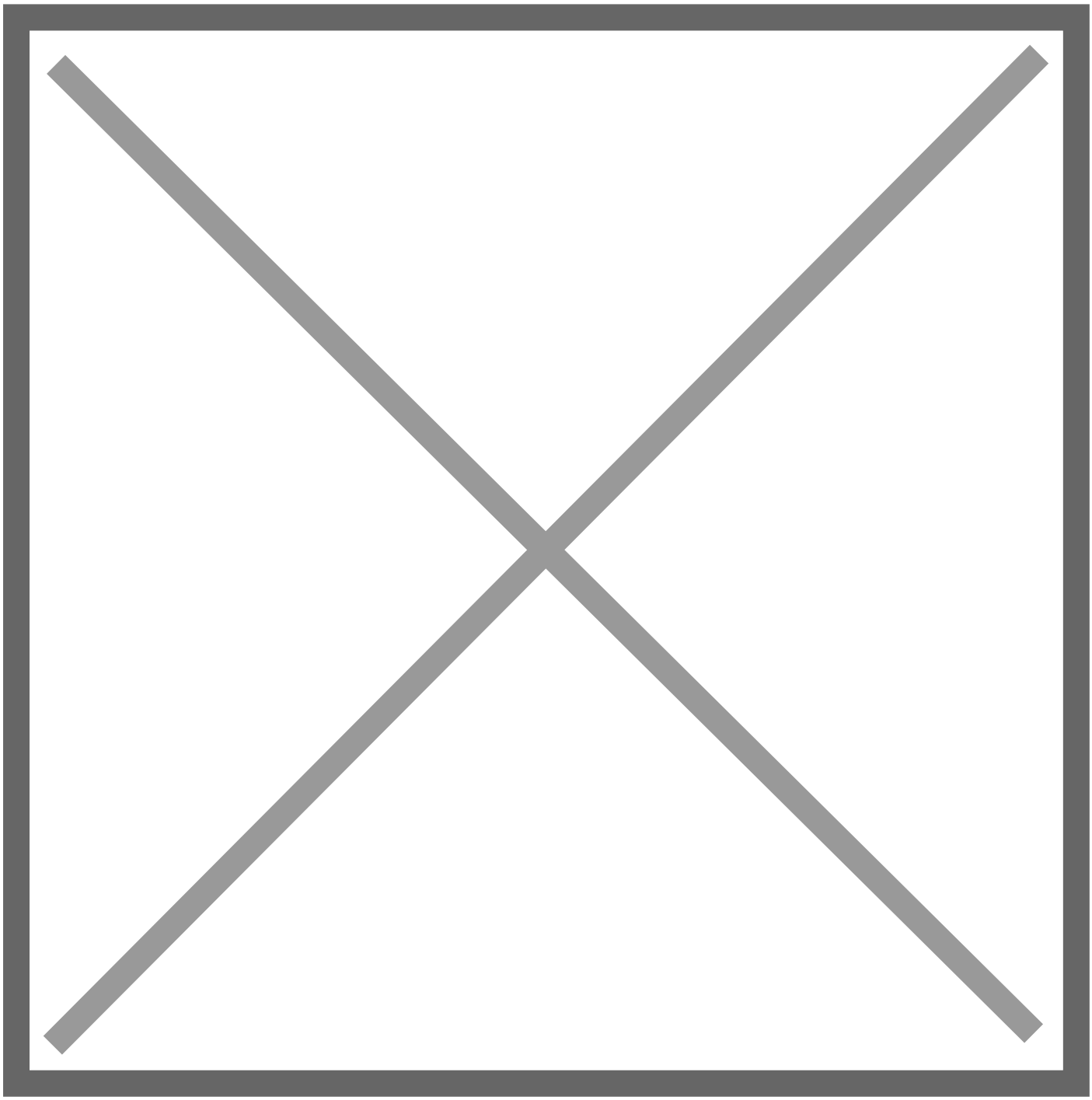


Toyota has a rich history of producing sports cars that have captured the hearts and imaginations of drivers and car enthusiasts around the world. Who are the people behind some of the most popular designs? The Calty Design Research team is the mastermind responsible for turning unimaginable concepts into reality.

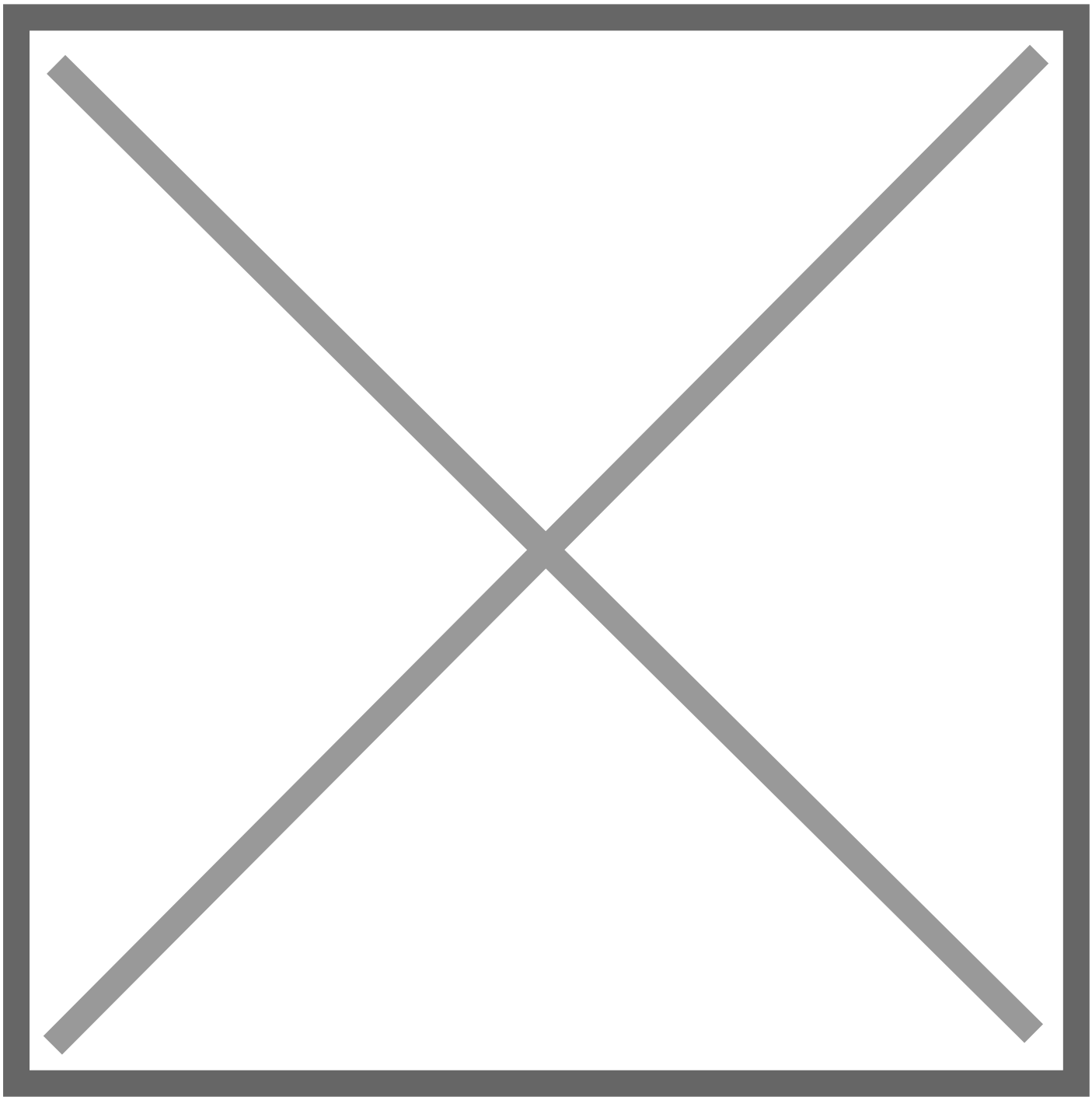
From the iconic Toyota Celica in 1978 to the groundbreaking 1989 Toyota MR2, the Calty team worked fervently to create vehicles that pushed the boundaries of automotive design and performance that would cement Toyota's reputation as a leader in the world of sports cars.

Take a trip down memory lane with this slideshow featuring some of Calty's most noteworthy sports car projects from the 1970s through the 1980s.



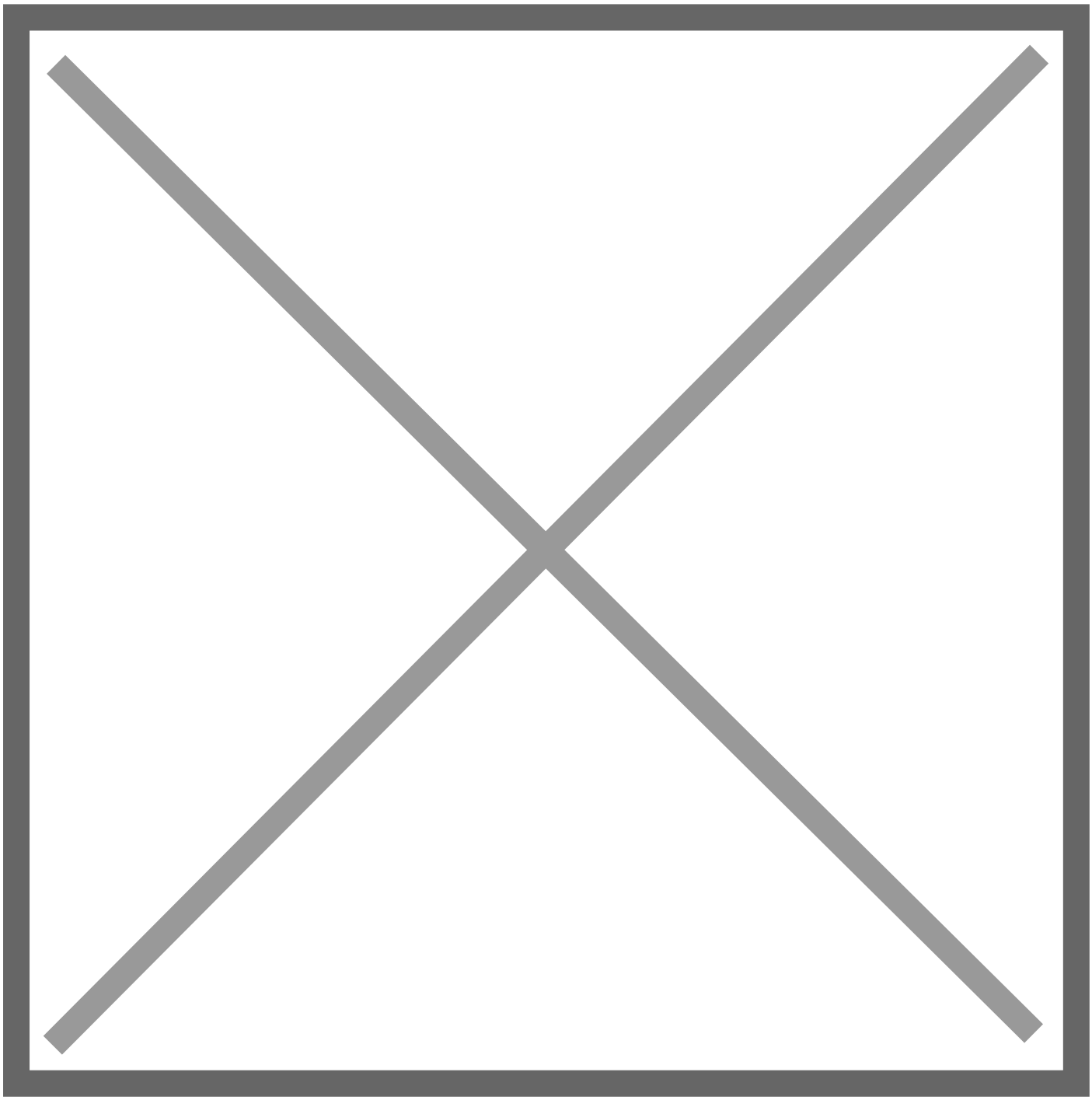
1975 Sports Car Concept

Toyota’s 1975 Sports Concept Design at Calty was a groundbreaking project that showcased the company’s commitment to innovation and design. There were several sporting studies that included a hatchback, a shooting brake and a pure sports car. The concepts represented a bold vision for the future of automotive design. Its influence can still be seen in today’s Toyota models, which continue to drive mobility forward.



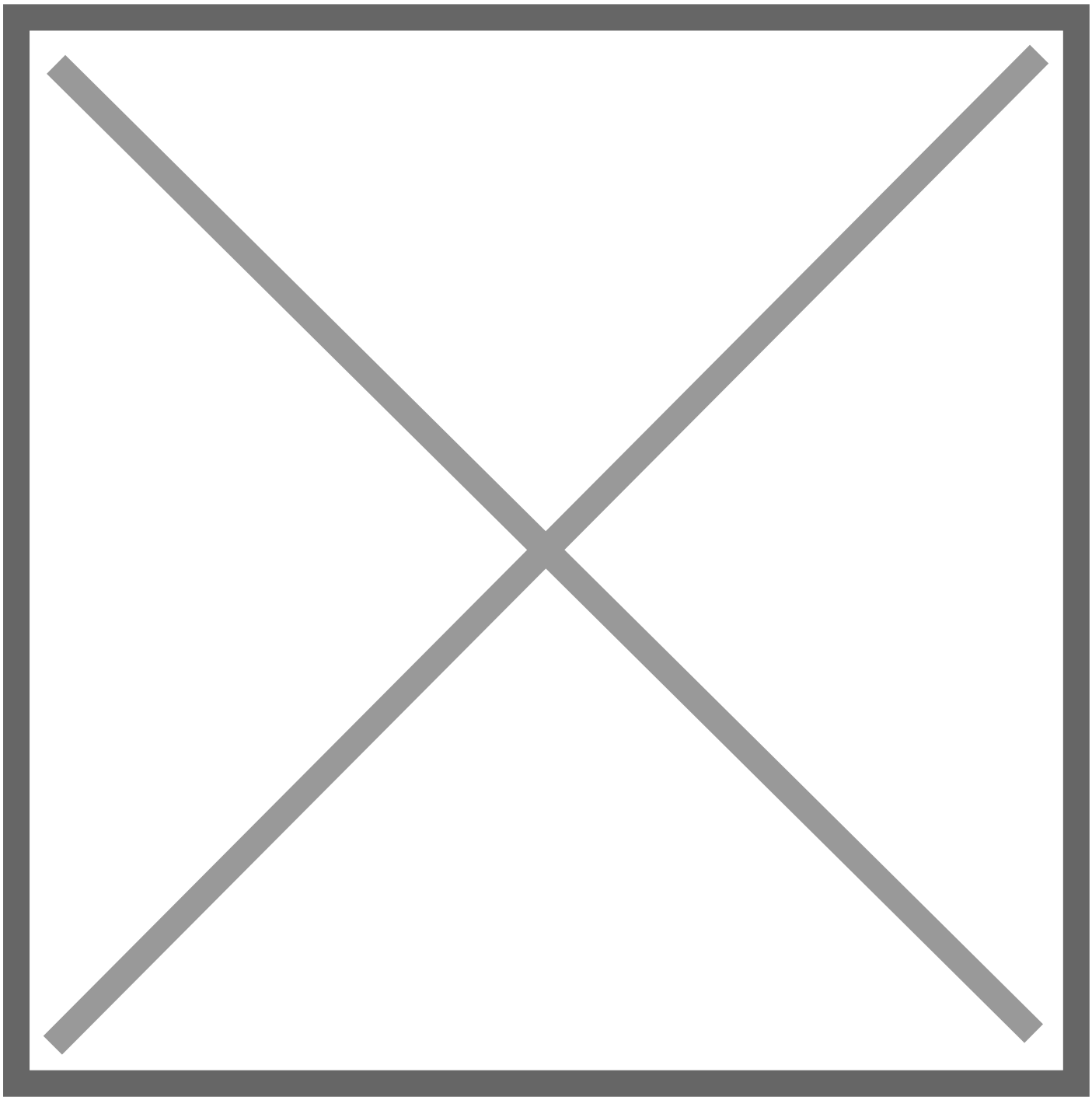
1978 Toyota Celica

The 1978 Toyota Celica is a classic sports car that has stood the test of time. With its sleek design and powerful engine, it was a popular choice for consumers and car enthusiasts in the late 1970s. The Celica's unique styling and reliable performance made it a standout among other cars of its era. In fact, it was Toyota's best-selling American model with more than 167,000 units sold in its first year. Even today, it remains a sought-after model for collectors and vintage car enthusiasts alike. Plus, it was the Calty team's first production-car design.



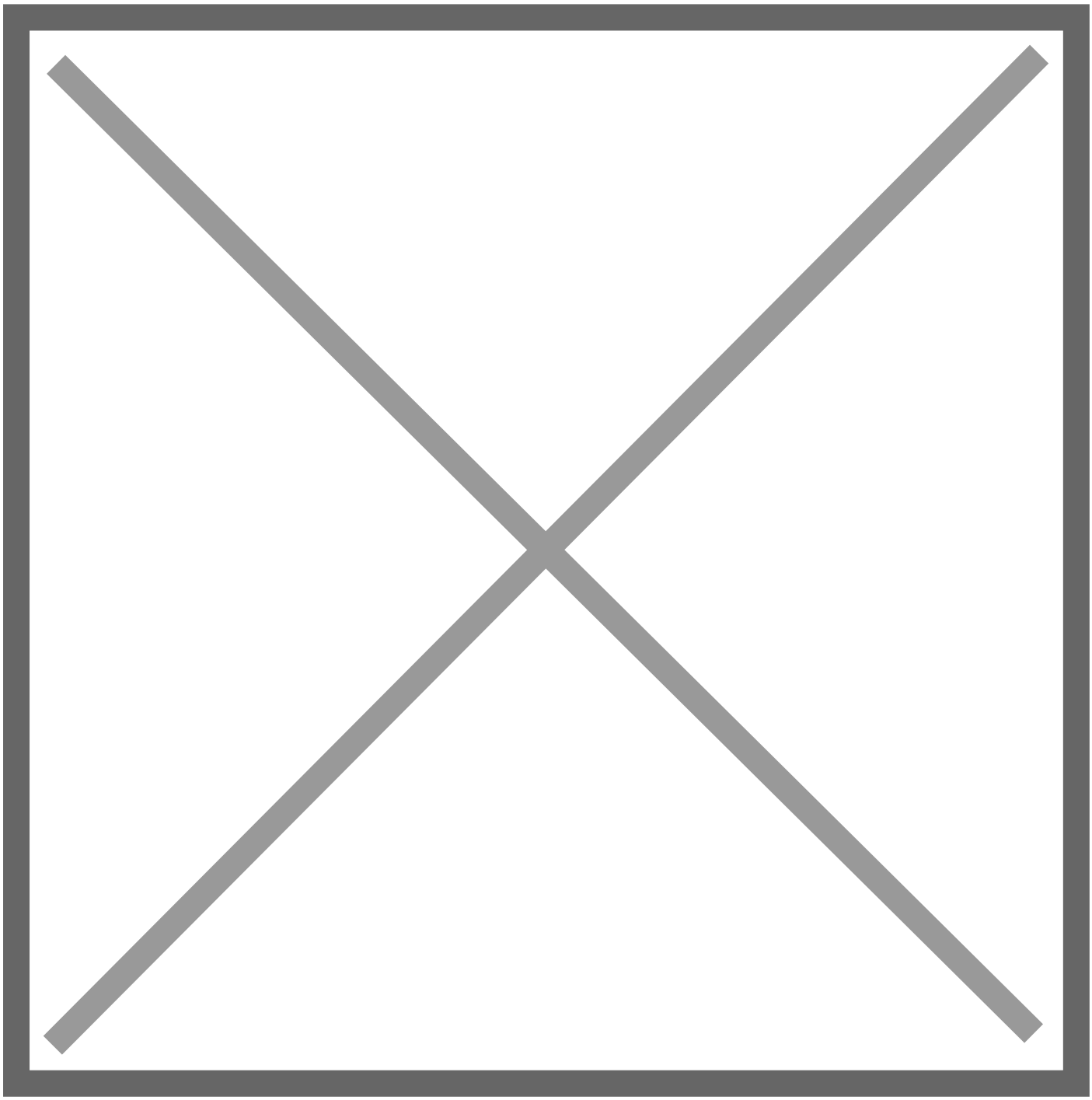
1985 FXV Concept

In the 1980s, Toyota's Calty studio revolutionized the company's luxury coupes with a new design approach that resulted in the creation of the game-changing Future Experimental Vehicle (FXV) Concept car. Unveiled at the 1985 Tokyo Motor Show, it had a sleek, aerodynamic body with advanced features including a multi-information system. The car's overall form was based on a simple, visually balanced, three-dimensional trapezoid fused with a sleek and unified class canopy.

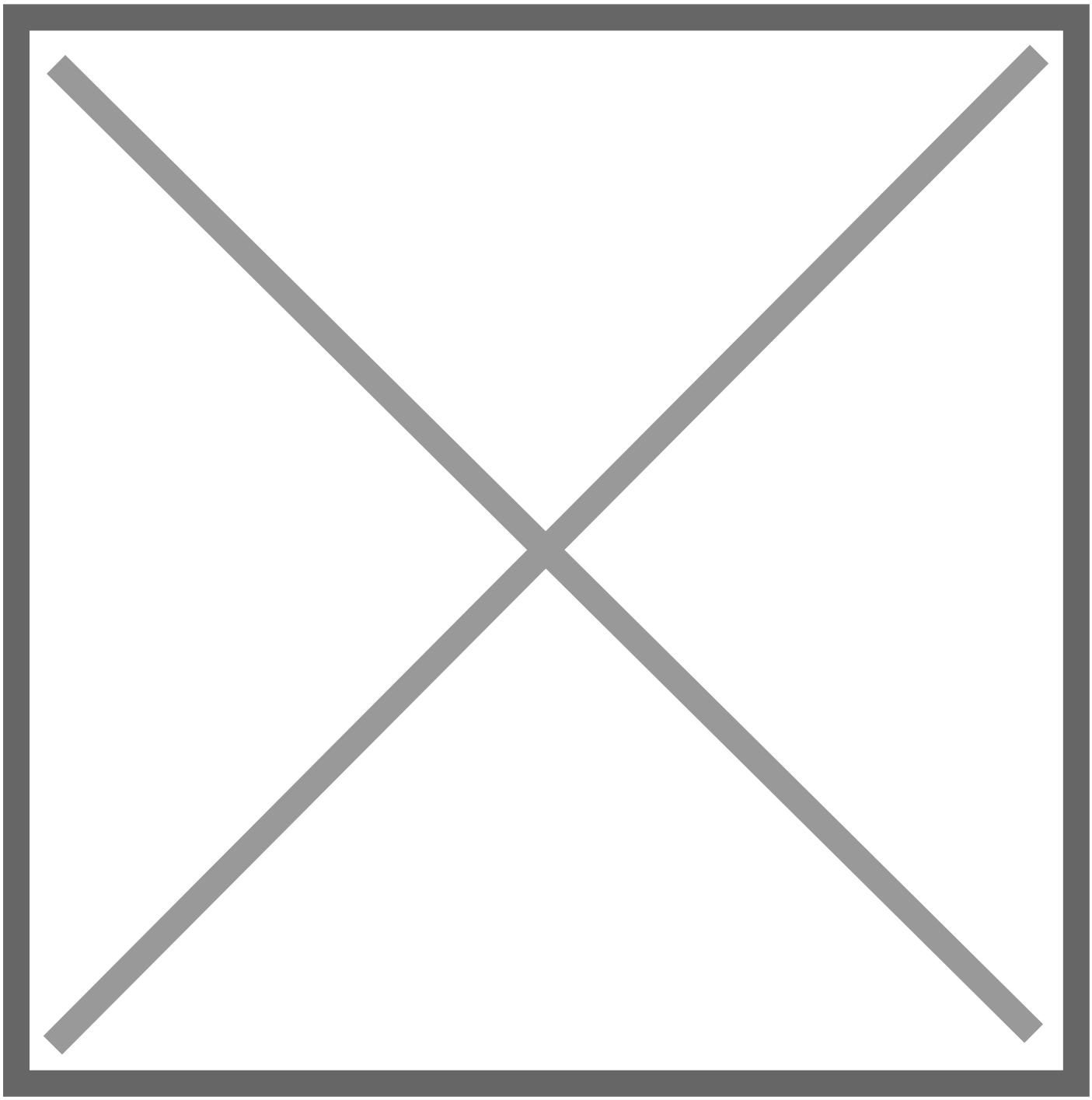


1980 ESX Concept
Paving the way for future environmentally sensitive vehicles, the ESX was a true trailblazer. For starters, the name stood for Eco Sports Experimental. It was Calty's take on an affordable, fun, and efficient sports car.

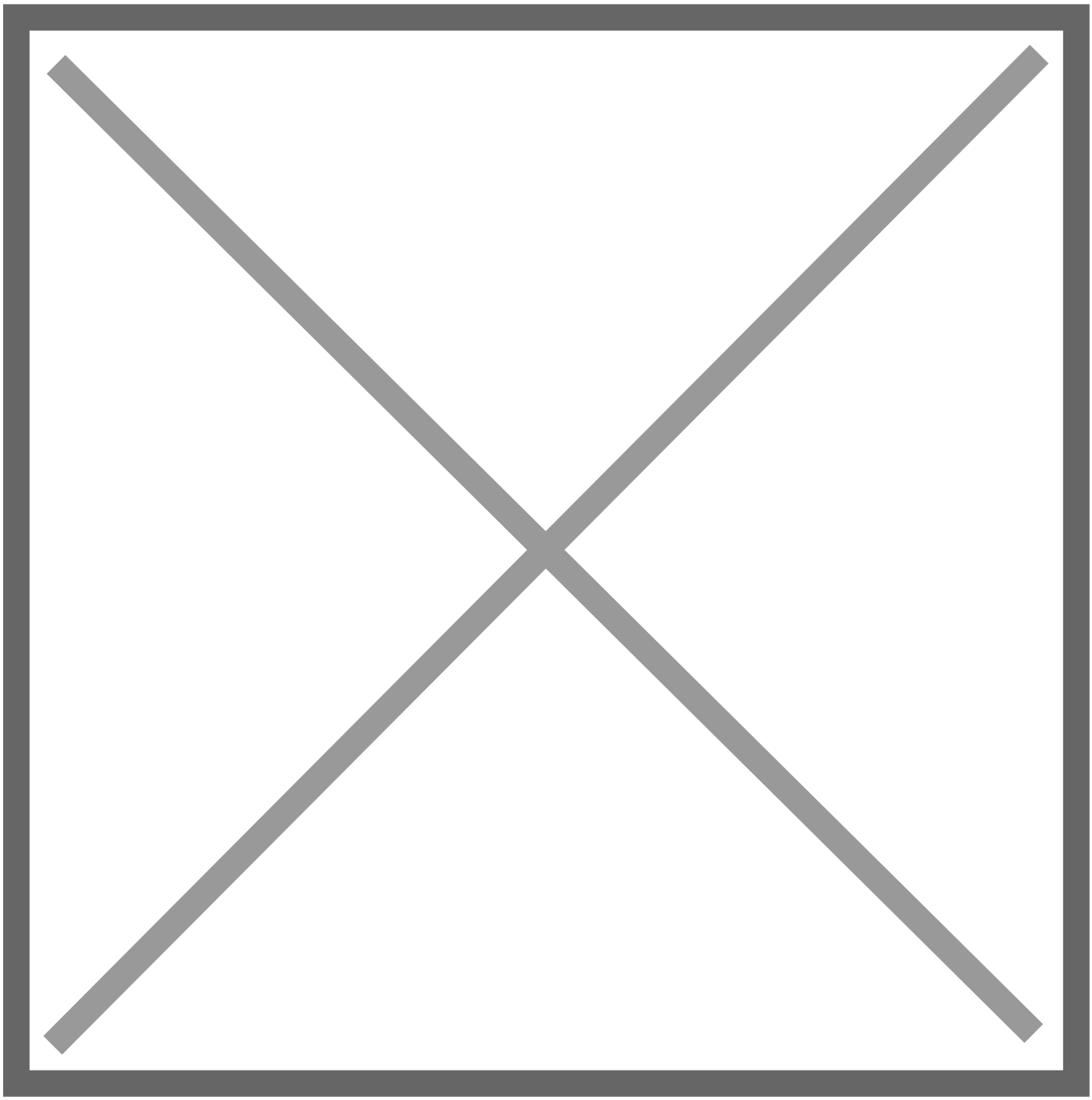
The ESX Concept Phase 2 was an evolution of the original study with a more refined interior and exterior design. The fiberglass reinforced plastic (FRP) model featured an innovative gull-wing door system that added to its futuristic appeal.



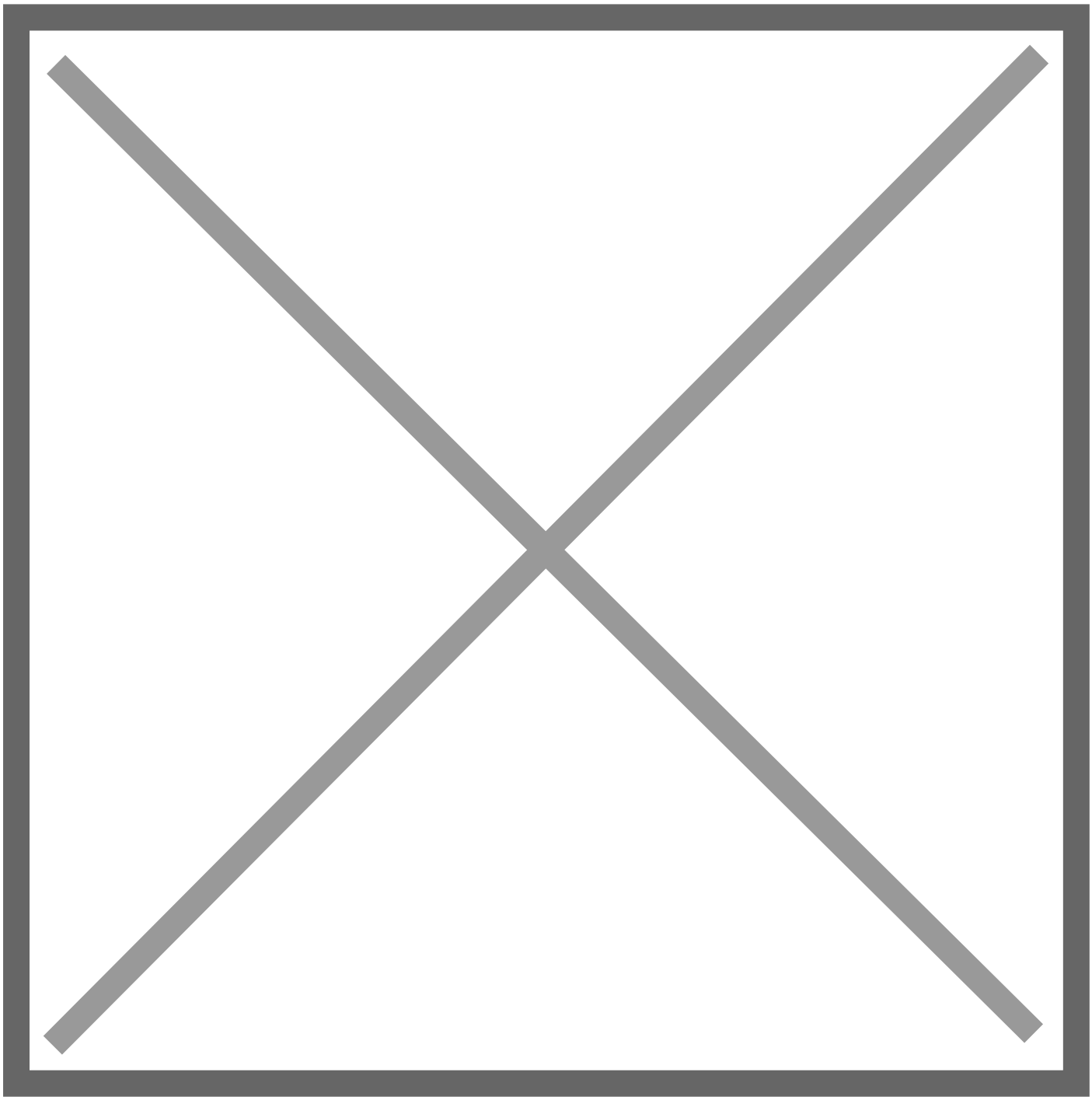
1980s Toyota MR2+2 Concept
Developed in the 1980s, this purely experimental design was based on the popular MR2 sports car but adopted a mid-engine layout with the cabin pushed forward to the limit. As one of Calty's many sports/sporty car proposals, the MR2+2 Concept truly looked like a sports car intended for the future with its barely visible A-pillars and fighter jet-like cockpit.



1980s MX-1 Mid-Engine High Performance Sports Car Concept
Calty drew inspiration from its earlier sports car lineup proposal to create a premium mid-engine halo sports car concept that would elevate Toyota's technology and brand. The project was a true group effort, from sketching to the creation of a full-size model in-house at Calty. The car's sleek wedge-shaped profile highlighted excellent aerodynamics and futuristic design qualities, including a powerful mid-placed engine and scissor-style doors.

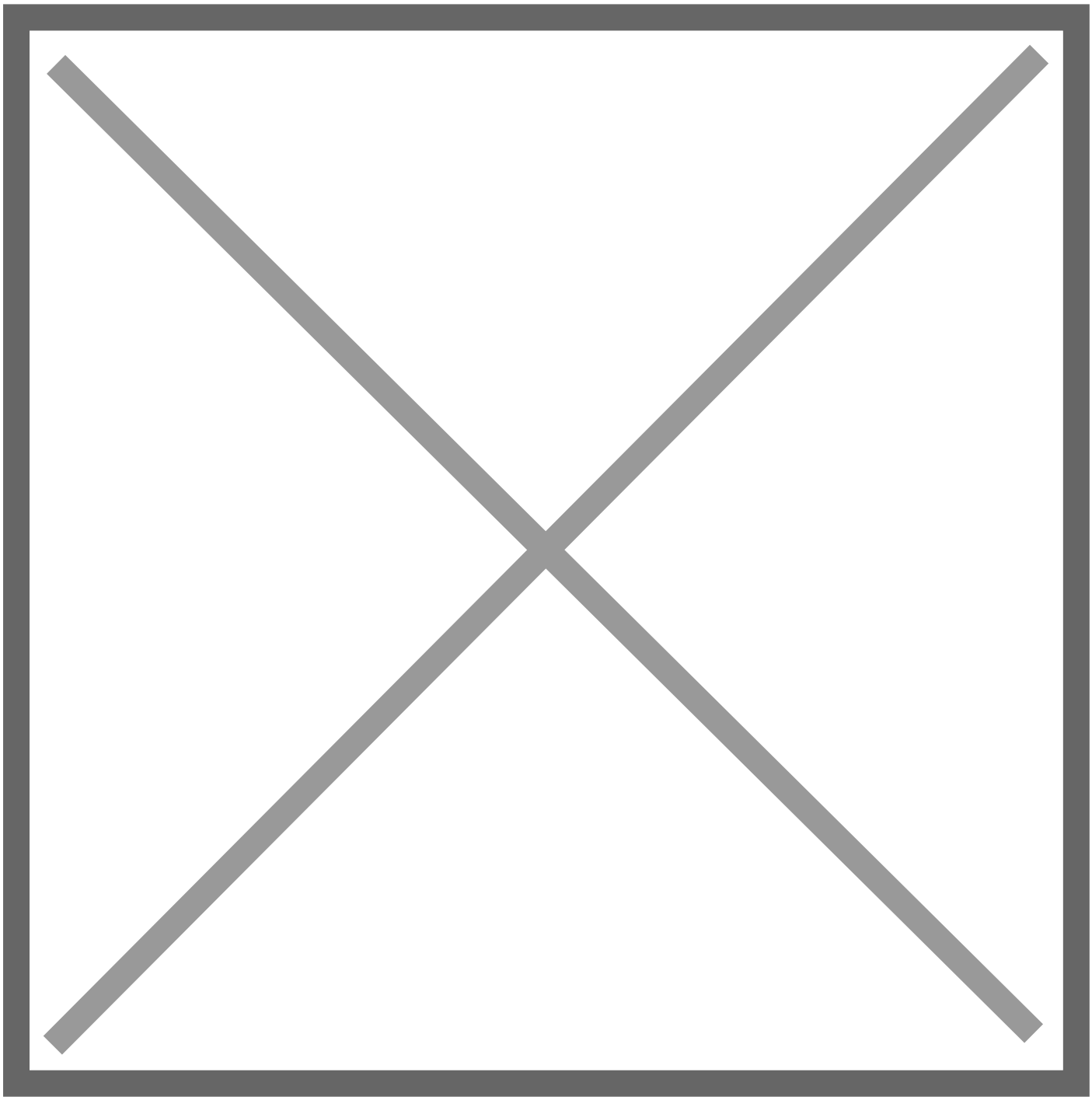


1985 MX-2 Mid-Engine High Performance Race Car/Sports Car
In 1985, Calty designers created the MX-2 as a radical sequel to the MX-1. The teardrop-shape exterior was optimized for aerodynamic performance, and the minimalist interior was functionally designed for racing. The mid-engine race car concept had gull-wing doors and an adjustable steering-wheel pod for right- or left-hand-drive capability. Although neither the MX-1 nor MX-2 made it to production, the mid-engine Toyota sports car MR2 was just beginning to make waves on the world sports car scene around this time.



1989 Toyota Celica
Calty utilized the newly discovered design technique of ceramic clay for an advanced proposal of the fifth-generation Celica. The design team experimented with this new method, creating numerous small-scale 3D models made of ceramic clay.

Finished ceramic clay studies were cast into hard plaster models and evaluated under the California sun to define shapes with bold light and dark shadows. These studies inspired the fifth-generation Celica's form language, which was utilized by designers in Japan to create the final design introduced in 1989.



1989 MR2 Advanced Concept
In the 1980s, Toyota introduced the MR2, a beloved sports car with a mid-engine/rear-wheel-drive layout, marking the company's first mid-engine production car. The press raved about its instant appeal, functionality, high performance, and reliability. Calty proposed several designs for the second-generation version of the car, which was released in 1989.