

## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the process by which General Motors' Cadillac brand of automobiles came to dominate the U.S. luxury car market between 1927 and 1960. In 1927, Cadillac was only one among a crowded field of U.S. and European automobiles priced above \$3000, the threshold of the luxury car market at the time. Through a skillful process of marketing, the corporate strength of General Motors, and the mistakes and ill-fortune of its competitors; Cadillac came to hold at least 50% of the U.S. luxury car market throughout the 1950s, and in some years accounted for nearly 70% of that market. It also briefly examines the reasons for Cadillac's decline in the market during the years since 1960.

HOW CADILLAC BECAME CADILLAC.

By

Edwin J. M. Benson.

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Foreword

### What is Luxury?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives the term luxury two modern definitions – “a condition of abundance or great ease and comfort” or “something adding to pleasure or comfort but not absolutely necessary.”<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, this is accurate but insufficient, for the concept of luxury is relative, dynamic, and highly subjective.

Basically, the purveyor any luxury good – certainly those marketing luxury cars – is selling an illusion. In the case of an automobile, this illusion has several components; including cost, quality, space, speed, convenience, exclusivity, and the desire to attain the respect of others.

Successfully marketing one’s product as a luxury product, and the ability to charge the premium price that such products will bear is difficult, especially when that product is mass produced. It is the central thesis of this paper that Cadillac rose to a position of dominance in among luxury cars between 1927 and 1960 because of a combination of three factors. First, its advertising successfully and consistently presented it as a luxury product that was, nonetheless, available to the newly affluent. Second, Cadillac’s styling and engineering were slightly (but only slightly) advanced when compared to other automobiles then available. Third, the structure of General Motors was such that it could provide a stream of newly affluent customers who already had a history of satisfaction with other General Motors products.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/luxury>

The early auto industry was known for a very high rate of attrition. From the earliest days of the industry up to 1961, about 2,750 brands of automobiles had been built and sold in the United States. By 1920 that number had been whittled down to 61 brands which were competing for a part of a market of approximately two million units, of which just under half (941,042 units<sup>2</sup>) were Ford Model Ts. By 1961, one year after the close of this paper, there were nineteen brands being produced by five U.S. manufacturers (General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, American Motors, and Studebaker).<sup>3</sup> As of this writing, only three of the traditional U.S. manufacturers remain, and their future is questionable.

To have survived in so caustic an environment for a century is a considerable achievement. To have done so in the smallest segment of that market, luxury cars, is remarkable. To have dominated that segment as completely as Cadillac did in 1960 is little short of miraculous.

The nature of that “miracle” is the essence of this paper. It was achieved through a unique combination of corporate strength and marketing skill. Here, the term “marketing” will be used in a very broad sense to include the processes of advertising, pricing, and design of the product. Between 1927 and 1960 Cadillac came to excel in all of these processes. After a discussion of the U.S. luxury car market in the years 1925-1927, this paper will go on to discuss each of the three processes in detail.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mtfca.com/encyclo/fdprod.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Holloway, “Which Automobiles will be Here Tomorrow?”, *The Journal of Marketing* Vol. 25, No. 3 (January 1961), pp. 35-36

By necessity, the coverage of these aspects is uneven. In certain aspects of this research, I have had a level of information that historians covering other industries can only envy. This is due primarily to two factors. The first is the presence of a motoring press designed to carry information to engineers, dealers, mechanics, and owners that sprang up from the very inception of the industry. The second is the work of enthusiasts that started collecting and preserving the products themselves, as well as almost every conceivable object connected to those products. Therefore, virtually every aspect of the physical objects, the cars themselves, is readily available to the historian.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to discern the decisions behind the design of those products and their marketing. This is uniquely acute for the historian of General Motors. Sometimes, it seems that G.M. would prefer that its own past be forgotten. The corporation was founded by a plunger and then run by financiers, engineers, and accountants – all of them with their eyes firmly fixed upon the future, either in the long or the short term. The past was seemingly seen as either irrelevant or, less often, something to be used as a marketing tool. On those relatively rare occasions that “the General” spoke of its past (for example, the production of its 50 millionth vehicle in 1954 or its fiftieth anniversary in 1958) it was always in the sense of, borrowing from Shakespeare, that “The past is prologue”; the engineering and manufacturing triumphs of the past having been used as sales tools to build interest in the current product.

The historical record is agonizingly short on records of information about the processes by which the design and marketing decisions were reached. The best single

source is Alfred P. Sloan's autobiography, *My Years with General Motors*, co-written with John McDonald<sup>4</sup>. Even this source, however, has a shroud around it.

McDonald's posthumously published *A Ghost's Memoir* details the extent to which G.M. was willing to go to prevent its long-time chairman from publishing his story.<sup>5</sup>

The short version of the story is that General Motors' management feared that inquiry into the inner workings of the corporation would result in its being broken up by the federal courts. As the Supreme Court decision that forced DuPont to divest itself of its considerable holdings in General Motors proved, their fears were not entirely unfounded.<sup>6</sup> For years afterward, there were whisperings that General Motors itself would be broken up because its own market dominance constituted a combination in restraint of trade.<sup>7</sup> Given this attitude, it is hardly surprising that the records and reports that helped to establish that dominance have either not been preserved or, at least, have not been made accessible to historians. At the General Motors Heritage Center, I was shown a 1962 report prepared for Cadillac by its advertising agency (MacManus, John, and Adams) in which Cadillac's competitive marketing position that year was discussed at length. Surely, similar documents had to have been produced for much of the period covered by this paper, but could not be located – if indeed they still exist. These were ephemeral documents, produced for a small

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., *My Years with General Motors*, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books Edition 1972).

<sup>5</sup> John McDonald, *A Ghost's Memoir: the Making of Alfred P. Sloan's "My Years with General Motors"* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> *United States v. E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Co.*, 353 U.S. 586 (1957)

<sup>7</sup> This concern was not illusory. In addition to the DuPont Case, General Motors had to give extensive evidence to the Subcommittee on Retailing, Distribution and Marketing Practices and the Subcommittee on Monopoly of the Select Committee on Small Business of the United States Senate in October 1968.

number of people and useful for a short time, and then to be discarded – or perhaps deliberately destroyed to prevent them from being used by a federal prosecutor bent on ending the market dominance that the documents were designed to create.

Another tantalizing, but incomplete, source of material is that distributed to Cadillac dealers. These appear to have taken two forms; books of facts and figures designed to acquaint the dealers' sales staffs with the products they were selling, and confidential booklets to assist the dealer to bring his/her marketing efforts into line with the division's marketing plans. My research at the G.M. Heritage Center and the library of the Antique Automobile Club of America revealed two of the former and one of the latter. Surely, these must have been printed in much larger numbers for each year, but most were likely discarded when the model year to which they referred ended.

Given the official attitude of secrecy, it is perhaps inevitable that corporate legends should develop, many of which have been repeated by the enthusiast press, and occasionally leaking into the academic realm. Some of these legends have direct implications on the events described in this paper. When it is necessary to use one of these stories, it will be identified as legend and attributed to its source as much as possible. If there is reason to doubt the details contained within it, these doubts will be discussed, and the reader will have to determine the weight that they should be given.

## Contribution to current scholarship

Another issue that I face in my research is that the specific part of the automotive market that I discuss here, luxury cars, has been relatively little examined by academic historians. That is not to say that the industry itself has been ignored. Since the publication of *Unsafe at any Speed*<sup>8</sup>, there has been a vein of scholarly literature that sees the automotive industry as a vaguely sinister force. Coincidentally, Nader's work was published at about the same time that the need to do something about air pollution, much of it caused by automobiles, was reaching a national consensus. It became fashionable for critics from various backgrounds to see the automobile and the cultural changes that it brought as detrimental. The automobile industry, and most especially General Motors, had profited from this social recklessness, and their motives were therefore suspect. This bias is found in both of James J. Flink's books, his 1975 *The Car Culture* and the larger *The Automobile Age* (1990).<sup>9</sup> More recently, James M. Rubenstein's *Making and Selling Cars* picks up much of this theme while adding in monopolistic motives possessed by Sloan and his minions. Interestingly, these works largely ignore the time period of this thesis. They all discuss the early days of the industry, a period ending roughly with the demise of the Ford Model T, at considerable length. They then spend very little time with the next three decades, except to decry the gradually increasing power,

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<sup>8</sup> Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at any speed; the designed-in dangers of the American automobile*, (New York: Grossman, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975). Interestingly, Flink dedicates *The Car Culture* "To the memory of my niece, Tiffany Ann Rudd. Born December 11, 1969. Killed while at play by an automobile on May 1, 1971, my thirty-ninth birthday."

size, and amount of chromium plate on cars as devices used by the industry to persuade the public to buy increasing numbers of vehicles.

Another strain of scholarly literature focuses on the internal management policies of the major players in the industry. Older treatments like Nevins and Hills's magnificent trilogy on the Ford Motor Company, as well as Chandler's and Drucker's works on General Motors focused primarily on the boardroom and methods of management decision-making. More modern treatments like Robert Freeland's *The Struggle for Control of the Modern Corporation* and David Farber's *Sloan Rules* continue this focus. Valuable as it is, a focus on upper management leaves out too much of the story. Sloan succeeded in his time, his place, and his firm. However, one can question whether the policies and structures that made General Motors great would continue to serve it well, given that in the recent past Oldsmobile and Pontiac, two of the building blocks of Sloan's "a car for every purse and purpose" policy have been jettisoned. Others, notably Henry Ford II, Henry J. Kaiser of Kaiser-Frazer, and James J. Nance of Studebaker-Packard tried to build G. M.-like product structures in the first half of the 1950's with a notable lack of success. It should be clear, even from this rudimentary argument, that understanding the policy is not a sufficient explanation for the success that followed from it.

David Hounshell moves the focus to the factory floor. His argument that it is crucial to understand the systems of production is significant. He cites the crucial importance of General Motor's development of flexible production techniques as opposed to Ford's use of purpose-built machinery. Ford's practice, which it largely abandoned after 1927, made Ford's success too dependent on a single product. This

produced disastrous consequences when that product, the Ford Model T, was rejected by the public. Hounshell does give us one indication that he realizes the limitations of his argument when he states, “First, Ford spent money as never before on advertising the new Model A. ... Ford had discovered what General Motors already knew: advertising – major advertising – was a fundamental part of the changeover strategy.”<sup>10</sup> It is tempting to wonder what Hounshell would make of Nicholas Dreystadt’s making Cadillac profitable in 1932-33 by simplifying its product offerings and mechanizing many of the hand-work processes. Unfortunately, Hounshell’s work ends just as Dreystadt’s work was beginning.

Other treatments, like Richard Tedlow’s *New and Improved*, Roland Marchand’s *Advertising the American Dream* and Sally Clarke’s *Trust and Power* focus on marketing as an important factor, perhaps the deciding factor, in corporate success. I believe that these treatments are important steps in the right direction. It is a truism in the world of business that nothing happens until somebody buys something. It is crucial to understand the process by which consumers arrived at the decisions that gave G. M. pre-eminence among automobile manufacturers.

Richard Tedlow spends a lot of space in his book looking at the competition between G. M. and Ford, basically telling the same story that Hounshell tells from a totally different perspective. Hounshell tells us about the technical reasons that Ford was resistant to change; Tedlow tells us about the marketing consequences to that resistance. However, Tedlow is also focused primarily on the bottom of the market. Although he gives some space to Sloan’s “car for every purse and purpose” product

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<sup>10</sup> David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1984), pages 292-293.

philosophy, the story that Tedlow really tells is the story of Ford v. Chevrolet. Cadillac receives scant notice; Ford's entry in that price class, Lincoln, gets none. Also like Hounshell, Tedlow largely ends his narrative with the 1928 introduction of the Ford Model A to replace the venerable Model T.

Roland Marchand's treatment deals more specifically with advertising, rather than the whole field of marketing. One of its many virtues is that it helps to create a vocabulary to classify the advertising of its period, 1920-1940. As Cadillac's advertising was taking shape during that period and largely remained in similar form until (at least) 1960, his work has been helpful and will be referred to a number of times in this work.

Sally Clarke's book is considerably broader than Marchand's in that it focuses on many aspects of automobile retailing. Her time span is very broad as well – starting with the industry's infancy and running until 1965. Unfortunately, for my purposes, her work and mine do not intersect until page 186 of her excellent book and only the last forty pages are used to cover the period following World War II. She also uses developments in product liability as a prominent sub-theme. I have chosen not to deal with this aspect of automotive marketing for two reasons. First, I am not a legal historian and any attempt to discuss regulation would tend to be rather superficial. Second, according to Clarke's treatment, the milestone case was *MacPherson v. Buick* (N. Y. 1916) which predates the period that I am covering. From that point, the law appears to have been relatively settled until the mid-1960s, except for three sets of events: the N.R.A., a flurry of activity around the time of World War II, and the Congressional investigations of dealer practices that occurred

in the mid-1950s. The N.R.A. and the World War II-era regulations were relatively short-lived and I find little lasting change to have been occasioned by them. Much the same can be said for the congressional investigations. Many of the practices that Congress investigated were condemned by scrupulous dealers and manufacturers alike. Congress did investigate certain credit practices, but – unlike other G. M. divisions – the use of credit played a relatively small part in the Cadillac story. According to Sally Clarke’s figures, over 80% of new Cadillac purchasers in 1954 paid cash, compared with 37% of the market as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Detailed study of these investigations would likely bear much fruit, but they are the stuff of another paper.<sup>12</sup>

The luxury car arena was (and continues to be) hotly competitive. The focus of the first section of this paper will be the nature and breadth of this competition, which will discuss the overall luxury car market in the 1926-1927 period. At that time, Cadillac was only one among several competitors, many of which were just as well established in the public mind as Cadillac was. In the second section, the process by which Cadillac was able to weather the Great Depression and come out as the leader of the luxury car pack will be examined. The third section will consider the first fifteen years following World War II and show Cadillac’s ascension from mere leadership to dominance within its market segment.

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<sup>11</sup> Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Online, Table Df330-338.

<sup>12</sup> A brief but informative discussion of less-than-scrupulous dealer practices and the legislative results is found in James. J. Flink’s *The Car Culture*, pages 191-193.

## Dedication

To my wife, Silvia, whose many sacrifices were essential to the completion of this work, and to my maternal grandfather, G. E. Mortimer and the childhood memories of his 1956 Cadillac which provided much of the work's inspiration.

## Acknowledgements

The value of any historical work is largely a reflection of the libraries and archives to which its author has access. This work is no exception. In this respect, my biggest debt is to Kim Miller and Chris Ritter, librarians for the Antique Automobile Club of America in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Kim has spent decades organizing the huge amount of material donated by club members over the Club's 75 years, and the scope of their collection is truly remarkable. Since Kim's recent retirement, Chris has taken the collection into his own very able hands. The kindness of both of them in the many hours that I spent complicating their lives was remarkable.

Other collections and collectors were also generous in their assistance. I want to thank LeRoy Cole of the Society of Automotive Historians for sharing his own personal collection, as well as buying me two of Flint, Michigan's incomparable Coney Island hot dogs in a little place across Dort Highway from the site of old AC plant. Paul Ayers of the Cadillac-LaSalle Club Museum and Research Center, Inc. opened their collection to me for a very pleasant morning in their makeshift temporary headquarters. Their recently announced move to Hickory Corners, Michigan will do much to make this fine collection accessible to historians. David White of Kettering University's Scharchburg Archives provided me with access to their collection, especially the papers of John Gordon, Cadillac General Manager in the late 1940s and later G.M. president. The staff of the Sloan Museum's Merle Perry Archives in Flint, Michigan allowed me to examine their institution's collection of sales literature and newspaper advertising.

I also want to express my appreciation for the friendship of Sherry L. Telling, who graciously housed this itinerant historian while I was in Michigan doing research.

David B. Sicilia, my advisor at the University of Maryland – College Park did much to help me focus my thinking and guide me through this, my first major writing project. His encouragement and advice were invaluable.

Most of all, I want to thank my beloved wife, Silvia, for the innumerable ways that she assisted me by simplifying my life so that I could sequester myself and get the writing done. The many days that she spent taking care of our dear Victoria while I gallivanted thither and yon to collect information are only the most recent of the many debts that I am proud to owe to this magnificent woman.

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## Chapter 1: 1926-1927: On the eve of the flood

*“Après moi, le déluge”* – attributed to Louis XV

If the pleasure seeking yet utterly confident world of the “Roaring Twenties” ever existed, it existed in the world of the luxury car market in the United States. Pictures of bejeweled fur-clad women alighting from the back of chauffeured town cars on the arms of their tuxedo-bearing escorts to go into nightclubs awash in illegal alcohol are parts of so many movies and newsreels so as to have become part of a kind of national mythology.

### Section 1

#### **Competition between brands of luxury cars**

Those few with the means to be cosseted in the back of cars costing over \$3000 had a crowded field of automobiles from which to choose in 1926. Most of those manufacturers were among the oldest members of an industry just coming out of adolescence. Cadillac was neither the oldest nor the most popular, although with a model year production of 14,249 it was clearly a major player in its segment. The independent Packard, whose 1926 production was approximately 25,000, had a solid lead on its G.M. competitor.<sup>13</sup> Among its other competitors, Peerless produced 10,430 units, Lincoln 7,711, Pierce-Arrow 5,682, Locomobile 2,586, Marmon 3,253, Stearns-Knight 987, and Duesenburg turned out two-to-three hundred. Chrysler’s

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<sup>13</sup> Production figures for the early auto industry are notoriously unreliable, especially before the standardization of the model year. In the mid-1920s, Packard numbered its production according to self-named series numbers in which 1925 and 1926 production were combined. Total production for the two years was 48,270

Imperial 80, a new-comer to the group, produced about 3,000.<sup>14</sup> There were a number of foreign choices as well, including the English Rolls-Royce<sup>15</sup>, the Belgian Minerva, the Italian Isotta-Fraschini, the Spanish Hispano-Suiza, and the German Mercedes-Benz. For most of these brands, total production was miniscule by American standards, with only a fraction of their small numbers reaching the United States, often going to Hollywood where their novelty was appreciated by the *nouveaux riches* within the movie colony.

## Section 2

### **“Design” before designers**

All these were largely hand-built cars. All the manufacturers offered at least two engines and two wheelbase lengths.<sup>16</sup> In all cases the more expensive series of cars rode on the longer wheelbase (somewhere between 133 and 143 inches) and had the more powerful motor. Smaller series cars had wheelbases that ran between 116 and 133 inches. Wheelbase was an important contributor to the overall “look” of the car. With bodies that were built on top of the frame, upright seating positions and riding wheels that were between 28 and 32 inches in diameter, the usual height of the top of a car body was going to be about six feet above the pavement. The greater length of the wheelbases of luxury cars made their overall proportions appear to be

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<sup>14</sup> Beverly Rae Kimes, et. al., *The Standard Catalog of American Cars 1805-1942*, third edition (Iola, Wisconsin: Krause 1996) pegs production at 9114 for the 1926, 1927, and early part of the 1928 model years combined.

<sup>15</sup> From 1919 until the Depression, Rolls-Royce operated a satellite plant in Springfield, Massachusetts which, according to Rolls-Royce’s web site produced about 3,000 cars over its life-span.

<sup>16</sup> Wheelbase is a term given to the number of inches between the center of the front wheel and the center of the rear wheel.

more pleasing. In comparison, the Model T Ford had 30 inch wheels and a wheelbase of 100 inches, giving it an appearance that can be described as spindly and unsubstantial.

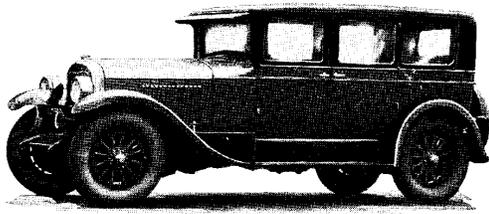
The sense of height was also accentuated by the presence of a panel often called the apron. This panel filled the gap that would otherwise exist between the top of the running board and the bottom of the body. Basically, these covered the frame rails, adding four inches or so to the height of the body.

Wheels were usually wooden “artillery” types or the more modern steel discs. Wire wheels were beginning to make an appearance during this period, and would become all but universal by 1930. But the manufacturers of large cars still appear to have preferred the solidity of the more substantial wooden or disc wheels.

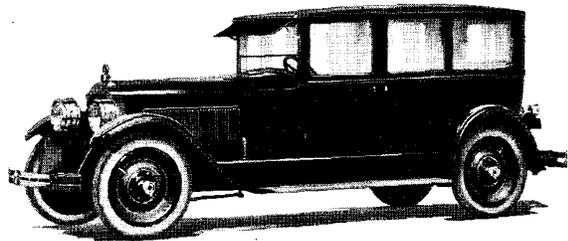
All except Duesenburg offered factory built bodies, but custom coachwork by any one of the several custom body companies that did business in the U.S. were also available on all of them. That being said, unless one went to a custom body shop, one would not get a car that had been designed by a stylist. Only in 1928 would General Motors set up its “Art and Colour” studio as the first in-house design staff. Until that time, bodies were laid out by body engineers. The effect was that cars were taller, boxier, simpler, and less colorful than those of the early 1930s. The fender lines tended to “hug” the tire more closely rather than flowing back at a more gradual angle.

Windshields were usually placed at a ninety degree angle to the cowl, which in turn was just beginning to be set at the same visual level as the hood rather than being curved in such a way as to raise the base of the windshield 2-3 inches above the

top of the hood, which in earlier designs had been only as high as it needed to be to clear the engine. All glass surfaces were flat, and would remain so for another two decades. If the car was a sedan, the back of the body was often an uninterrupted plane, often totally vertical with only the slightest rounding when the back of the body met the top. Only below the “Belt Line” (the line formed by the bottom edges of the side windows) was there a curvature that allowed the back of the body to meet the frame.



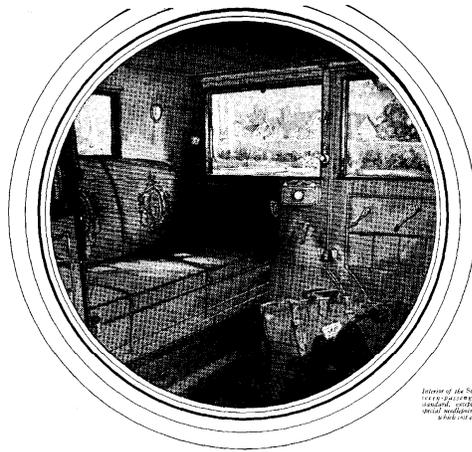
1926 Cadillac Seven Passenger  
Standard Sedan



1926 Packard Eight Sedan

(Source for both: 1926 Handbook of Automobiles)

As plain as the exteriors often were, the interiors were intended to convey sumptuous quality. This was, after all, the part of the car that its owner would see the most. A 1927 advertisement for Pierce-Arrow described it as having “Interiors in the manner of famous royal rooms” and went on to describe its “gold plated appointments and rich hand tailored upholstery.

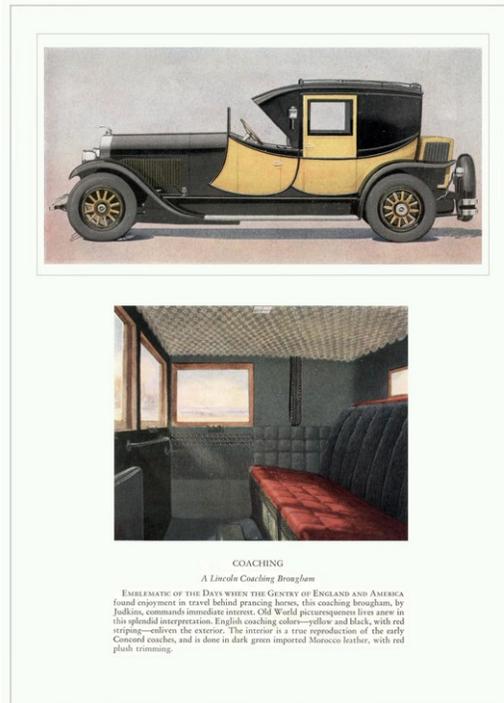


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1910-1920, 1920-1930, 1930-1940,  
1940-1950, 1950-1960, 1960-1970,  
1970-1980, 1980-1990, 1990-2000,  
2000-2010, 2010-2020

INTERIORS · IN · THE · MANNER · OF  
FAMOUS · ROYAL · ROOMS  
Pierce-Arrow Advertisement 1927  
(Source: Antique Automobile Club of America)

If the car was designed to be chauffeur-driven, the interior carried a none-too-subtle statement of the class structure. While the owner was swaddled in fabric, usually some sort of wool broadcloth, the driver, who was still very likely to be exposed to the elements, rode on serviceable and durable black leather.

When one went the custom body route the sky was the limit, provided that one had the means to pay for it. Here the design work could actually become a bit bizarre. One extreme example was featured in Lincoln's 1926-27 catalog as the "Lincoln Coaching Brougham." Meant to recall "the Days when the Gentry of England and America found enjoyment in travel behind prancing horses," this vehicle was a horseless carriage in the purest sense and was bound to capture attention. It was intended to be finished in yellow and black with red pinstripes to "enliven the exterior." (Incidentally, at least one was actually built and is currently in the collection of the National Automobile Museum in Reno, Nevada.)



**The Lincoln Coaching Brougham  
 (Source: The Old Car Manual Project)**

Although it did not affect the external appearance of the cars, it should be pointed out that there were substantial differences in the power plants. According to the N.A.C.C. scale in common use at the time, the Cadillac, with 31.25 horsepower, was the lowest powered of the 1927 luxury cars the most powerful being the Packard at 39.2. Pierce-Arrow ran a close second at 38.4 hp. The others all ranged from 33.8 (Peerless) to 36 (Locomobile). Among the less expensive cars, a different situation existed. Cadillac used the same engine in both series, as well as the LaSalle after its 1927 introduction, meaning that Cadillac had the most powerful of the junior series cars. The lowest powered in that class was the Marmon with 24.2 hp. The Packard and Pierce offerings both had 29.4 and the others ranged from 24.2 to 25.3. Since the junior series cars were more likely to be owner-driven, the difference in the power

ratings may have made a greater difference, but only Imperial gave any substantial mention of the car's top speed in their advertising.<sup>17</sup>

### Section 3

#### **The evolution of automotive advertising**

If any term could best be used to describe the totality of luxury car advertising in the mid- to late-1920s, that term would be “snob appeal.” On a practical level, the luxury cars from each manufacturer are largely identical other than the differences in the output of the engines, mentioned above. That is not to say that they looked exactly alike; there were detail differences in the lights, bumpers, radiator shells, available colors, ornamentation, interior fittings, etc., yet all these cars presented very similar packages to their prospective owners. Each needed an image that would impress the potential customer. That job of fell to that most obvious of marketers, the advertising agents.

The advertising and automotive industries can be said to have grown up together. The earliest automobile advertising usually showed a small picture of the car without benefit of artistic style and made a few vague statements about it.



Ad for the 1904 Autocar  
(Source: The Old Car Manual Project)

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<sup>17</sup> Unless otherwise noted the figures in this section came from the 1926, 1927, or 1928 issues of the annual Handbook of Automobiles produced by the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce.

As both advertising and automobiles developed over the next decade, the poor quality photos were increasingly replaced by better quality engravings and more words – lots more words.



**Cartercar**

**Gearless!**

No transmission gears—not even a clutch. The Cartercar is so very simple that it is practically trouble-proof. This is the car that does things. You get 100 cents' worth of excellent service for every dollar you invest. This car is different from others—and this difference accounts for its remarkable popularity among those who demand the best service.

<b>Climbs 50% Hills</b> Yes, the Cartercar will easily climb a 50% grade—and carry a full load, too. This great pulling power takes it through bad sand and mud.	<b>Unlimited Speeds</b> You have any number of speeds—controlled easily and noiselessly by a single lever. Just a simple movement of this lever changes from one speed to any other.
<b>Greater Tire Mileage</b> There are no jerks nor jars in starting and changing speeds—which prevents a large part of the wear on tires and all parts.	<b>Electric Starting</b> All Cartercars equipped with the excellent "Jesco" lighting and starting system, one of the best. All other modern ideas.

*Send for Catalog today*

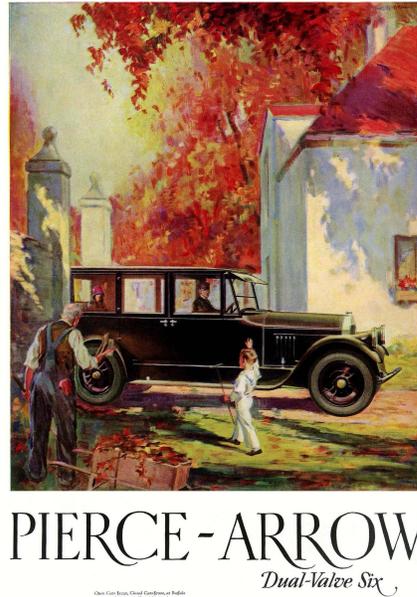
**Cartercar Company**  
Dept. S. Pontiac, Michigan  
Four splendid models—Touring Car, Roadster, Coupé and Sedan

1913 Cartercar Ad  
(Source: The Old Car Manual Project)

For some of the luxury manufacturers, this would remain as the state of the advertising art for decades to come. Others would adopt advertising practices that were far more visually evocative with very few words in a style that is almost modern in approach.

Pierce Arrow's advertising in particular was remarkably trend-setting, despite the fact that theirs were among the most conservatively designed cars of the period. The ads are artistically in keeping with the best illustrative work of the periods. Words are largely limited to the brand name of the product. Virtually no information is given. We learn nothing about the mechanical power of the vehicle, its ease of use,

its interior appointments, or anything else other than the car's general shape and color. We are being offered a mood, a glance into the lives and aspirations of the sort of person who bought these cars.

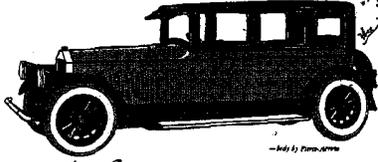


Pierce-Arrow Ads from 1910 and 1926  
(Source: The Old Car Manual Project)

The images that these ads present were common images in luxury car advertising for decades. To our eyes, the cars and clothing styles are antique, as are the social relationships (it has long since become more difficult to get good servants), but the form of the ads would not be out of place today.

Conversely, when advertising their junior series car, the Series 80, Pierce-Arrow felt it necessary to give the potential buyer more information, as though the middle-class buyer could not be trusted to know enough about the Pierce-Arrow Company's reputation for quality.

**PIERCE-ARROW**  
Series 80



**A five-passenger  
4-Door COACH**  
*Custom-built by Pierce-Arrow*

This smart Five-Passenger COACH is for those who prefer the Four-Door arrangement. A commodious car for the average family.

Mounted, of course, on the standard six-cylinder Series 80 chassis.

The body is hand-built in Pierce-Arrow's own shops. Thick aluminum fitted to a staunch framework of finest northern white ash gives great strength with light weight, and freedom from squeaks and rattles. Glance inside. Here is an interior you immediately recognize as "Pierce-Arrow." Deep, luxurious cushioning. Rich, soft-textured, all-wool upholstery. Appointments of obvious refinement and quality.

For individuality—your choice of six striking colors.

Economical! Thousands of owners who previously drove cars at \$2,000 or less have found that it costs no more and often less to operate the Series 80 than many "medium price" cars. A moderate payment now will insure early delivery. The balance will be divided over a period of months.

**Five-Pass., 4-Door Coach**  
**\$3250**

5-Pass. 2-Door Coach . . . \$2995  
7-Pass. 4-Door Coach . . . \$3550  
7-Pass. 4-Door . . . 6' 4" . . . \$3450  
Limousine Coach

*All prices f. o. b. factory, no tax  
Delivery to charge without notice*

SERIES 80 Custom-built DeLuxe Bodies, \$2895 to \$4045, at Buffalo  
SERIES 55 Dead-Valve Six . . . \$2250 to \$7000, at Buffalo

**HARROLDS MOTOR CAR COMPANY**  
228 West 20th St., New York  
1440 Grand Central Station, New York  
115 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn

**WILLIS MOTOR CAR COMPANY**  
140 W. 42nd St., New York  
100 W. 42nd St., New York  
100 W. 42nd St., New York

Pierce-Arrow Series 80 ad  
(Source: New York Times, June 15, 1926, p. 14)

Here there are no vignettes of upper-class life, no fine art illustrations. While certainly not inexpensive, this is a car for someone who is emerging from the masses. By reading it, we gain information about the car's construction, interior, operating economy, and price. This was a buyer who may be more prosperous than most, but was still concerned about getting a good deal. Interestingly enough, no promises of social achievement were promised or implied. The message is simple; buy a Pierce-Arrow because it is a good car.



other manufacturers, only that the high end of Pierce-Arrow's advertising was so high, and its low-end advertising was so much more price conscious, that the extent to which Pierce-Arrow thought that it was moving down-market is clearly seen. Far less distinction is seen in advertising for the Packard Eight and Packard Six models.

**DISTINCTION *with*  
INDIVIDUALITY**

You May Choose the Color and Upholstery  
of Your New Packard Eight

From the very first every Packard Eight has been built with no thought in mind save the quality, comfort and distinction it was to provide its owner.

While the distinction of Packard lines is unchanged, the new Packard Eight can become more than ever your individual, your personal car.



When you place your order for your Packard Eight you may choose the color of its finish, and you may select the upholstery.

Packard will co-operate in producing your own car—a car combining all the grace and beauty of a Packard body with your own good taste in decoration and appointments.

**PACKARD**  
*Ask the man who owns one*

*This Packard Eight is built in two body types, four open and six enclosed, ranging in price from \$1700 to \$1100 at Detroit.  
A liberal monthly payment plan makes possible the immediate enjoyment of Packard Eight ownership, purchasing out of income instead of capital.*

**PACKARD MOTOR CAR COMPANY OF NEW YORK**  
1561 Broadway  
Branch: Grand Concourse, at 184th St. Brooklyn; 1021 Atlantic Ave.  
**DEALER**  
Park Avenue Packard, Inc., 247 Park Ave.

Right, Packard Eight ad and left, Packard Six ad. (Sources, New York Times, May 27, 1925, page 54 and September 13, 1925, page XX12.



**PACKARD**

**DEPRECIATION** is by far the greatest cost in owning a short life or yearly model car.

The average car traded in on a Packard Six often has cost its owner more for depreciation than for gasoline, oil, tires and repairs.

There is but one way to cut depreciation costs—buy a better car and keep it longer.

Those who are buying the Packard Six expect to keep their cars two or three times as long as the cars they are trading in.

Packard is helping its owners to realize their expectations of long motor car life by building into each car the chassis lubricator and motor oil rectifier.

These, the most important improvements since the electric starter, are found only on Packard cars.

The Packard Six is offered in two body styles, four open and six enclosed. Prices range from \$1700 to \$1100 at Detroit.

**PACKARD MOTOR CAR COMPANY OF NEW YORK**  
1561 Broadway  
Branch: Grand Concourse, at 184th St. Brooklyn; 1021 Atlantic Ave.  
**DEALER**  
Park Ave. Packard, Inc., 247 Park Ave.

ASK THE MAN WHO OWNS ONE

Certainly there are differences between these ads. The potential Packard Eight customer was invited to make the Packard an expression of his/her own superior tastes, while the appeal to the customer for the Packard Six was far more practical, centering on the lack of depreciation together with a nod in the direction of easy maintenance. However, Packard was willing to acknowledge that both classes

of its buyers might need some information about the actual price of the car, which in both ads was in small italic in a separate location away from the main body of the text. And perhaps more importantly, a Packard Six buyer who happened to see both ads would have had no reason to believe that he/she was being talked down to.

As will be seen in a later section of this thesis, Cadillac would decline to see even this level of distinction between its two markets, as its LaSalle advertising in 1927 was, perhaps, even more aristocratic in tone than that aimed at its more prosperous customers.

#### Section 4

##### **Moving down-market in search of higher sales**

For most of the 1920s, the line that separated luxury cars from more plebian automobiles was just a shade under \$3000, and sales had never been better. Although 1926 was a slack year, 1927 was rosy for Cadillac as 36,369 were produced (plus 10,767 LaSalles). This beat their previous best year, 1922, by a little over 10,000 units. During the teens, production in the 15,000 range had been normal. The good fortune was not limited to Cadillac – in fact, it seems that Cadillac’s gains were among the lower in the segment, at least on a percentage basis. Peerless reported a 68 percent gain in the number of cars shipped in August 1925 over the figure for a year earlier and then reported that sales were up over 300 percent for the first three months

of 1926 over 1925.<sup>18</sup> Packard's system of recording production figures by the series of the automobile rather than by production year makes their gains more difficult to quantify, but in an article by Packard's President, Alvan Macauley predicted that 1926 auto production as a whole would be up by one-half million over 1925 for a new total of 4,500,000. Just what "present indications" led him to that conclusion were unmentioned, but they were likely related to Packard's own improving performance.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, six months later, Packard reported a net profit of \$5,527,282 for the second quarter of 1926 which was over 40 percent higher than their performance for the second quarter of 1925.<sup>20</sup> During the same quarter, Pierce-Arrow, a far smaller company, reported profits of \$474,861, up from \$364,714 the year before.<sup>21</sup> Marmon's president reported early 1926 sales as running "well ahead of the same period last year."<sup>22</sup>

Within that context, it is interesting to note that all of the established brands were offering, or in the process of introducing, less expensive vehicles under their own name or as "companion" makes of cars that offered the quality of their more expensive brethren at a more popular price. Sometimes these would prove to be relatively popular. Packard, in particular, followed such a strategy successfully. From 1916 to 1923, Packard's marquee vehicle was its 12-cylinder "Twin-Six" range

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<sup>18</sup> "Peerless Cars Gain in Volume of Sales", *Washington Post*, September 10, 1925, p. AU3 and "Peerless Reports Big Sales Increase", *Washington Post* April 11, 1926, p. A3

<sup>19</sup> Alvan MacCauley, "Motor Plants to Make More Automobiles This Year", *New York Times* January 10, 1926, p A24

<sup>20</sup> "Packard Motor Profits Increase", *New York Times* June 25, 1926, p 30.

<sup>21</sup> "Pierce-Arrow Earns \$803,942", *New York Times* July 27, 1926, p. 24

<sup>22</sup> "Sales of Marmons are Running Ahead of '25, Report Says", *Washington Post*, April 18, 1926, page A2.

which sold at prices that went from \$2750 at the low end in 1916 to a high end of \$5500 in 1923. (Of course, it should always be remembered that custom coachwork could increase that price substantially.) The companion “Single Six” – introduced in 1921, certainly was not an inexpensive car, with prices generally in the \$2500-3500 range and it handily outsold the larger car. By 1925-1926, the “Twin-Six” had been displaced by an inline eight cylinder engine, and the sales margin in favor of the six increased even more substantially (40,358 vs. 7,912, a difference of about 5:1).

The obvious lessons could not have been missed by other luxury car manufacturers, and most leapt to the idea. In Late 1924, Pierce-Arrow presented its “Series 80” to supplement its top-of-the-line “Series 33.” By 1926, the Series 80 was retailing for \$2895 to \$4045, which could only be considered inexpensive when compared to the \$5250 to \$7000 that the Series 33 cost.<sup>23</sup> Locomobile came out with its “Junior Eight” with advertised prices between \$1785 and \$2285 in 1925. On November 22 of that same year, Peerless announced the advent of its 6-80 Sedan carrying a price of \$1595.<sup>24</sup> By mid-1926, the price of parking a Peerless in your driveway had declined even further, with the 6-80 being priced at \$1395 to \$1795, the 6-72 for \$1895 to \$2995, and the big car –the Eight-69 pegged at \$2995 to \$3795.<sup>25</sup> After an abortive attempt to market a mid-range car under the Roosevelt banner, Marmon brought out its “Little 8” early in 1927, advertising it as “America’s First Truly Fine Small Car,” and advertising its prices as “\$1795 and upward – all under

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<sup>23</sup> Advertisement, *New York Times*, 4-6-26, p 25

<sup>24</sup> “Peerless Produces New Lower-Priced Six Cylinder Car”, *Washington Post* November 22, 1925, page AU8.

<sup>25</sup> Advertisement, *New York Times* June 6, 1926, page XX13

\$2000.”<sup>26</sup> Cadillac’s LaSalle, also introduced in 1927 will be discussed in more detail later.

Of the established manufacturers, only Lincoln and Stearns-Knight declined to produce a car in the upper-middle price range. One assumes that the talent pool at Ford was taken up with the process of ending the reign of the Model T in 1927 and the introduction of the Model A in 1928. Stearns-Knight, having been purchased by John North Willys in 1925 to form the upper echelon of the Willys-Overland Company’s line-up, did not venture down-market, probably because Willys already had a mid-priced car.

The other exception to the general pattern is the Chrysler Imperial. This was a new player in 1926. Walter Chrysler can be said to have started his pyramid in the middle. Chrysler cut his teeth in the industry by successfully running Buick. After departing G. M. because he could no longer work William C. Durant, Chrysler took over the nearly-defunct Maxwell-Chalmers firm, gave the firm his name and started turning out mid-priced cars in 1924. By 1926, Chrysler was building four series of automobiles with the “Imperial 80” at the top. At the low end of the luxury car spectrum with 1927 prices of \$2495 to \$3595, that and the fact that the car was still primarily badged as a “Chrysler” rather than being a marque in its own right (a situation that went uncorrected until 1955) the image of the Imperial as a “true” luxury car would be suspect for most of its life-span.

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<sup>26</sup> Advertisement, *Washington Post* 1-30-27, page A10

## Chapter 2: The Age of LaSalle, 1927-1940

Like its competitors, Cadillac was looking for a way to move down-market. It would, however, take a very different route. Where Packard, Locomobile, et al. would place their time-honored badges on less expensive automobiles, Cadillac created a totally new brand and then used its advertising to invest it with a dose of Cadillac prestige. The decision was also made that the less expensive new car, called LaSalle, would be Cadillac's test bed for new directions in design, while the senior models continued to appeal to a more conservative clientele.

That there was a hole in the G. M. line up in the early 1920s was obvious, as can be seen from the following advertisement from the New York Times on November 12, 1925:

### A car for every purse and purpose

Somewhere in the General Motors line is the new car you want at the price you want to pay. General Motors offers 46 models of cars. They include every open and closed body type. They range in price-at-the-factory from \$525 to \$4485, as follows:

CHEVROLET . 5 models .	\$ 525 to \$ 775
OLDSMOBILE 6 models .	\$ 875 to \$1115
OAKLAND . . . 6 models .	\$ 975 to \$1295
BUICK . . . . 16 models .	\$1125 to \$1995
CADILLAC . 13 models .	\$2995 to \$4485

These cars represent "the greatest values in automobile history." Sweeping economies, possible to an institution of the size and scope of General Motors, have been fully realized in the production and marketing of the new General Motors line.

A further important saving is offered to time purchasers through the GMAC Plan and its new and still lower rates.

# GENERAL MOTORS

"A car for every purse and purpose"

In order to truly offer "a car for every purse and purpose," the \$1000 hole between Buick and Cadillac had to be filled. That the top leadership at General Motors saw the need to fill this gap is clear in the available literature. Alfred Sloan

claimed to have proposed that Cadillac prepare a model to fill that gap, although his autobiography is unclear as to the exact date (the context of the book would place it between 1921 and 1924).<sup>27</sup> Chandler and Salisbury give credit for the proposal to Pierre S. duPont.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of who exactly first saw the need, the fact that both Sloan and duPont perceived it is significant.

### Section 1

#### **Enter Harley Earl, stage west**

The development of LaSalle under the Cadillac umbrella would be significant for the entire corporation in a way that neither Sloan nor duPont can have foreseen, for it placed the process of creating the new car in the hands of Lawrence P. Fisher,<sup>29</sup> who had become the President and General Manager of Cadillac in 1925. To design the new car, Fisher hired a young man from California, Harley Earl. At the end of the project, Earl returned home, although he would not stay there for long. The success of the new car brought Earl to the attention of Alfred Sloan, who would eventually make Earl the head of G.M. styling – a post he would hold until 1958.

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<sup>27</sup> Sloan, *My Years with General Motors*, p 178.

<sup>28</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. and Stephen Salisbury, *Pierre S. duPont and the Making of the Modern Corporation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p 519.

<sup>29</sup> Fisher was one of the seven Fisher brothers who had come into General Motors through G.M.'s purchase of the Fisher Body Company. G.M. had been a customer of Fisher Body for several years before purchasing a stake in the company in 1916, and integrating it completely into the corporation in 1926.

The details under which the highly significant relationship between Sloan and Earl began are unclear, and the various versions of that story differ in detail.<sup>30</sup> It appears that Fisher came into contact with Earl through Earl's association with Don Lee, a leading Cadillac dealer in Southern California. The Lee firm had made something of a name for itself by providing custom built Cadillacs to members of the recently established movie colony in Hollywood. Earl had come into the automobile business through his father's carriage and body building firm, which had been purchased by the Lee organization. Fisher was apparently impressed by Earl's design work for Lee and invited him to participate in the design of the new car.

Styling was believed by Fisher and other top executives to have been a primary reason for the success of the 1923-1925 Packard. According to Earnest Seaholm, Cadillac's Chief Engineer from 1923-1943, Fisher was eager to take total control of styling away from the body engineers at Fisher Body. The prejudice of the body engineers was in favor of high quality and ease of production, while paying rather little attention to the aesthetics of the car. By bringing in Earl, Fisher had to know that he was setting up considerable conflict between his new protégé and the more established, more conservative Fisher Body men.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The narrative that follows is a composite made up of information from Sloan, *My Year with General Motors*, pages 312-317; Maurice D. Hendry, *Cadillac, the Standard of the World* 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Kutztown, Pennsylvania: Automobile Quarterly Books, 1990), pages 133-134; Ed Cray, *Chrome Colossus* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), pages 243-246; and Stephen Bayley, *Harley Earl* (New York: Taplinger, 1990), pages 23-33.

<sup>31</sup> Even in 1995, a journalist for *Automotive News*, Mary Conally referred to designers and body engineers as, "the Hatfields and McCoys of the auto industry." Quoted by James M. Rubenstein, *Making and Selling Cars*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 46.

The extent to which Earl's position was tenuous in these early days was spelled out by Franklin Quick Hershey, a long-time G. M. designer:

Harley was under the gun all the time. When he first went there, everybody resented him because he hobnobbed with the Fishers. The Fishers got him back there, and he was introduced to Sloan, and Sloan liked him, and Sloan liked what he did ... but they were all jealous of him because they wanted to design the cars. Well, engineers can't design cars, and they thought, well, he's a goody-good, doggoned pantywaist because he's a doggoned artist, see? Well, this was as far from the truth as it could be. So then Fisher Body...their nose was out of joint, and they thought we'll screw this guy the best way we can.

So, when they designed the pregnant Buick... it had a little roll all down the...the roll ran down the hood right through the body at the belt line. ... What happened was, when Fisher Body got a hold of it, once the design department got into Fisher Body, that was it. I mean they could do anything they wanted to do, and they did. They raised it two inches, which made the windows starey. They did all kinds of things that ruined the original design, because I saw the original one. Harley kept the original one under cover there. I saw it, eventually. He kept that for a long time. So, they ruined the car. Well, that became of the pry to help him to put Fisher Body in their place. Finally, the edict came through that, from now on, no change was to be made in the Fisher Body development unless it was made—the design part—unless it was made in the design department themselves.<sup>32</sup>

Sloan's appreciation of Earl's success eventually gave Earl a power within the G.M. hierarchy that became legendary, and stories that illustrate it abound. Typical is the following, related by David Gartman:

One day in the early 1930s Harlow Curtice, the new general manager of General Motors' Buick Division, ventured to the third floor of the corporation's headquarters in Detroit, where the Art and Color Section was located. This was the corporate "beauty parlor," as some of Detroit's hard-boiled, no-nonsense automotive men referred to it, where the "pretty-picture boys" dressed up the automobiles that came off the engineers' drawing boards. The section was headed by a California transplant named Harley Earl, a style-conscious man given to wearing white-linen suits and purple shirts. But he was also a huge, powerful man who could curse, drink, and womanize with the best of

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<sup>32</sup> Franklin Quick Hershey – Oral History at the Benson Ford Research Center, Interviewed by David Crippen, May 20, 1986, Volume 1, Page 77.

the industry's engineers and production men. And he was determined to wrest the power to design cars away from them.

Curtice eyed the decorations that Earl and his staff had hung on his forthcoming Buicks and did not like what he saw. He quickly got into a heated argument with Earl, who told him that he did not know a "damn thing" about style. After a few more expletives were exchanged, Earl suddenly fell silent and strode toward his office, motioning for Curtice to follow. He picked up the receiver of the phone on his desk and pushed the button that opened a direct line to the office of GM president Alfred Sloan.

"Hello, Alfred, how are you?" Earl asked calmly.

"How's Carol, Alfred? And how are the kids? Alright? That's good." Now the tone of Earl's voice grew notably harsher.

"Alfred, I'm here in the Buick studio with that son of a bitch Curtice, and he seems to be a little confused. He can't tell who's in charge of Buick and who's in charge of Art and Color. I thought maybe you could straighten out his ass for me."

Earl handed the phone to Curtice, to whom Sloan calmly stated: "Let him build anything he wants."<sup>33</sup>

Like many of these stories, there is reason to doubt some of the details.

Sloan's wife's name was Irene, not Carol, and they had no children. Even in the early 1930s, Harlow Curtice was a real power within the corporation, and would become its president in 1953. There is nothing in the record of their relationship that implies Curtice held any animosity toward Earl, as he might well be expected to have held toward the man who called the big boss so that Sloan could "straighten out his ass"

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<sup>33</sup> David Gartman, "Harley Earl and the Art and Color (sic) Section: The Birth of Styling at General Motors"; *Design Issues* Vol. 10, No. 2, (Summer 1994), p.3. Gartman says in his footnote, "This story is pieced together from various sources. See especially Al Fleming, "The Earl of Design," *Automotive News*, (Sept. 16,1983), 232; Barbara Holliday, "Harley Earl, the Original Car Stylist," *Detroit Free Press Sunday Magazine* (May 25, 1969), 13. These sources, however, have cleaned up Earl's language. I have inserted characteristic expletives, relying on the firsthand reports of Earl's associates. See C. Edson Armi, *The Art of American Car Design* (University Park, Pa.; 1988), 32; and "Reminiscences of William L. Mitchell," *Automotive Design Center, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village* (Dearborn, Michigan, 1984), 8."

while Curtice was on the way up.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the power that Gartman describes was apparently very real. Earl did report directly to Sloan, rather than to the engineering chief or the heads of the various divisions. In 1940, Earl would become a vice-president of the corporation.

Earl embraced a design philosophy that would serve him and G.M. well over the next three decades. Boiling his philosophy down to its simplest elements, he believed that automotive design should strive to make the car lower, longer, wider, and better detailed. Much of that detail work would be seen on the front of the cars. Earl placed great emphasis on the frontal appearance, especially the grillwork, of his designs. Early on, the structure of the radiator itself would limit Earl, but as will be seen, once the radiator shell was abandoned as a style element, Earl would use the grillwork to visually widen the vehicle. Throughout Earl's career, one can see the importance of the horizontal line, which tended to lower and lengthen the visual image of the car. This emphasis can be seen even in Earl's pre-G.M. work for Don Lee. Some observers, especially Bayley and David Gartman<sup>35</sup>, emphasize a sense of theater that Earl acquired during his early career in California.

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<sup>34</sup> In fact, a *Time Magazine* cover article on Curtice (November 1, 1954) describes a very close working relationship between Curtice and Earl.

<sup>35</sup> Bayley, *Harley Earl* and David Gartman, *Auto Opium* (London: Routledge, 1994).



1922 Cadillac built by the Don Lee Company for Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle. Note the horizontal strip which begins at the radiator and continues to the back of the car. This attempt to use trim to visually lengthen the car would become one of Earl’s trademarks.

Source: [http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/l/lee\\_don/lee\\_don.htm](http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/l/lee_don/lee_don.htm)

The importance of detail was another hallmark of Earl’s work that can be seen in the early years of his career and extending until his retirement. He appears to have always been aware of the ways in which subtle decoration could reflect light. Below is a detail photograph of the headlamp of a 1932 Cadillac. At first glance, it is simply a headlamp, but further investigation reveals at least two features whose only purpose is to reflect light and make the car more dazzling as sunlight reflects off of it. The first is the groove that runs around the lens. It could have simply been one unbroken curve extending from the lens to the edges of the “bucket” that encloses the bulb and the wiring. Earl inserted an extra groove into the design, which serves no purpose other than to reflect light. He also inserted a small crown into the top of the lamp for the same purpose. These details served no function other than ornamentation. They are very subtle – one could look at the car very closely and not notice them; however they do reflect light in such a way as to draw the eye to the front of the car that Earl wanted to emphasize.



1932 Cadillac Headlamp. Author's collection.

Another important element of Earl's philosophy was the use of color. In this he was aided immensely by the recent development of Duco lacquer by the chemists over at DuPont. Duco combined two virtues: the ability to present more vivid hues than previous formulas with relatively rapid drying time. This development assisted in the straightening of the production bottleneck that the painting and finishing of bodies had long presented. The extent to which Earl was able to use this new capacity and its effect can be seen in the following article from Time magazine:

The Laughing Cavalier is a sports roadster. King Henry VIII and The Blue Boy are all-weather phaetons. The Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is an inside drive sedan.

No gibberish are the above statements.

They are easily explained by the fact that Cadillac-La Salle engineers together with Fisher and Fleetwood coachworkers have built 17 automobiles with color schemes derived from paintings by 17 famed artists, from Botticelli to John Singer Sargent. The purpose was to use precisely the colors of the paintings; to give each color its proper value; to distribute the colors so that the result would be practical, utilitarian.

The Cadillac-La Salle-Fisher-Fleetwood clientele have always been gourmets of the gasoline world. But these latest models require the very pink of passengerhood. Only the jolliest, most debonair of present-day gallants could fittingly adorn the La Salle-Fisher Laughing Cavalier. Students of the Hals painting have provided it with hood and cowl of Wissahickon green; lower body, fenders and gear of deep maroon; wire wheels, rear deck and body above moulding of Talina brown; roof and rear quarters of tan Burbank silk mohair; mouldings of gold leaf.

Regally imperious must be the wife who would venture forth with the Cadillac-Fleetwood King Henry VIII, sumptuously decorated in wine, red and silver after the Holbein portrait.

For the personage with truly ecclesiastical majesty is the Cadillac-Fleetwood Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michael Angelical in dull reds, blues, greens, gold.

Innumerable duets will find a luminescent cosiness in the La Salle-Fisher special convertible town car, glistening with greens, pale yellows and silver after *The Conversation* by Watteau.

And for the lady of devastating chic and ophidian fascination, who looks forward to penthouses rather than backward at palazzos, is the Cadillac-Fleetwood Art Moderne, a sleek transformable cabriolet in aluminum, black, copper, snakewood.<sup>36</sup>

This use of color was also featured prominently in the 1928 Cadillac brochure, entitled “Color Creations from Nature’s Studios.” Perhaps the most beautiful automotive catalog ever produced, the first inside page proclaims color to be “Nature’s Most Precious, Most Lavish Gift” and goes on to tie the new Cadillac to the very center of life itself as it enthused:

NATURE, master artist, does not draw lines. She works with masses of color. It is the one skill she never relinquishes, the one that never fails her. Forms crumble. Motion comes finally to rest. Sound sinks to silence. Color alone abides. It may fade—it does not vanish.

Here in the gay plumage of a bird, there in a gorgeous undersea fish; now in a rose resplendent in June sunlight, and again in the lavender shadows on January snows; in the fragile splendor of an afternoon butterfly and in the adamant heart of a gem buried deep in the core of earth—everywhere and always, Nature hangs her earth with rich tapestries and veins its rocky bastions with vivid hues. It is the final, the glorifying touch, of her handiwork. Only when the mechanical structure is perfected does she take up her palette. After the seed the flower; after the larva the butterfly.

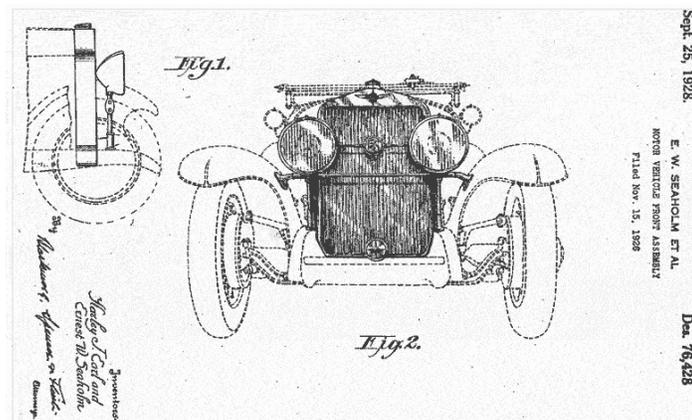
The motor cars pictured on these pages are, therefore, in a double sense, creations from Nature's studios. They signalize the perfecting of the inward structure. Their mechanisms – the Cadillac and LaSalle chassis and Fisher and Fleetwood coachcraft — mark the highest refinement of automotive design and construction. They are perfected as Nature perfects — to ultimate simplicity, economy, and efficient coordination.

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<sup>36</sup> “Motor Masterpieces” *Time*, December 10, 1928.

Therein lies their indisputable right to their unique color schemes—harmonies faithfully worked out from Nature. They reveal her consummate mastery of color—the most elusive and sole abiding thread in the fabric of life.

Perhaps the most important consideration underlying Earl's design philosophy was that he wanted G.M. to be on the leading edge of automotive styling, but not so far advanced that his style-conscious, but still relatively conservative clients (both among the corporate executives and the eventual purchasers of the cars) would find the eventual products jarring. It can be said, therefore that much of Earl's best work was derivative. For the 1927 LaSalle, Earl borrowed heavily from the Hispano-Suiza, (a fact that Earl himself acknowledged) a very low production French car.<sup>37</sup>



The LaSalle design patent, credited to both Harley Earl and Cadillac Chief Engineer Seaholm.

(Source [http://www.carofthecentury.com/harley's\\_la\\_salle.htm](http://www.carofthecentury.com/harley's_la_salle.htm))

In this respect, Earl was not alone. One of the few major automobile designers of the period who never worked for Earl was Raymond Loewy, an independent industrial designer who worked extensively for Studebaker from the late 1930s through to the early 1960s. Sally Clarke points out that Loewy's attitude was similar to Earl's, pointing out that Loewy, "tried to entice consumers with something

<sup>37</sup> See Bayley, *Harley Earl*, p. 46; Gartman, *Auto Opium*, p. 81

new – but not so new as to startle his clients’ shoppers. Market research helped determine what customers thought of as comfortable or conventional, and, given their conventions, Loewy claimed to design products in keeping with his principle of being ‘the most advanced yet acceptable.’”<sup>38</sup>

Earl’s success with the new LaSalle was immediately apparent. The unnamed reviewer from the trade publication *Motor* noted that, “When the writer first laid eyes on these new models ... his first impression was that here was just about the most beautiful line of cars that he had ever seen.” He referred to the overall effect of the design as “European.” Pressing himself to isolate those factors that made it so striking, he specifically mentioned the “sweeping, low-crowned one piece front fenders,” the “high, low-bottomed nickel radiator,” the “bullet-nosed nickeled headlamps mounted on nickel plated brackets”, the “low, broad but graceful [radiator] filler cap,” the “streamline crease” found on the fenders, headlamps, radiator, and radiator cap, as well as the fact that the frame was sufficiently low so that the floorboards were a mere twenty inches from the ground.<sup>39</sup>

W.L. Carver, writing for *Motor Age*, amplified this assessment and drew attention to the color scheme in which the hood and cowl were painted in a darker shade than the body from the leading edges of the front doors to the back of the car.<sup>40</sup> This unusual use of color set the car apart from the rest of the U.S. car market as well as from its cousins in the Cadillac line. It was also seven inches shorter than the

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<sup>38</sup> Sally H. Clarke, *Trust and Power*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), page 8.

<sup>39</sup> “Cadillac Announces the LaSalle V-Eight” *Motor*, March 1927, pages 52 and 174.

<sup>40</sup> “The LaSalle – a New Vee Eight” *Motor Age*, March 3, 1927, page 17.

standard Cadillac, having a wheelbase of 125 inches as opposed to Cadillac's 132.

The use of color and the smaller wheelbase was calculated to give the new car a more sporting, less formal appearance than the senior car.

The importance of the LaSalle has not been overlooked by modern commentators, either. English design critic Stephen Bayley sums up its appeal to its target audience:

Its appearance was entirely new: sharp corners had been excluded in favour of warmly curved junctions, disparate elements had been harmonized into a unified whole, and as a hint of the chief concern in car structure that was to remain Earl's for the next thirty years, the silhouette had been lowered so that the car gave an impression of elegance and expressed a potential for speed.

## Section 2

### **The men behind Cadillac advertising and their philosophy**

Throughout most of the period covered by this paper, direction of Cadillac advertising was led in turn by two of these comfortable upper-middle-class men, Theodore F. MacManus (1872-1940) and James R. Adams (1898-1956). The two men, together with W. A. P. John, formed MacManus, John & Adams, with MacManus bringing the Cadillac account into the firm. Exactly when MacManus turned supervision of Cadillac advertising over to Adams is subject to some conjecture. The Advertising Hall of Fame's website credits Adams with "supervising Cadillac advertising for 30 years," which would mean that he took over the account

about 1926. This seems highly unlikely, since the same source says that he was with Campbell-Ewald until partnering with MacManus in 1934.<sup>41</sup>

Assembling a chronology from his book, *Men, Money, and Motors*, it appears that MacManus's association with Cadillac began shortly before Henry Leland sold Cadillac to General Motors in 1909. According to this account, MacManus got the account over other, more experienced advertising agencies when it turned out that a poem he had written was a favorite of both Leland and Leland's son Wilfred.<sup>42</sup> With the possible exception of the period from 1931-1934,<sup>43</sup> MacManus and the successive firms into which the MacManus agency was absorbed would do Cadillac's advertising until 2006.

MacManus himself is something of a legend in the advertising community. His most famous work is a Cadillac ad that ran only once, in the Saturday Evening Post on January 2, 1915. Entitled "The Penalty of Leadership," it has been described as "perhaps one of the greatest advertisements and most inspiring pieces of business literature ever written."<sup>44</sup> Cadillac was never mentioned in the text of the ad, although its logo appeared in the border (See Appendix A). In his advice manual,

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[http://www.advertisinghalloffame.org/members/member\\_bio.php?memid=518](http://www.advertisinghalloffame.org/members/member_bio.php?memid=518)

<sup>42</sup> Theodore MacManus, *Men, Money, and Motors*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929), pages 192-194

<sup>43</sup> This exception is purely speculative, based upon the fact that the files that the General Motors Heritage Center acquired from Leo Burnett Detroit, the successor firm to MacManus, John & Adams contains no advertising from those model years, even though the files have many items from the period before 1931 and after 1934. A possible explanation is that the Cadillac account was taken to Campbell-Ewald, which did work for other G.M. divisions – notably Chevrolet – and was assigned to Adams, who was then somehow able to take the account with him into his partnership with MacManus in 1934.

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.advertisinghalloffame.org/members/member\\_bio.php?memid=698&uflag=m&uyear=](http://www.advertisinghalloffame.org/members/member_bio.php?memid=698&uflag=m&uyear=)

*More Power to Advertising* (1937), Adams asserted that “To this day Cadillac cars are being sold on the strength of an advertisement written more than twenty years ago, and entitled ‘The Penalty of Leadership.’”<sup>45</sup>

A modern reader is likely to look at that ad and wonder how it can possibly have been so effective. The text is densely packed; there is no artwork except the border around the text; it transmits no emotional charge to the casual onlooker leafing idly through the magazine. However, on reading it, one knows exactly to whom it is addressed. It is easy to imagine the careworn captain of industry or owner of a prosperous small business reading this ad and saying internally, “Those people know what it is like to be me. They understand what I am up against, and why I am up against it.” A bond was formed. In 1927, MacManus was able to quote an unnamed Cadillac President as saying, “Advertising has put something into the Cadillac that was not built in the factory. I do not know what it is, but I know that it is there, and it had made this the most uniquely valuable motor car property in the world.”<sup>46</sup> The car was sold because the ad complimented the reader more than it complimented the product.

Theodore MacManus’s philosophy of advertising sprang from a series of solid core beliefs. First among these was what he called the “Metaphysics of Advertising” which had its basis in, “a balance between product, and producer and consumer that must be a true balance, one that does not deceive. Its essence is honesty as a principle

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<sup>45</sup> James Adams, *More Power to Advertising*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), p 168.

<sup>46</sup> Theodore MacManus, *The Sword-Arm of Business*, (New York: Devin-Adair, 1927), page 25.

as well as a policy.”<sup>47</sup> It was, in his opinion, this honesty that set publicity apart from propaganda that was based on untruth or half-truth. Springing from this base was his “advertising formula.” This first premise in this formula was the idea that consumers possessed subconscious minds that were being constantly influenced by the various stimuli to which the individual was subjected. The job of the advertiser<sup>48</sup> was to raise those influences from being largely accidental to “make it at least semi-scientific.” The first step in accomplishing this end had to lay with the manufacturer who had to determine, as simply as possible, what he/she wanted the public to believe about the product. A single sentence served to encapsulate the virtues of the product and/or the policies of the firm in such a way that it would be “so clear and so convincing that it will carry conviction every time it is repeated<sup>49</sup>.”

In MacManus’s world, that single sentence, that core idea, would be repeated, and repeated often. It would, in fact, form the core of the reputation that the advertiser would build for the manufacturer through the advertising. In this respect, repetition was a key element. The core concept would need to be repeated so often that the consumer would internalize it, coming to see it as his/her own carefully thought-out opinion. To be accepted, it was important that the concept compliment the consumer’s other beliefs, to fit comfortably into his/her frame of reference.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, page 138

<sup>48</sup> For the sake of clarity and brevity, throughout this essay the term advertiser will refer to the advertising agency, the term manufacturer will refer to the company whose products are being advertised, and the term consumer will refer to the potential purchasers of the product in question.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, page 146.

This belief placed MacManus in direct opposition to those advertisers who captured the consumer's attention by pointing out their deficiencies (real or imagined), and then presented the manufacturer's product as the cure/preventative. The purchase a Cadillac, MacManus implied, would convey to the world the kind of person that you were (or aspired to be). The goal was never presented as keeping the other members of the Country Club from laughing at you behind your back.

This was a slow-growth policy. Cadillac advertising would occasionally mention the technical aspects of the product in a general way, and pricing would take a more prominent place during the 1930s, but the key appeal of Cadillac advertising would remain largely stable for decades. "Buy a Cadillac," the ads seemed to say, "because this is the car that will show the world the kind of superior person that you are."

This process would yield huge rewards because it produced an incredible amount of customer loyalty. As Adams would put it,

A business is safe and sound and durable only when it has back of it a safe and sound and durable public opinion.

The man who takes advantage of your bargain, or who responds to your loud claims and ballyhoo, is not your friend and you cannot depend on him.

He will desert you tomorrow for a more attractive offer.

Your only chance is to keep everlastingly at him with bargains and claims; and you do that only at the expense of your own ruin.

How different the customer who buys from you because he respects you and genuinely admires the product you build!

He is your friend. You can trust him. He will be back again and again. He is the very cornerstone of business success.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Adams, *More Power to Advertising*, p 84.

MacManus and Adams were not lone voices trying to persuade a reluctant client to embrace the value of advertising. Alfred Sloan placed great value on divisional advertising. He also saw its value in building an image for the company as a whole. Sloan worked closely with Barton, Durstine, and Osborn to develop a broad campaign as early as 1922.<sup>51</sup> Pamela Walker Laird gives Sloan a great deal of credit, saying that, “Sloan brought fashion into the market. ... Sloan deliberately explored design and advertising for profit, rather than for the purpose of enhancing anyone’s personal identity – other than the consumer’s.”<sup>52</sup> By 1923, General Motors was the single largest national magazine advertiser.<sup>53</sup> Given the fact that the corporation had faced near-bankruptcy only two years earlier, the importance that Sloan placed on advertising shines out in even greater clarity.

### Section 3

#### **Pricing**

Cadillac’s marketing success was built on three elements, styling, skillful advertising, and pricing. We have seen how the first two played out in the 1927 introduction of the LaSalle. It is now time to turn to the third element.

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<sup>51</sup> Sloan, *My Years with General Motors*, p. 119. Roland Marchand also discusses this campaign at length in “The Corporation Nobody Knew: Bruce Barton, Alfred Sloan, and the Founding of the General Motors “Family” *The Business History Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4. (Winter 1991) pp 825-875.

<sup>52</sup> Pamela Walker Laird, “The Car without a Single Weakness: Early Automobile Advertising” *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 37, No. 4. (October 1996), p. 807.

<sup>53</sup> Richard S. Tedlow, *New and Improved - the Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), page 172.

The genesis of the LaSalle brand was born in the price gap between Buick and Cadillac, as shown at the beginning of this section. The advertised spread in LaSalle pricing was initially rather small, from \$2495 to \$2685. Advertised 1927 Cadillac prices started at \$2995 and could go way up from there, although the available advertisements do not mention a top price.<sup>54</sup> Buick prices ranged from \$1195 to \$1995.<sup>55</sup> While LaSalle did not entirely fill the \$1000 price gap between Buick and Cadillac, it did occupy the middle of that gap.

#### Section 4

#### **A policy of gradual improvement as the model years rolled along**

The 1927 season for LaSalle was an abbreviated one, since the car was introduced in March. Even so, 10,767 were sold – a healthy figure when one considers that Cadillac sold only 14,249 vehicles for all of the 1926 model year. Nineteen twenty-seven also would be the beginning of very good times for the senior nameplate as, as 36,369 Cadillacs were sold. The combined total of over 47,000 units far eclipsed Cadillac’s earlier best year, 1922, with production of 26,296.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, G.M. complimented itself when many of the LaSalle’s styling touches were used on the 1928 Cadillac as well.<sup>56</sup> By this time, Earl was in the process of setting up the industry’s first in-house design studio, dubbed the Art and Colour Section. This set the pattern that the division

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<sup>54</sup> Advertisement, *Washington Post*, February 6, 1927, page A8 simply says “Priced from \$2995 upwards.”

<sup>55</sup> Advertisement, *Washington Post*, October 28, 1926, page 9

<sup>56</sup> Hendry, Cadillac, pages 133-134

would follow throughout the LaSalle's short lifespan. LaSalle would be the sportier, more avant-garde of the pair while Cadillac would be slightly more conservative, longer, and more somber in color. Mechanically, they were very similar, LaSalle usually sharing the drivetrain of the least expensive Cadillac. Every year from 1928 through 1933, the Cadillac division moved gradually to produce a car that was slightly lower and longer; at least visually, if not in fact. These mild styling upgrades would be accompanied with mechanical improvements as engines grew more powerful, braking technologies improved, and transmissions became smoother. This was consistent with the policy of annual model changes instituted by Sloan in the mid-1920s.

## Section 5

### **Sixteen Cylinders**

There would be one significant exception to this policy of gradual improvement during this period, but this time it was in the realm of engineering instead of styling. Cadillac leapfrogged the entire industry with the introduction of a V-16 engine in 1930.

The project was apparently kept secret until the car's introduction. Given the standard development times in the industry at the time, work on the engine must have begun by early 1928, but I found no mention of it in the motoring press until the actual introduction. This secrecy served two purposes. First, it maximized the impact that accompanied the introduction. Second, keeping the new engine a secret prevented potential buyers from waiting until the new car came out before making a

purchase. The logic is simple. Someone who wanted a top-of-the-line car in 1929 might well have decided not to buy had he/she known that a substantially better car was coming along in 1930.

If ever an automobile engine could be called beautiful, this one was. There was an Art Deco sensibility in the look of the engine with its smooth surfaces, valve cover decorations, and the fact that special shrouds were designed to keep engine wires out of sight. Everything gave the appearance of being neat, in order, and efficient.

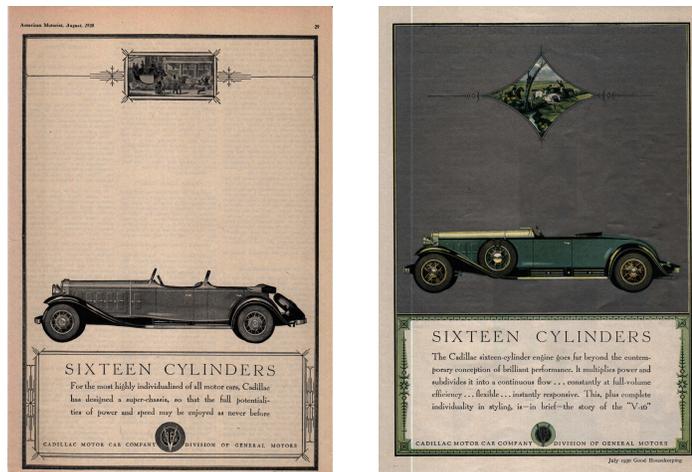


Charles Kettering and the 1930 Cadillac V-16 engine  
Source: <http://www.gmphotostore.com/1930-Cadillac-V16-Show-Engine/productinfo/53216831/>

Of course, the V-16 was a very expensive automobile. Cadillac advertised the price range as starting out at \$5350 for the roadster and going up to \$15,000. The usual varieties of body style were available in virtually any color combination that the customer desired.

The advertising campaign was incredibly simple and thoroughly understated. The car was shown in stark profile. Very small depictions of historical vignettes

related to travel appeared in the top of the page, but are almost too small to have any impact. The most important part of the copy of the ad is the phrase “SIXTEEN CYLINDERS.” The ads conveyed a Cadillac that was thoroughly modern; its new engine destined to make it a part of history, and its owner could expect to be thoroughly comfortable in the knowledge that this was a superior car that would accent his/her position in society. The car was revolutionary, the ads seem to say, without causing a revolution.



1930 Cadillac V-16 advertising. Left to right, American Motorist – August 1930, Good Housekeeping – July 1930, Sources – Cadillac-LaSalle Club Library and Antique Automobile Club of America Library.

Initially, the V-16 was successful, with over 3,000 sold in 1930 and 1931.<sup>57</sup>

Late in the 1930 season, Cadillac introduced a shortened version of the engine with twelve cylinders. Instead of using the V-16’s 148” wheelbase, the V-12 borrowed the 140” frame that had supported the Cadillac V-8 since 1928. The V-8 was then moved to the LaSalle’s 134-inch chassis. *Automotive Industries* detailed the process through

<sup>57</sup> Available records do not break out V-16 or V-12 production by model years for 1930 and 1931. Hendry’s *Cadillac* gives figures of 3,250 V-16s for the two years combined and 5,725 V-12s.

which the V-12 was formed, “The new 12-cylinder engine is virtually a replica of the 16, with two cylinders eliminated from each bank. On the other hand, axles, transmissions and clutches are virtually identical with those of the Cadillac V-8. External body construction ... is notably Cadillac V-8. Body interiors, on the other hand, are more of the character of the V-16, interior appointments being by Fleetwood.”<sup>58</sup> This would become a typical pattern for Cadillac and all of G.M. for years into the future – production would fill a newly perceived niche by combining already designed and tooled parts in a new combination. Prices for the V-12 began at \$3795, slightly more than the most expensive V-8, to \$4895. With LaSalle factored in, a Cadillac dealer could offer the public three different engines, three different chassis, a full array of factory and custom built bodies, all at prices ranging from \$2490 to \$15,000. Had the conditions of the 1920s gone on forever, Cadillac was poised for huge gains in market share.

## Section 6

### **Responding to stern realities**

Of course, the good times didn't last. Sheer momentum carried Cadillac along for a time, but the decline in sales as the Great Depression spiraled downward was impressive. It is easy to forget that what we all call the Great Depression was not always thought of as such. Early in 1930, Time Magazine referred to “the hazards of

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<sup>58</sup> Athel F. Denham “V-12 Completes Cadillac Range in Multi-Cylinder Line” *Automotive Industries*, August 30, 1930, page 292.

a possible business recession.”<sup>59</sup> Calendar year 1929 saw sales of 36,598. The following year sales were off by more than a third – to 22,559. Even so, that number was better than Cadillac had done in any year prior to 1926. By 1931, 1932, and 1933, the 1930 numbers would have filled the Cadillac sales force with nostalgia as sales declined to 15,012, 9153, and 6736 respectively.

The response of the luxury car industry to the Great Depression can be broken down into two phases. The first phase, from 1930 to 1934 or 1936 depending on manufacturer – Packard and Lincoln held out longer than Cadillac or Imperial. During this phase, those at the top of the price range competed more actively for the shrinking pool of buyers by improving their offerings. Cadillac’s V-16 lost its exclusivity in 1931 when Marmon brought out its own sixteen-cylinder behemoth. Packard and Lincoln marketed V-12 engines in 1932.

Nineteen thirty-two was also the year in which this first response to the Depression reached its zenith with virtually every car in every price range receiving, at the very least a facelift to make the cars look more streamlined, particularly by slanting the windshields, giving the radiator shells a vee-like design when viewed from overhead, and elongating the fenders. H.A. Tabantous noted in the *New York Times* that “practically every engine in 1932 has more power than the corresponding one of last year.” Alfred Sloan gave the 1932 models his stamp of approval when he was quoted in *Time* as saying “We know that we have the first lien on the purchaser’s budget; that the motorcar is the last thing that the individual gives up.... The new offerings this year unquestionably represent greater value than ever before.... My

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<sup>59</sup> “The Automobile Year” *Time*, January 13, 1930

own belief ... is that we will enjoy a somewhat better year than in 1931.<sup>60</sup> Even today, enthusiasts of pre-World War II American cars are likely to point to 1932 models in all price classes as being especially desirable.

Perhaps, if Herbert Hoover had been correct in predicting that prosperity was just around the corner, this would have been the correct response. As it was, having the “first lien of the purchaser’s budget” was not a secure position as the New Deal made its debut. Cadillac knew that changes had to be made. They were not the only ones. At Marmon and Stutz, 1932 would be the end of the line. Packard’s new “Light Eight” came nowhere near to achieving the goals its producers pinned upon it. By the time that industry-wide 1932 production proved to be about 40% lower than lackluster 1931 had been,<sup>61</sup> it was too late to make major changes for 1933, but both Cadillac and Imperial poised themselves to go deeply down-market for 1934.

Relatively new to the scene was Cadillac’s general manager, Nicholas Dreystadt. Fisher had been something of an artist, or at least an art fancier. Dreystadt was a production engineer. He would imprint a new way of doing business that would both go a long way toward assuring Cadillac’s success, both in the marketplace and within the G.M. corporate structure.

Dreystadt was something of an anomaly in the ranks of G.M. management, first coming to the U.S. from Southern Germany as a teenage apprentice on the Mercedes racing team. Management theorist Peter Drucker became acquainted with Dreystadt while doing research on what would eventually become his 1946 book

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<sup>60</sup> “Motion for Sale”, *Time* January 18, 1932 and H.A. Tabantous, “New Cars Reflect the Genius of Engineering Experts” *New York Times*, January 10, 1932, page A17.

<sup>61</sup> 1,431,000 vs. 2,472,000 according to “Cock of 1933” *Time* January 8, 1934.

*Concept of the Corporation.* Years later, he asserted that Cadillac was inches from liquidation when Dreystadt came on the scene.<sup>62</sup> Drucker gave Dreystadt, whom he very much admired, credit for two innovations that may well have saved Cadillac from the fate of Pierce-Arrow, Marmon, and Stutz.

The first of these was in the realm of marketing. Cadillac apparently had a policy of not selling directly to African American customers, no matter what their ability to pay. Dreystadt had noticed that these well-heeled customers would employ a white man to make the purchase for them, paying a substantial commission to the buying agent. Having noticed this, Dreystadt ended the practice and went to some lengths to cater to this market of entertainers, realtors, doctors, etc. thereby substantially increasing Cadillac sales. While this account certainly could be true, I believe there is room for doubt. There is an element of a story that is simply too good to be true, portraying Dreystadt's marketing philosophy as a prototype of Branch Rickey's hiring of Jackie Robinson to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers. I see nothing in Cadillac's advertising to support this change, although information provided to dealers during this period is in incredibly short supply. In justice to Drucker and Dreystadt, it is plausible that this change was done very quietly to avoid antagonizing white customers. Certainly, it is possible that a few telephone calls to dealers in cities with substantial African-American middle classes could have effected the desired change.

The second of these changes is in the realm of production. Until Dreystadt's accession, Cadillacs had been produced in the same sort of craft-oriented shop as

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<sup>62</sup> The following paragraphs are based on Peter F. Drucker, *Adventures of a Bystander* (New York: HarperCollins 1991), pages 268-269.

those in which its competitors were produced. The result of these labor-intensive practices was that Cadillac was barely profitable even during its best years, and was hemorrhaging money during the Depression. Dreystadt recognized that modern mass-production techniques could be every bit as reliable as the previous methods and implemented them in Cadillac's factories. The result was that a Cadillac cost little more to produce per unit than a Chevrolet while it carried a far higher price – making it vastly more profitable.<sup>63</sup>

This is a plausible tale. The set of production practices often called “Fordism” had never been an acceptable model for small output operations like Cadillac. However as David A. Houndshell points out, by the early 1930s, they had largely given way to a mode called “Flexible Mass Production.” Such a system would have been useful to luxury car manufacturers who needed to produce a wide variety of models, none of which would be produced in large numbers. Having access to the resources of General Motors, this was especially advantageous to Cadillac.<sup>64</sup>

Another significant change giving this story credence is the fact that the gradual changeover from a “composite” system of body manufacture was going on. The composite system was one in which sheets of steel forming the outer skin of the car body were secured to a wooden frame. In the mid-1930s, the composite body was giving way to the all steel body. The earlier system, while amenable to Fordist production techniques, was also open to being used by a small custom shop using a

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<sup>63</sup> See Hendry, *Cadillac*, page 242 and William H. Whyte, “The Cadillac Phenomenon” *Fortune*, February 1955, page 107.

<sup>64</sup> This change is discussed at length in Chapter 7 of David A. Houndshell's *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

large amount of skilled labor. This inherent flexibility meant that such a small shop was easily able to embrace modern style trends and produce a few examples of a wide variety of models. Just how broad the model line could be is seen in 1929's *The Book of Fleetwood* in which seventeen types of custom bodies were listed as being available, each being open to alteration by the eventual customer. The all-steel-body used frames made by huge presses rather than by skilled carpenters. This made flexibility rare and vastly more expensive. Under these conditions, keeping up with new trends in styling could only be done by those, like General Motors, who had the financial resources to make expensive tooling changes on a regular basis. Of the few surviving independent luxury car manufacturers, only Packard was able to keep up, and then only by going far more deeply down market than Cadillac ever would. (Interestingly, Mercedes-Benz would continue to produce a composite bodied car until 1955, twenty years after the practice was abandoned by G.M.)

Dreystadt actually took over the reins at Cadillac from Lawrence Fisher on June 1, 1934. By that time, Cadillac's own move down-market was at least partially underway. Throughout the period from 1930-1933, LaSalle's pricing structures had been largely consistent, with its least expensive model retailing at a point somewhere between \$2,200 and \$2,500. However, over the same period, the price of the least expensive Cadillac declined considerably – from \$3,295 to \$2,695. By 1933, only fifty dollars separated the most expensive LaSalle from the least expensive Cadillac. Certainly, the idea of scuttling LaSalle had to have come up.

## Section 7

### **Design saves LaSalle**

The decision to keep LaSalle is another enduring part of automotive myth. According to this oft-retold but unverifiable tale, the decision to drop LaSalle had already been made when Harley Earl showed top G.M. management the design that he had prepared for it. Dazzled by the design, management reversed itself and ordered the 1934 LaSalle into production.<sup>65</sup>

Regardless of its exact gestation process, the 1934 LaSalle was a major departure from its immediate predecessor. The overall style of the car could be described as conventional streamlining. The radiator grille, which had by 1933 become a steel shell placed over the working radiator, still had a vertical emphasis, but Earl visually distanced it from its traditional shape by narrowing it significantly. The vertical axis was emphasized by the adoption of “headlamps of airfoil shape,”<sup>66</sup> the addition of wide “catwalks” linking the sides of the grille and hood to new fenders of pontoon shape extending back nearly the entire length of the hood, and a bumper with two thin blades that resembled nothing so much as the wings of a World War I biplane. As if to extend the airplane metaphor further, the bumper was joined to the body by two fuselages which were spring loaded to allow the bumper to move back in a very minor collision without damage to the brackets mounting it to the body.

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<sup>65</sup> The source of this story that I find the most credible, perhaps because its author also doubts that it actually happened, is from Jeffrey I. Godshall’s essay *LaSalle: The Cadillac Companion* which is appended to Hendry’s *Cadillac*, p. 397.

<sup>66</sup> “Straight 8 LaSalle, New Cadillacs”, *Automotive Trade Journal*, January 1934, p 28.

Under the hood, the engine of the car actually seemed to be a technological step backwards. Instead of being powered by the Cadillac V-8, as it had been since its 1927 introduction, the 1934 LaSalle had a straight eight cylinder engine of Oldsmobile design.

This combination of progressive, but not radical styling and conventional engineering would be so much a part of Cadillac and G.M. marketing that this car will be compared at length with its competition.

Stylistically, the 1934 LaSalle has much in common with a far less expensive automobile introduced two years earlier, the Graham “Blue Streak.” The Graham was styled by one of the few designers who is said to rival Harley Earl, Amos Northup. Its styling featured the same sort of sloping radiator and full fenders that the LaSalle did. Historian of Automotive Design Nick Georgano posits that, “For anyone accustomed to cars of the later 1930s, it is hard to understand the importance of the 1932 Graham. Suffice it to say that it could easily have passed for a 1935 car, in an age when design was changing very rapidly.” It retailed in a price range between \$1,000 and \$1,300, and likely would have sold well in better times. But it was that most unkind of years, 1932, and fewer than 10,000 were produced.



1932 Graham Blue Streak  
Source: Encyclopedia of American Cars, p 493.

Whether or not Earl took inspiration from Northup’s work is uncertain. The amount of time that was necessary to put a new design into production at the time

makes it unlikely, but possible. Earl almost certainly would not have admitted borrowing design themes for the new LaSalle from a mass produced car in the Oldsmobile price range, but the derivative nature of much of Earl's work has already been discussed.

### Section 8

#### **The radical alternative**

A far more advanced contemporary of the new LaSalle from which Earl most definitely did not draw was the new Chrysler Airflow. That the Airflow was very significant from an engineering standpoint is a point that many Automotive historians, both enthusiast and academic, will acknowledge. James J. Flink sums up both its virtues and the reasons for its lack of success well:

Powered by an eight-cylinder, 4.4-liter engine, the Airflow in motion developed 40 percent less drag than competing models. The five-passenger Chrysler sedan sold for a moderate \$1,345. It was one of the first cars to feature welded unitized construction, in which the body and chassis frame are built as an integral structure, rather than the body being a separately built structure bolted onto the chassis frame in assembly. Unitized construction permits greater rigidity for a given weight and a roomier passenger compartment for a given width of body. The full aerodynamic shape of the Airflow combined a deco grille, headlights mounted flush in the front fenders, a split slant windshield, seating entirely within the wheelbase, and an integral trunk. Although the Airflow was a superior automobile in all respects, it was far too revolutionary for consumers. Fewer than 54,000 units were sold before it was withdrawn from production in 1937. Chrysler hurriedly brought out conservatively designed Airstream models in 1935 and after its Airflow experience remained the most conservative of the Big Three in styling policy for several decades.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p 238

Some contemporary commentators were far less guarded. *Harper's* editor Frederick Lewis Allen said that the car was, "so bulbous, so obesely curved as to defy the natural preference of the eye for horizontal lines."<sup>68</sup>



Chrysler Airflow Publicity Picture  
Source: Gartman, *Auto Opium*, page 122

If Earl had harbored any desire to be on the automotive avant garde in 1934, Chrysler's experience with the Airflow likely cured him of it. The lesson was as clear to him as it was to the rest of the industry: engineering excellence did not sell cars, styling that fit the car into the tastes of current consumers did. Earl would always attempt to design cars that were modern but not radical, as was the 1934 LaSalle.

## Section 9

### **Once again, advertising follows styling**

MacManus and Adams were quick to pick up on the themes presented by the design of the new offering as a more streamlined look also came to predominate in LaSalle's advertising. This is not to say that the approach was completely new. Both the 1933 and 1934 ads shared an overall theme in common with each other and with the other LaSalle advertising shown above. The themes of rich people at play were

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in David Gartman, *Auto Opium*, p. 124

prominent. There was a sense of athleticism. Pictures were far more important than copy. Women were prominently featured.

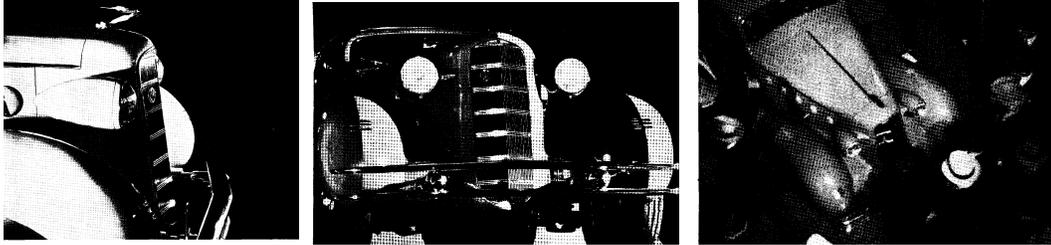


Source for both ads – Antique Automobile Club of America Library

The differences were also marked. The antique print quality of the 1927 advertising seen earlier had yielded to artwork of a far more contemporary sensibility by 1933. The 1934 artwork was minimalist. The customer could not focus on the beauty of the background as he/she could in the earlier ads. The car stood by itself in all of its stark modernity. In other ads, photographs replaced drawings. These photographs feature only the front of the car from a variety of dramatic angles, straight on, overhead, and very low.

Another difference between the 1934 ad and the earlier effort was the prominence given to the price of the car. Price information had almost always been a part of LaSalle ads, but it had always been subordinate to other information, appearing at the bottom of the earliest ads or camouflaged in 1933, as if to say, “Here is a smart car that incidentally is less expensive than other smart cars.” In 1934, the price information is next to the illustration, far more prominent than the rest of the

copy. The shift is subtle, but the message has become, “Lucky lady – here is a bargain that is also a smart car.”



Photography from 1934 LaSalle Ads (Right – Motor, May 1934, p. 73 ; Center – Automotive Trade Journal, October 1934, p. 181; Left – Motor, March 1934, p. 65)  
All courtesy of the Antique Automobile Club of America Library.

## Section 10

### **Pricing strategy dooms the LaSalle**

Even after all that has been said about styling and advertising, it is possible that the most important difference between the 1933 and 1934 LaSalle was the price. As mentioned earlier, LaSalle had been introduced to give G.M. a car that would retail in the low-to-mid-\$2,000 range. The price range of the new LaSalle was \$1,495 to \$1,595. This made the LaSalle a competitor with the Series 60 Buick, and considerably less expensive than Buick’s 90 Series. As if to accentuate the LaSalle’s demotion, the 1934 (as well as 1935 and 1936 models) carried a straight eight engine sourced from Oldsmobile. A narrower model line-up reflected the price range with only four offerings; two- and four-door sedans, a coupe, and a convertible. Gone from LaSalle’s line were the Fleetwood bodied long-wheelbase sedans and limousines that had been featured earlier. On the other hand, sales over 1933 more than doubled (3,482 vs. 7,195).

LaSalle's price decline did not end in 1934. The advertised entry price in 1935 was \$1,225, \$1,175 in 1936, and \$995 (later increased to \$1,095) in 1937. This price decline was paralleled by a decline in LaSalle's fortunes overall. By 1937, Cadillac was advertising prices starting at \$1,555 for a car carrying the full prestige of the senior offering. That same year the Buick Roadmaster sedan retailed at \$1,518. The price gap that had provided LaSalle with its genesis simply no longer existed. Nor, after 1934, did the design exclusivity that gave LaSalle much of its luster.

While the 1934 Cadillac had been a slightly more conservatively styled car than the LaSalle was, in 1935 Cadillac picked up most of the LaSalle's styling cues. From that point on, the LaSalle would simply be a cheaper Cadillac with a narrower grille. LaSalle would regain some of its status when it resumed using the Cadillac V-8 in 1937, but it would be the last hurrah. It limped along until 1940, when it was quietly dropped, along with the unprofitable Cadillac V-16 line.

Curiously, the LaSalle's last three seasons showed considerable gains in sales, even as its star in the G.M. firmament set. As the Great Depression crept toward its end, LaSalle posted sales of 14,675 in 1938, 21,127 in 1939, and 24,130 in 1940. It is possible, therefore, to conclude that G.M. snuffed out the LaSalle's candle just as it was once again finding its market. That is not, however, the consensus of most automotive historians who point to the fact that the car that replaced the LaSalle, the \$1,345 Cadillac Model 61, sold 29,250 during its freshman year.

## Section 11

### **The “Turret Top” and longer, lower, all steel bodies**

During these years, a production innovation occurred that would play a role in both establishing Cadillac as the dominant player in its market, both by making it (and the rest of the G.M. line) among the most modern cars on the market and by helping to eliminate some of its competition. It began with U. S. Steel’s introduction of strip steel in 88-inch widths. This made possible the one piece “Turret Top” which made its bow on G.M.’s 1935 models. Prior to this time, all cars had a wood-framed, fabric-covered panel in the center of the roof. Compared with an all-steel roof, this was noisier, required special upkeep, and was prone to leak as it aged. The Turret Top made all G.M. cars look more modern. It also made it possible for a car to be built with an all-steel body, rather than using a composite of steel with wood framing, as had been done since the genesis of the industry.<sup>69</sup>

Manufacturing the Turret Top required the installation of the largest steel presses heretofore used in the industry. The all-steel body entailed far greater tooling costs than the composite method of construction, wood being inherently more malleable than steel. Sally Clarke quotes Gordon Buehrig – chief designer of the revolutionary Cord 810 and later an important designer at Ford – as saying that tooling costs for wood to framing as ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000 and that tooling for all-steel bodies could range from \$10 to \$20 million.<sup>70</sup> Since the annual model change had become an established part of life in the industry by the mid-1930s, at least some of this tooling had to be replaced every year. Since G.M. could

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<sup>69</sup> Bayley, *Harley Earl*, p. 54; Sloan, *My Years With General Motors*, p. 321.

<sup>70</sup> Clarke, *Trust and Power*, page 192.

amortize these costs over a far larger production run than could its smaller competitors, Cadillac gained an important competitive advantage. As will be seen below, these costs were extremely detrimental to Packard's ability to compete in the mid-1950s.

By the late 1930s, styling had solidly established itself as a key factor in the marketing of all General Motors products. Sloan himself wrote in 1941 that, "the appearance of a motorcar is a most important factor in the selling end of the business – perhaps the most important single factor because everybody knows that all cars will run."<sup>71</sup> That same year, Harley Earl quipped that "I have watched them spend upwards of \$50 million since I have been here to drop cars 3 inches."<sup>72</sup>

## Section 12

### **The Sixty Special and a new direction in styling**

As LaSalle entered its five year death throes after 1935, design leadership returned to the Cadillac line. Perhaps the best example of this trend was the groundbreaking 1938 Cadillac Sixty Special. The Sixty Special was a watershed vehicle for a number of reasons. Perhaps most importantly, it was a harbinger of styling trends for the next decade. The entire car was approximately three inches lower than anything else that Cadillac built, but this was not a case of achieving the look of a lower car by simply lowering the top and sacrificing interior headroom. In this case, the entire car was lowered by using a "double drop" frame in which the

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Tedlow, *New and Improved*, p. 168.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Clarke, *Trust and Power*, p. 177

outer rails of the frame were decreased in height and then supplemented by an X-member between the frame rails. The result was a shallower frame that was substantially stiffer than the taller frame that it replaced.<sup>73</sup> The lowering of the car also dropped its center of gravity, resulting in a better handling and more controllable automobile.



1939 Newspaper advertisement.  
(Source Antique Automobile Club of America Library)

As can be seen by the above advertisement featuring both the Sixty Special and the LaSalle, it is easy to see that the shorter Sixty Special, despite its reduction in height, was a more substantial looking car than the “older” LaSalle. The combination of lower height and greater length (126 in. wheelbase vs. 120 in.) produced a greater sense of width as well. Lowering the car meant that its designer could dispense with the traditional running boards, which made ingress and egress more graceful.

To modern eyes, the differences may not appear as great as they did in 1939, and Cadillac played up those differences in their advertising. The 1939 catalog

<sup>73</sup> Hendry, *Cadillac*, p. 243

proclaimed that “When the first Sixty Specials rolled down America’s highways, startled motorists rubbed their eyes and looked – again and again. For here, indeed, was something different – a car so low that it seemed to spring right out of the pavement . . . a closed car with doors so wide and pillars so narrow that it looked like a cabriolet . . . a car whose seats were so wide that *every* passenger could ride in complete comfort.”

Another reason that the Sixty Special was significant was that it was the first signature design by the man who would one day replace Harley Earl as head of G.M. Styling, William Mitchell. Mitchell was only 23 when he joined G.M. Art and Colour in 1935. Mitchell clearly gained Earl’s confidence early on and according to one source was the head of Cadillac styling from the fall of 1936.<sup>74</sup> G. M. Styling was administratively a work in progress throughout the 1930s and the separate brands did not possess separate studio groups until about 1938. Eventually these groups would become extremely segregated; to the extent that only Earl himself had the keys that would get him entrance to all of the studios, but that was still to come when Mitchell joined the staff. Another designer, Strother McMinn would describe the G.M. studio in the mid-1930s as “a wild mix of seasoned professionals, mad illustrators, art moderne architects, highly skilled pattern makers, subtly sensitive sculptors and car-crazy kids.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Hendry, *Cadillac*, p. 429

<sup>75</sup> Nick Georgano, *Art of the American Automobile* (New York: Smithmark, 1995), page 41



1938 Cadillac Sixty Special

Source: New York Public Library Digital Collection, Image #1570530

However, it must be pointed out that this design, however advanced it may have been compared with other cars, was still derivative. According to Nick Georgano, Cadillac division manager Nicholas Dreystadt had been impressed by the Cord 810 of 1936-37. That car had been much admired throughout the industry, and remains a hallmark among collectors today. Unfortunately, the Cord organization, which also included Auburn and Duesenburg, was in its death throws when the car came out, and was never able to take full advantage of the 810's styling. The situation was a near copy of that in which Earl had designed the 1927 LaSalle – borrowing styling cues from a little seen design that had already gained favor amongst the elite. In a 1985 interview Mitchell disclaimed credit for the design because he had done it under Earl's supervision<sup>76</sup>, and certainly the design is in accord with Earl's overall design philosophy, but there is also a sense of decorative restraint that is more typical of the work that Mitchell oversaw in the 1960s than that of Earl's over the top approach to decoration that would be seen in the 1950s.

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<sup>76</sup> Automotive Design Oral History Project, The Reminiscences of William M. Mitchell, related to David R. Crippen, August 1984 in the collection of the Benson Ford Research Center. <http://autolife.umd.umich.edu/Design/Mitchell/mitchelli.htm>

### Section 13

#### **Hydra-matic and the coming of war**

For the most part, the introduction of Sixty Special combined with the dropping of the LaSalle and V-16 lines would be the last of Cadillac's big news until World War II put a temporary end to all civilian automotive production. There is one exception to this statement. That was the introduction of Hydra-Matic, a fully automatic transmission, to the Cadillac line in 1941. Engineered by the Oldsmobile division and first used on its 1940 line, Hydra-Matic gave Cadillac a highly desirable feature that would not soon be seen on any competitive car. Packard would offer its own Ultramatic late in the 1949 model year, and Lincoln would be forced to buy G.M.'s Hydra-Matics from 1950 until Ford engineers introduced their own automatic for Lincoln in 1955.

## Chapter 3: From Luxury Car to Cultural Icon

During the fifteen years following the end of World War II, Cadillac not only became the dominant player in the U.S. luxury car market, the brand itself became a synonym for all things luxurious. During that period, it was not unusual to hear a product referred to as the “Cadillac of” its type. Even today (2009) at a time when the Cadillac brand is significantly diminished, a Google search asking for “Cadillac of” still revealed mentions of the P-51 as the Cadillac of the Skies, the HP Mini as the Cadillac of Netbooks, the International Baccalaureate as the Cadillac of College-Prep Programs, the Trade Adjustment Act as setting up the Cadillac of all unemployment benefits, and specific products as the Cadillac of Picnic Sets, the Cadillac of Golf Carts, and the Cadillac of Walkers. The 1960 Broadway Musical *Bye, Bye Birdie* included a popular song in which its teenage rock ‘n’ roll star hero sang:

There are chicks just ripe for some kissin'  
And I mean to kiss me a few!  
Then those chicks don't know what they're missin',  
I got a lot of living to do!  
Sizzlin' steaks all ready for tastin'  
And there's Cadillacs all shiny and new!  
Gotta move, cause time is a-wastin',  
There's such a lot of livin' to do!<sup>77</sup>

### Section 1

#### **Postwar Challenges**

In light of the much-photographed enthusiasm over the end of World War II and the rose-tinted nostalgia that has often distorted our view of the era, it is easy to

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<sup>77</sup> Lyrics by Lee Adams, Music by Charles Strouse

believe that its product-driven economic euphoria was inevitable. In economic terms, the popular explanation is simple – pent-up demand caused by the economic deprivation of the Great Depression and the unavailability of goods during World War II combined with historically high rates of employment during the war produced a condition in which masses of consumers both wanted goods and had the money to pay for them. This unprecedented demand for all forms of consumer goods created the jobs that employed the G.I.’s who were returning home, and led the way to massive prosperity lasting until the recession of 1958.

However, it is important to remember that the rosy scenario of the prosperous 1950s was hardly seen as inevitable by those who were living through it. Those with memories that stretched back a couple of decades remembered the brief but severe depression of 1920-21 that was in part the result of the return of unemployed veterans of World War I.<sup>78</sup> This was a major impetus behind the passage of the far-reaching ‘G. I. Bill of Rights.’ Prominent business figures in other industries also held a bleak view of postwar prospects. Richard Tedlow points out that Sewell Avery’s decision to retrench played a major role in Montgomery Ward’s loss of its traditional role as a leader in the field of retailing, as a more optimistic Sears surged ahead.<sup>79</sup> General Motors itself saw the necessity to reassure the public with an advertisement in the New York *Times* on September 2, 1944 in which a large banner waved denoting the 100,637 G. M. employees who were at war, followed by the caption, “We salute G.

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<sup>78</sup> Within the Automotive Industry, this concern is reflected in “Buyers Strike Threat Real Economic Menace” *Motor* December 1946, page 38.

<sup>79</sup> Tedlow, *New and Improved*, pages 332-336.

M.'s "G. I.'s" – We are waiting to bring them back – We are planning jobs for them."<sup>80</sup>

A review of the issues of *Motor*, a periodical designed for the Automotive retailer, for the first five years following the end of the war reveals an impressive number of concerns. Among these were increased competition among dealers, inflation, materials shortages (especially steel), a slacking of demand once the temporary demand for new cars caused by the war was met, the developing black market in cars, unscrupulous dealer practices, and the possible resumption of the automakers forcing unwanted cars on dealers as had happened during the Depression.<sup>81</sup>

However uncertain the future may have been, it is safe to say that the return to civilian production was eagerly anticipated by virtually everyone.



Cartoon from *Motor*, April 1945, page 60

## Section 2

### **Advertising the unobtainable**

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<sup>80</sup> Advertisement, *New York Times*, September 2, 1944, page 24

<sup>81</sup> See *Motor* September 1945, June 1946, September 1946, December 1946, April 1947, June 1947, December 1947, January 1948, February 1948, May 1948, July 1948, December 1948, July 1949, and July 1950 .

Cadillac advertising, which during the War had been largely limited to wartime scenes featuring one of the division's wartime products in a combat scene, the only copy being a bold-face "Cadillac" began to reflect the popular anticipation. Without a product to display, Cadillac advertising featured the customers who were looking forward to purchasing their post-war Cadillacs. Of course, the images of these would-be customers were solidly upper-middle-class.



1945 Cadillac Ads, Source – General Motors Heritage Center

This behavior was not unusual. Buick showed a 1942 model convertible and asserted that it would be so nice to come home to. At the same time, Ford began its famous "There's a Ford in Your Future" campaign which would provide its advertising theme for several years after the War ended. It was also a logical extension to the MacManus and Adams advertising philosophy discussed earlier, that of selling the trademark rather than the product. By this time Adams was in sole possession of the Cadillac account, MacManus having passed away in 1940.

### Section 3

#### **Huge demand and massive inflation**

Like everywhere else in the industry, when the first post-war civilian vehicle rolled off the line at Cadillac's now-venerable Clark Avenue plant on October 17, 1945, it was little changed from its 1942 counterpart.

Prices, on the other hand were up sharply. The Consumer Price Index (see Appendix G), which had gradually increased from 20.3 and 21.4 between 1935 and 1940 before jumping to 23.0 in 1941, soared to 34.1 in 1947. By 1949, it would stand at 40.9.

Cadillac's price leading Model 61 Club Coupe had sold for \$1,450 in 1942. By 1946, the price had ballooned to \$2,052. In fact, the top-of-the-line Pontiac cost more than the pre-war Cadillac had. In any event, Cadillac appears to have deliberately built few of its least expensive models, all the better to milk maximum profits out of the sellers' market. Only 800 of the Series 61 Coupes were sold compared with 2,323 of the Series 62 Coupes which retailed at \$2,284. In four-door sedans the production gulf was even wider – 2,200 Series 61's as opposed to 14,900 of the more expensive Series 62's. Almost two and a half times as many of glamorous Sixty Specials (\$3,095) were turned out than the price leading 61's.

Counterbalancing the sharp increases in prices was an increase in income. The national income, as low as \$41.6 billion in the depth of the depression, stood at \$105.9 billion at the outbreak of the war. Each succeeding year (except 1945) showed a marked increase, and by 1947, the national income was \$202.9 billion, almost double the 1941 figure and nearly five times as great as the depression trough.

Of course, with the overwhelming demand for new cars at war's end, the system for distributing them was likely to be contentious. Here, Cadillac's policy was a sub-set of G. M. corporate policy. Devised in March of 1942, the "Sloan System" would be in effect from October 1945 to October 1947. It allocated cars to dealers based on their 1941 performance.<sup>82</sup> How successful this policy was and how closely it was adhered to remains a matter of conjecture. It certainly ended long before the shortage in cars did. Sloan himself asserted that the shortage of Cadillacs lasted into nineteen-*fifty*-seven.<sup>83</sup>

All of the established manufacturers sold cars "warmed-over" designs in 1946. Even in this, however, Cadillac enjoyed an advantage over its competitors. Cadillac had heavily facelifted its offerings for the short 1942 model year. This meant that the 1946 Cadillac was a considerably fresher product than either Packard or Lincoln.

#### Section 4

#### **A dwindling Packard, a forgettable Lincoln, and an uncertain Imperial**

The first season after the War would be the last time that Packard would out sell Cadillac – 30,883 units vs. 29,194. However, merely looking at the total production figures here is misleading. Well over two-thirds of Packard production was in its Clipper Six, Clipper Eight, and Clipper Deluxe Eight lines. The price spread among these lines was from \$1,680 to \$1,817 – well below the lowest Cadillac

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<sup>82</sup> Sloan, *My Years with General Motors*, p. 347

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

price of \$2,052. These were cars that competed with Buick and Oldsmobile. Only 7,687 of the units that Packard produced competed directly with Cadillac.

As seen above, Packard had enjoyed considerable success with a careful move down-market in the 1920s. In 1932, they attempted a similar move with the introduction of its “Light Eight” model, which was not a success owing largely to the cost of its manufacture relative to its price, as well as the overall depressed condition of the 1932 economy. Packard’s most significant and deepest move down-market had begun in January 1935, with the introduction of its 120 model. Using vastly more modern manufacturing techniques than any previous Packard, it was also much less expensive than any car they had ever produced, with prices that began at \$980. It still carried the Packard name and Packard styling cues, the car was a great success and, according to numerous automotive historians, saved the company.<sup>84</sup>

However successful in the short term, that move robbed Packard of much of the luster necessary to call your product a luxury car and demand that prices that came along with that status. Low priced Packards closely resembled their higher priced stablemates, differing chiefly in wheelbase length and interior appointments. Every \$1500 Packard sold adversely affected Packard’s ability to sell a \$4000 car to a status conscious buyer. This was a problem that Cadillac did not share. One of the advantages of G. M.’s highly stratified divisional structure was that everybody knew the difference between a Cadillac, a Buick, and an Oldsmobile.

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<sup>84</sup> See Chapter 21 of Beverly Rae Kimes, ed., *Packard – A History of the Motor Car and the Company* (Kutztown, Pennsylvania: Automobile Quarterly Books, 2007).

These were only the most obvious of Packard's problems. The first full year after the War would bring steel shortages, labor stoppages, and production issues – chiefly concerning body production, which Packard had largely farmed out to the Briggs Manufacturing Company. The upshot was that during the time when Packard and any other manufacturer could sell everything that it could pump out, Packard production was often uncertain. Some of these problems would remain unsolved for years.<sup>85</sup>

All that being said, however, the biggest single reason that Packard out-produced Cadillac in 1946 was probably a 113 day strike against General Motors that started on November 21, 1945.<sup>86</sup> It is a safe assumption that Cadillac would have built far more than the 1,689 units that separated the two manufacturers had its lines been running for those four months.

Cadillac's other major competitors were Ford's Lincoln line and the Chrysler Imperial. Both had serious problems of their own.

In 1946, Ford was only beginning to emerge from years of administrative anarchy. Company founder Henry Ford was feeble and would die the following year. Henry's son and presumed heir, Edsel had died during the war. Grandson Henry Ford II had been discharged from the Navy specifically to prevent the company from falling into complete bedlam and had only been given authority by his grandfather

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<sup>85</sup> In addition to the Kimes book previous mentioned, see James A. Ward, *The Fall of the Packard Motor Car Company*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>86</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1995), page 232. See also *Time* February 25, 1946 and April 8, 1946.

when old Henry's wife and daughter-in-law threatened to sell their stock in the Company.<sup>87</sup>

With an entire company to save, Henry Ford II had little time to focus specifically on Lincoln. Like the Cadillac and Packard, the 1946 Lincoln was basically a warmed-over 1942, a situation that would continue until the 1949 model year. In 1946, Lincoln sold a little more than half of the cars Cadillac did, with a total of 16,645 in prices ranging from \$2,318 to \$4,474.

One of the biggest problems that the Chrysler Imperial had was summed up in its name. Unlike Cadillac and Lincoln, the most prestigious Chrysler product had no specific product identification of its own. It was simply the highest trim level in the Chrysler line-up. This situation would continue until the Imperial was raised to independent brand-name status in 1955. Additionally, the Chrysler Imperial nameplate had been taken deeply down-market as early as 1933 when the Imperial Eight Coupe carried a \$1,275 price tag. The cheapest Cadillac was still twice as expensive. Moreover, in 1946 the Chrysler Imperial was available in only one model, a limousine at \$3,875. In 1947, a slightly less expensive sedan model would be added, but it would be late in 1949 before the Chrysler Imperial would expand beyond that limited offering and 1951 before a coupe and convertible would be added to the line. Production figures for individual models and years within the Chrysler line are apparently unavailable, but the Imperial Club (an enthusiasts' online group)

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<sup>87</sup> Probably the best treatment of these events is to be found in the third volume of Allan Nevins and Frank Ernest Hill's history of the Ford Motor Company, *Ford: Decline and Rebirth*, (New York: Scribners, 1963). A less scholarly treatment that has the virtue of focusing specifically on the relationship between Henry and Edsel Ford is Richard Bak, *Henry and Edsel*, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2003).

estimates that total Chrysler Imperial production from 1946 through 1948 to be about 750.<sup>88</sup>

## Section 5

### **Fins and high compression**

Given the competitive situation just described, one can posit that Cadillac was the most important player in the luxury car market, but not yet the dominant player that it would be by the end of the 1950s. In the next few years, Cadillac would acquire two elements, one stylistic and one technological, that would help to create that dominance – the coming of the fin in 1948 and the high-compression V-8 in 1949.

Obviously, the fin came out of Harley Earl's Styling department. By this time Earl had long since consolidated his hold on the department. G. M. designer Homer LaGassey summed up the imposing role that Earl played.

[T]he guy did all of the design, all the product planning, all the projects with the president of the company, himself, and his general managers of each one of those divisions. There were not 50 guys that could come in and lean on you from product planning, at that moment in time, today there are echelons on echelons of people. There were no survey people, per se. He did that whole damned thing himself, which now takes a multitude of people to do.<sup>89</sup>

Long-time Detroit legend holds that the tail-fin was inspired by the twin tails of the World War II-era Lockheed P-38 Lightning. If the tale is true, there was some

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.imperialclub.com/Yr/1946/FactsAndFigures.htm>

<sup>89</sup> Homer La Gassey oral history, May 20, 1986, at the Benson Ford Archives (As yet unbound, the page numbers are from the folder marked "#1673 – Design Oral Histories – La Gassey, Homer – 3<sup>rd</sup> Draft), page 25

severe turbulence as it prepared to land on Cadillac. Its development offers an insight into the way in which that system functioned in the late 1940s. Franklin Hershey, who would later play a major role in designing the first Ford Thunderbird, claimed credit for the innovation. As he told the story:

So, I had the Cadillac studio, ... I put the fin on the Cadillac,... we did this—we did this in '46 before, it takes about two years to get all that done or more. Put the fin on it. ... Harley Earl came screaming up to where we were working on the '48. "Take the goddamned fin off! Nobody likes it. Dealers don't like it the public don't, nobody likes it." ... So I just covered it up with a piece of canvas. I couldn't take it off. ... Harley came by one day, and he said, "Take that fin off." "Yep!," that's all I said. So finally he came up with—... I think it was Jack Gordon [Cadillac Division General Manager, 1946-1950]. I'm not sure. ... Anyhow, he [Earl] said, "Did you take that fin off back there?" I said, "No." He said, "Oh, thank God." So he pulled the canvas off, and he said, "Oh boy. We found everybody loves it."<sup>90</sup> It was a controversial move. As William Mitchell said in 1955, "It takes a

controversial design to be a success. If it's 'nice' we don't like it. We like something gutty, something shocking." About half of the feedback that G. M. management got from the auto shows about the fins was negative – at first. However, within a few weeks the fin appeared to have grown on people and it achieved a high degree of public acceptance.<sup>91</sup> Instantly, the Cadillac became the most recognizable vehicle in the world when viewed from the rear. Before that, the rear of a car was a fairly generic affair, a simple curve tapering down from the bottom of the roof to the rear bumper with the car's nameplate and some adornment around the trunk lid handle. One measure of the fin's popularity was the extent to which practitioners of the new

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<sup>90</sup> Franklin Quick Hershey – Oral History at the Benson Ford Research Center, Interviewed by David Crippen, May 20, 1986, Volume 1, Pages 109-111.

<sup>91</sup> William H. Whyte, "The Cadillac Phenomenon" *Fortune*, February 1955, (Reprint found among the Papers of John Gordon in the Richard Scharchburg Archives at Kettering University).

“Hot Rod” craze borrowed the fins for their creations. Before long a kit was available to give fins to a commonplace Ford or Chevrolet.



The real thing and the pretender. The 1948 Sixty Special and the “Cad-Fin” that was available for Fords, Chevys and Pontiacs from Auto Accessories Co. for \$29.95.

Sources: : <http://images.businessweek.com/ss/06/03/cadillac/source/10.htm> and *Motor Trend*, March 1951, p.7

If the tail fin was “all show and no go”, the high compression V-8 that Cadillac introduced in 1949 was very much the opposite. Compression is the second of the four strokes that typify the vast majority of car engines since the inception of the automobile. Basically, the more compressed the air/fuel mixture becomes, the more powerful the explosion that is the combustion stroke will be. More powerful combustion makes an engine more powerful and more economic. However, it needs higher quality fuel. The new engine was 220 pounds lighter and had a smaller displacement than its predecessor, yet the car was significantly faster. Tom McCahill of *Mechanix Illustrated*, one of the first of a new breed of automotive journalists that had sprung up since the end of World War II was sufficiently enthusiastic about the new engine that he said, “It’s unquestionably America’s finest automobile to date. ...With this engine Cadillac, despite its large size, outperforms just about every

American car now being made.”<sup>92</sup> Other automotive journalists agreed, and the 1949 Cadillac became the first *Motor Trend* Car of the Year.

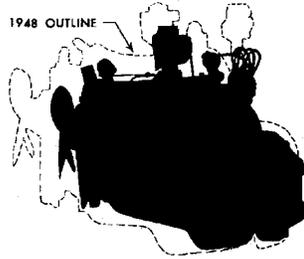


Illustration from *Motor Trend*, November 1949, comparing the size of the 1948 and 1949 Cadillac engines

Source: Antique Automobile Club of America Library

Nor was its praise limited to U. S. journalists. The venerable British Journal *The Motor* tested the largely unchanged 1950 model in its March 22, 1950 issue and came to the conclusion that, “the car offers astonishing value for money. It has performance which few makes can rival, even fewer surpass, a general silence of running (including low wind noise) which many will consider unbeaten, and an ease in driving which must be a great asset when very long mileages are attempted.”

## Section 6

### **Selling a sense of success**

As the 1950s dawned, Cadillac’s special place in the marketplace was beginning to make itself felt. *Changing Times*, a non-enthusiast magazine intended to help people manage their money reported that, “Ninety-nine out of a hundred

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<sup>92</sup> Tom McCahill, *MI tests the '49 Cadillac, Oldsmobile, Buick*; *Mechanix Illustrated*, February 1949 (Reprint found among the Papers of John Gordon in the Richard Scharchburg Archives at Kettering University).

Americans have never driven a Cadillac or even taken a ride in one. But, according to surveys, an overwhelming percentage of them say they would rather have a Cadillac than any other car in the world if they could afford one.”<sup>93</sup> Apparently, an increasing number of Americans were finding it possible to do just that, during the new engine’s freshman year 92,554 were produced, and 1950 saw Cadillac break 100,000 for the first time, with a model year production of 103,857.

It was James Adams’s job to make sure that this trend continued. He did it by stressing a combination of snob appeal and availability. This seeming contradiction is seen in the newspaper ad in which the reader is reminded that, despite Cadillac’s quality, it was surprisingly affordable.

**400,000 People Paid More for Their Cars than a Cadillac Costs!**

You will probably find it difficult to believe the statement which appears above on the headline for this message. But records indicate that it is true, nevertheless. The reason for this is found in a surprising fact: There are people who prefer our own country's cars, produce more value which actually cost more than the lowest-priced Cadillac. Approximately four hundred thousand of these high-priced automobiles have been produced and sold in the past few years. Undoubtedly, a great many of the people who bought these cars did so because Cadillac was not available in the area they lived in. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of these high-priced cars don't realize what they did. Cadillac has such a wonderful, worldwide reputation for goodness and quality that many who are silent in this

likely conclude it is beyond their means. So they pay the price of a Cadillac—and don't get a Cadillac. We don't believe you would want that or happen to you. So we suggest that you come to and let us give you the actual facts. It is not necessary for a Cadillac to be equipped exactly as you want it, let that be your entire problem as you enter your car.

Now to make you, that a Cadillac is an economical car to own and use is completely up to the individual. You will actually appreciate that of the transportation people here. And it isn't so long that so far the price has never been increased.

Some come to make and get the whole Cadillac story. If you pay for a Cadillac, we think you will want to make sure that you get one.

1949 Cadillac Newspaper ad  
Source: Antique Automobile Club of America Library

The heart of the argument is that eight manufacturers sold cars that cost more than the least expensive Cadillac, and that buyers of these cars could have enjoyed the quality of Cadillac and saved money as well.

<sup>93</sup> “Cadillac – Almost Everybody Wants to Own One” *Changing Times*, March 1950, page 20.

In 1955, William H. Whyte writing for *Fortune* Magazine narrated the following tale by borrowing from the copy of Adams's ads for Cadillac:

Let's say it was thirty-one years ago, on a beautiful morning in June. A boy stood by a rack of papers on a busy street and heard the friendly horn of a Cadillac. "Keep the change," the driver smiled, as he took his paper and rolled out into the traffic. "There," thought the boy, as he clutched his coin, "is the car for me!"

And since this is America, where dreams make sense in the heart of a boy, he is now an industrialist. He has fought — without interruption — for the place in the world he wants his family to occupy. Few would deny him some taste of the fruits of labor. No compromise this time! The papers are all in order...and the car of his dreams is waiting for him. It's his!

It's Junetime—and the top is down—and he's going halfway up the hill, to a spot where a lane strays into the wild-wood and he can glimpse the top of a fieldstone chimney above the trees. The family rushes out with the final voice of confirmation. "Hi there, neighbor, isn't it a lovely day?"

There's the first trip to the office with a waiting delegation to admire his choice. He'll get those quick glances of approval that tell him the dream he dreamed for so many years is still in the hearts of others.

Let him arrive at the door of a distinguished hotel or a famous restaurant ... and he has the courtesy that goes with respect. "Here is a man," the Cadillac says — almost as plainly as the words are written, here — "who has earned the right to sit at this wheel."<sup>94</sup>

A new Cadillac was not just a car. In James Adams's world it was an aspiration, a sign of favor from the powers that be, a way of life. His task was to make it a way of as many peoples' lives as possible.

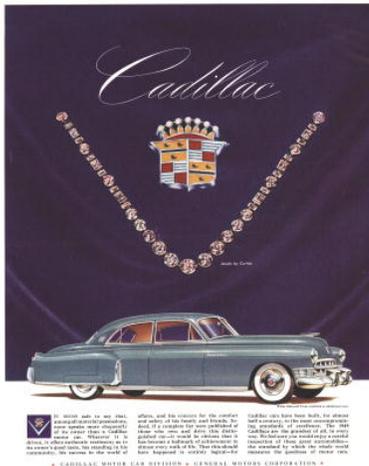
Adams was profiled by James Nagle for the *New York Times* in 1953. As if to confirm Roland Marchand's point about advertising professionals being in the upper middle class, and therefore understanding that buyer best, Nagle pointed out that, "At fifty five, Jim has the appearance of a man who should be the owner of a

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<sup>94</sup> Whyte, "The Cadillac Phenomenon" *Fortune*, February 1955, pages 109 and 174.

Cadillac. He looks prosperous, tall, and well upholstered. Asked his weight, he chuckled, ‘no comment.’”<sup>95</sup>

A new tone of lavishness was seen in Cadillac’s magazine advertising as well. Adams began a theme in 1949 that would last over a decade, that of using jewels to emphasize Cadillac’s position as a status symbol. The jewels were always chosen to accent the color of the car being shown, and there was always a tag line indentifying the jeweler. To the casual onlooker, the implied message was simple, that Cadillac was the car of choice for those who could afford such baubles. Only to the reader serious enough to read the rather small copy at the bottom would the secret that the Cadillac was surprisingly affordable, easy to drive, or economical in operation be opened. To that reader, the message is more complex; that it might well be possible for him or her to join those whose automobiles could stand out amid such luxury. The appeal to status-conscious 1949 America must have been impressive.



Bejeweled 1949 Cadillac Advertising  
Source: General Motors Heritage Center

<sup>95</sup> James J. Nagle, “News of the Advertising and Marketing Fields,” *New York Times*, February 1, 1953, page F10

Perhaps the significant item in these ads is the placement of the Cadillac trademark, which was actually devised from the genuine heraldic device used by Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac. Pamela Walker Laird relates the process through which trademarks developed as advertising substitutes for pictures of the founders of the firm in question, depictions of its factories, and sometimes florid company names in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>96</sup>

Some early Cadillac advertising used what the division, even today, calls “the crest”, but it appears that at least as often it did not. Throughout the 1920s and most of the 1930s, the crest was frequently, but by no means universally used in Cadillac ads, and when it was used it was not prominent. Usage of the crest appears to have increased as World War II drew near. Of course, as we have already seen, the crest substituted for an as-yet-unbuilt product late in World War II. In these 1949 ads, the crest, combined with the Cadillac script, had taken on a totem-like character – as though they were objects of reverence. It was far more important than the pictures of the cars, the copy, and the jewels that serve to embellish it.

The crest took on a similar function on the cars themselves. Until the mid-1930s, use of the crest was usually limited to a relatively small circle at the top of the radiator shell, the middle of the horn button, and occasionally a small crest would appear on the dashboard. However, by the late 1930s, Harley Earl had begun to realize the role that a well used trademark could be used as an element in his attempt to make three relatively similar, although differently sized, inner bodies into five

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<sup>96</sup> Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, pp. 270-271.

separate and distinct brands of automobile. From that point, the crests (similar, wholly fictitious devices were invented for Buick and Oldsmobile, Pontiacs featured the supposed head of Chief Pontiac, and Chevrolet used its famous “bow tie” emblem) increased in size, sprouted embellishments, and were featured more prominently, both in ads and on the cars.



On each model throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Cadillac Crest was always prominently displayed – albeit with a variety of forms and embellishments, always on the hood and deck lid, and often on the sides as well. Most years, the Cadillac name was also prominently placed.

Source: Author’s collection

On November 25, 1949, a 1950 Cadillac Coupe de Ville became the one millionth Cadillac to be produced. *Automotive News*, an industry trade publication, ran the obligatory photo of the car coming off the line by the Cadillac General Manager, the Sales Manager, and the Plant Manager, all broadly grinning. They had a lot to grin about. It had taken Cadillac forty-seven years to build its first million, but at the anticipated rate of 100,000 per year, General Manager John Gordon stated his hope that the second million would be built before he hit G. M.’s mandatory

retirement age in 1965.<sup>97</sup> (That goal would be easily exceeded and Gordon's own advancement would continue until he would retire as the President of the Corporation.)

To modern eyes, the second part of the headline the *Automotive News* story about the millionth Cadillac is somewhat surprising given Cadillac's well-known penchant for building the largest of autos, "No Small Car in '50." Most major manufacturers, including all of the big three, were considering the construction of smaller cars in the early 1950s. Nash, Hudson, Willys, Kaiser-Frazier, and Crosley would actually build and market one. For all but Nash, it would prove to be their undoing. Three facts proved the folly of such an undertaking. First, it was simply not possible to build a small car to sell for much less than Ford, Chevrolet, and Plymouth were building their "full size" cars. Second, the robust used car market was capable of providing cars for those who could not afford the new car of their choice. Third, most Americans still equated size with luxury. There would be no "small" Cadillac until the 1976 model year.

This is not to say that Cadillac was averse to a careful trip down-market, provided that the luster of the marque was not tarnished. As pointed out above, a recurring advertising theme was its "surprising" affordability. In the press release that heralded the millionth Cadillac, General Manager Gordon was quoted as saying, "Fifteen years ago the average price of a Cadillac automobile was more than four and one-half times that of the average price of cars sold in the industry. Since then this

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<sup>97</sup> "Cadillac Plans Output Hike, But No Small Car in '50," *Automotive News*, December 5, 1949, page 1

ratio has been greatly reduced until, at the present time, the average Cadillac price is only 1.6 times the average price of cars sold in the automotive field.”<sup>98</sup>

## Section 7

### **Selling the sizzle - Motorama**

It was also in 1949 that General Motors first used a marketing device that they would later call Motorama.<sup>99</sup> The idea was not new; General Motors had long seen the value of getting people excited about technology. In earlier years, General Motors had sponsored its own display in a hotel ballroom, usually at the Astor House or the Waldorf-Astoria in conjunction with the National Auto Show in New York City. The G. M. pavilion at the 1939 New York Worlds’ Fair featured a huge display showing the roads and cars of 1960 called Futurama. Additionally, the corporation had also sponsored travelling shows featuring scientific and technological breakthroughs that could be seen in high school auditoriums and at county fairs for years.

Motorama took this concept to its natural extent. It was a show to which the public was invited without cost. Of course, the various automobiles produced by G. M. held center stage, but there was a wide variety of displays from other G. M. divisions (Frigidaire, Hyatt Roller Bearing, AC Spark Plugs, etc.).

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<sup>98</sup> Cadillac Motor Car Division press release, November 28, 1949 from the papers of John Gordon, Scharchburg Archives, Kettering University.

<sup>99</sup> At this point, probably the best work on the Motoramas is enthusiast historian David W. Temple’s *G.M.’s Motorama – The Glamorous Show cars of a Cultural Phenomenon* (Minneapolis: Motorbooks, 2006). In the absence of other sourcing, it should be assumed that the factual material about the Motorama show and cars herein is derived from this source.

To say that Motorama was elaborate would be a severe understatement. The New York *Times* related the cost of the 1949 show at the Waldorf-Astoria to have been \$500,000. Dubbed “Transportation Unlimited”, this 1949 show featured 31 cars, a “Train of Tomorrow” and a cut-away jet engine. Fisher Body contributed an large display detailing the construction of car bodies and interiors. The secrets of Hydra-Matic were on display for those who could understand them. Herbert Hoover, Dwight Eisenhower, and the exiled King of Yugoslavia visited. Four specially trimmed-out Cadillacs were on display, including a special town car intended for Mrs. Sloan. A customized convertible conveyed the message that true rugged manhood and a love of luxury were not mutually exclusive. Dubbed “El Rancho,” it featured saddle leather upholstery, suede trim, carpets of cow hide with the hair left on it, and built-in pistol holsters. Reportedly, it was destined for John Gordon’s Arizona ranch. During the first hour 5,300 visitors came in and attendance for the first day was roughly 55,000. It ran for seven January days in New York, and was reconstructed for a six-day run in Detroit.<sup>100</sup>

The name Motorama was applied to this concept the following year. Similar in size and scope to the 1949 show, 1950’s “Mid-century Motorama” focused on the history of the automobile and especially on G. M.’s role in it. Thirty-eight cars were

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<sup>100</sup> “General Motors to Open Big Show” New York *Times*, January 16, 1949, page 37; “Automobiles: ’49 Models” New York *Times*, January 16, 1949, page X23; “\$500,000 GM Show Opens Here Today” New York *Times*, January 20, 1949, page 29; “Hoover Acclaims Auto Show of GM” New York *Times*, January 22, 1949, page 20; “GM Joins Search for Better Fuel” New York *Times*, January 24, 1949, page 27; “King Peter Visits Automobile Show” New York *Times*, January 25, 1949, page 31; “The Forty-Niners” *Time*, January 24, 1949 (online); and “Glamour and Crowds at Peak in GM Show” *Motor*, February 1949, pp 54-55.

displayed this time and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor dropped by to purchase a new Cadillac Sixty Special and a Buick Station Wagon.<sup>101</sup>



Mid-century Motorama

Source: <http://www.gmphotostore.com/1950-GM-Motorama-in-New-York-City/productinfo/53216935/>

The 1950 Motorama would be the last until 1953, when two basic changes were made. First, the 1953-1956 Motoramas would visit 5-6 cities (New York, Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and either Dallas, Chicago, or Boston). Second, G. M. would make prominent display of what were then called dream cars. Earlier shows had featured customized versions of factory vehicles along side of those that could actually be purchased by the normal consumer. These dream cars, or concept cars to use the more modern term, were something else entirely. These were individually built cars, displayed to gauge public reaction to some idea that was then under consideration.

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<sup>101</sup> “General Motors Opens Auto Show” *New York Times*, January 19, 1950, page 17 and “50,000 Jam Hotel to see G. M. Autos” *New York Times*, January 20, 1950, page 36.

Like the Motorama itself, these dream cars had their genesis in the early 1930s. In 1938, Harley Earl had a heavily modified Buick built to test styling ideas and serve as his personal transportation. The result was the “Y Job”.



1938 Y Job

Source: [http://wallpapers.bpix.org/wp\\_17\\_Buick\\_Y-Job\\_Concept\\_Car,\\_1938.html](http://wallpapers.bpix.org/wp_17_Buick_Y-Job_Concept_Car,_1938.html)

The Y Job was an exciting car to look at, especially when compared with other cars of the time. Measuring only 58 inches tall, it was 74 inches wide, its overall proportions were much lower and wider than other cars of its time.<sup>102</sup> Its design influence in the late 1940’s is obvious, especially when it is compared with Cadillac or Buick coupes of the period.

By the late 1940’s the mine of ideas that the Y Job represented was largely played out. Under the direction of Harley Earl and Chief Engineer Charles Chayne, two new dream cars were made, the Le Sabre and the XP-300. Both were full of innovation, fully functional, and very expensive.<sup>103</sup> Each would be prominently displayed at the 1953 Motorama. The styling studios of the divisions were expected to make contributions as well, in Cadillac’s case they were the LeMans, basically a

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<sup>102</sup> Overall height is not usually a part of most published statistics, but for comparison’s sake the 1934 Cadillac Fleetwood convertible coupe, a sporty car for its time, had an overall height of just under 67 inches. See diagram in Hendry, Cadillac, page 244.

<sup>103</sup> Eventually, Earl would put about 45,000 miles on the LeSabre and Chayne would clock over 10,000 on the XP300.

stock Cadillac convertible with the center section removed to make a two seat vehicle, and the Orleans, which borrowed the then-popular pillarless hardtop coupe style and made it into a four-door vehicle. These vehicles were more than the term dream cars implied. Reportedly, some thought was given to producing the LeMans, and four were actually made. Cadillac would use the Orleans concept and add a four-door hardtop to its line in 1956.

In addition to the cost of the cars displayed, the 1953 Motorama cost G.M. over five million dollars, for displays, Broadway-style musical acts, stagecraft, personnel, and transportation. Corporate management must have considered it a success, because similar shows took place in 1954, 1955, and 1956.

### Section 8

#### **Cadillac as a metaphor for Eisenhower's America**

In Dwight David Eisenhower, America found a leader who both calmed its fears and confirmed its aspirations. Having received popular acclaim for defeating Hitler, he seemed the ideal man to stare down Josef Stalin. Yet at the same time he projected the comforting image of a small-town boy made good – very good indeed. That combination of power, comfort, and prestige had great appeal in the 1950's. It was also a more than adequate description of Cadillac's appeal to the same Americans who so liked Ike.

The inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower as President of the United States in 1953 saw a new high in both G.M.'s and Cadillac's visibility and influence. Like many major changes, this one had both symbolic and actual aspects. The symbolic

side of the event was seen in the two official presidential processions to and from the inauguration. When President-elect Eisenhower arrived at the White House, he and President Truman got into the official White House parade car, a 1949 Lincoln Cosmopolitan. After officially taking office, President Eisenhower rode to the parade stand in the newly introduced top-of-the-line Cadillac Eldorado convertible.



The Transfer of Power: On their way to the 1953 inauguration, Truman and Eisenhower rode in the official White House parade car, a 1949 Lincoln Cosmopolitan. After the ceremony, Eisenhower switched to a 1953 Cadillac Eldorado.

Sources: Truman-Eisenhower Photo: <http://www.trust-us.ch/cryptome/04-Iraq-Kill-Maim-061213/prezsec/prezsec-eyeball7.htm>, Eisenhower Photo: <http://marcovilla.instablogs.com/entry/the-american-presidential-car-across-the-decades/>

The actual implications to the transfer of power lay in two appointments that placed men closely connected to General Motors into the new cabinet. Arthur E. Summerfield, a very successful Chevrolet dealer in Flint, Michigan who served as Chairman of the Republican National Committee, became Postmaster-General.<sup>104</sup> Of greater importance was the fact that G. M. President Charles E. Wilson became Secretary of Defense. At a time when such proceedings attracted far less attention

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<sup>104</sup><http://millercenter.org/academic/americanpresident/eisenhower/essays/cabinet/577>

than they do today, Wilson catapulted into national headlines during his confirmation hearings before the Senate. Wilson was asked if he could make a decision that was adverse to the interests of General Motors. Since G.M. was a major defense contractor, the question was highly pertinent. Wilson's rather cavalier reply was that he could not conceive of such a situation because, "for years I thought what was good for the country was good for General Motors and vice versa." In light of the fact that Wilson owned G. M. stock valued at \$2.5 million, a minor scandal erupted, and Wilson was forced to divest himself of the stock.<sup>105</sup>

Even if many were upset by Wilson's comment, to others it was eminently correct and provable. Certainly, General Motors had come to see itself as the epitome of American free enterprise and maybe of America itself. (See Appendix B.)

Charles Wilson's travails may have led to yet another sign of Cadillac's developing cultural significance, the Broadway premiere of *The Solid Gold Cadillac* by Howard Teichmann and George S. Kaufman on November 5, 1953. In it, a minor and troublesome female stockholder in the fictional General Products Corporation was able to play a role in persuading the corporation's former President and Chairman of the Board, who has taken an important position in government, to return and remove the corrupt and lazy men who have taken over the Corporation in his absence.<sup>106</sup> A successful 1956 film followed the closing of the show on Broadway.

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<sup>105</sup> [http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/secdef\\_histories/bios/wilson.htm](http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/secdef_histories/bios/wilson.htm)

<sup>106</sup> Howard Teichmann and George S. Kaufman, *The Solid Gold Cadillac*, (New York: Dramatists Play Service) 1953.



For instance,  this bewildered blonde gets kissed, dismissed, bawled out,   balled up, pushed around, subpoenaed, surprised,   compromised . . . and she finally even gets the Cadillac in the end!

COLUMBIA PICTURES presents  
**THE SOLID GOLD CADILLAC**  
 starring  
**JUDY HOLLIDAY + PAUL DOUGLAS**

with FRED CLARK · JOEY WILLIAMS · MIRIAM SHERMAN · NEVA PATTERSON · RAY COLLINS · ARTHUR O'CONNELL  
 Screen Play by ABE BURROWS · From the Play by GEORGE S. HARTMAN & HOWARD TESSMAN  
 Produced on the stage by MAX GORDON · Produced by FRED HOPKINER · Directed by RICHARD CLUNE

**WASHINGTON PREMIERE TODAY at 11 A.M.** "Critics Room" Open for Reservations—Accommodates 14 Persons  
**TRANS-LUX** 14th St. N.W. DI. 7-7600  
 Win a Share of General Motors Stock—Enter the Roche & Co. Contest—Full Details in our Lobby.

Washington Post and Times Herald advertisement – October 10, 1956, page 58.  
 (Notice the last line advertising a contest to win a share of G. M. stock.)

This is the kind of advertising that money cannot buy, and while it is impossible to quantify, has to have played a role in establishing the Cadillac as something more than a product.

Indeed, it is possible to see the years of *The Solid Gold Cadillac*'s run, 1953-1956, as the golden age of the Alfred Sloan-Harley Earl era Cadillac. By this time G. M. was at the top of its game, selling about half of all cars in the United States, so many that there were voices saying that the corporation should be split up, and anti-trust action was going on that would eventually split G. M. away from DuPont, the corporation whose millions had kept G. M. from bankruptcy in 1920. Sloan turned 80 in 1955, and rumors of his retirement had been circulating since the end of World War II, when he had given up the responsibilities of being Chief Executive Officer.

He gave up the Chairmanship in 1956. Earl would turn 65 in 1958, when G. M. law said he must retire. But in 1953-1956, Sloan was still in charge – although Harlow Curtice was calling the shots on a day-to-day basis –and Earl was still the only power at G. M. Design.

Through all of this period, Cadillac grew slightly longer, slightly lower, and slightly more powerful each year. And, for all intents and purposes, incremental improvements were about all that was possible. Having added power steering and brakes in the early 1950s, air conditioning was being refined and slowly gaining acceptance during the middle of the decade. *Motor Trend*, which was itself becoming the pre-eminent car enthusiast’s magazine, said of the 1954 Cadillac, “These cars may have the outline of a landing barge, but it’s the one the admiral rides in.”<sup>107</sup> A few months later, the same magazine named the Cadillac Model 62 “The Hottest-Performing Car.”<sup>108</sup>

While Cadillac was subtly refining what had clearly become a winning combination of style, engineering, and marketing, its competitors were in a process of redefinition.

### Section 9

#### ***Requiescat in Pace, Packard Motor Car Company (1899-1958)***

Worst off was the sole independent manufacturer in the luxury car field, Packard. During the 1920s, Packard had consistently outdistanced Cadillac. During

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<sup>107</sup> Don Mac Donald, “Spotlight on Detroit” *Motor Trend*, March 1954, page 10.

<sup>108</sup> “The Best 1954 Car” *Motor Trend*, November 1954, page 20.

the 1930s, they fought as equals. After World War II, Packard appeared more often to see itself as competing with Buick rather than with Cadillac.

As mentioned earlier, Packard was saved through its move down-market after 1935. By the end of the war, its management was apparently convinced that that the upper-middle price segment would be the spring of Packard's future success, seeing volume production rather than exclusivity as the most important element.<sup>109</sup> It was an understandable argument. In an economic downturn, catering to what Packard President George Christopher called the "carriage trade" was a severe liability and being a volume manufacturer was the key to success.

Unfortunately, this turned out to be precisely the wrong strategy for the booming postwar period. Packard's big problems in the late 1940s were to be supply problems, particularly supplies of steel. In retrospect, it seems that Packard would have been better served to use its limited supplies to build cars that would have rebuilt its pedigree as a quality manufacturer. It did not take appreciably more steel to produce a expensive car as it did to build a middle of the road machine – and the profit margin was far higher on the luxury car. Since anything coming out of the factory with four wheels and an engine found a willing buyer between 1945 and 1949, this would have left Packard with a higher profit margin, instead of slowly bleeding to death when production targets consistently went unmet.

Packard advertising also appeared to be rather "middle-brow". Where Packard advertising was clearly crafted for the elite in the 1920s, Packard ads of the 1940s and early 1950s were clearly more interested in selling a commodity than an

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<sup>109</sup> Pete Wemhoff, "Christopher Forecasts 30% Output Climb" *Automotive News* November 18, 1946, page 2.



of timeless beauty and changed only in detail from year to year.<sup>110</sup> Packard's restyling effort in 1948 fell far short of this mark. The 1948 Cadillac made it look old the day it came off the line. It imposed a kind of inverted bathtub style on the car that was similar to many others on the market. Unfortunately, the cars that it most resembled were other independents fighting for their own corporate lives as the postwar sellers' market ended – Nash, Hudson, Kaiser-Frazier. The 1951 to 1954 generation looked better to most eyes, but it is also possible to detect a resemblance to a 1949 Buick with the portholes on the rear fender rather than on the hood. In any case, there was little here that made a prospect make tentative plans for a trip to the dealer as soon as he/she saw the first one on the street.

For generations, Packard's long suit had been engineering. Its straight eight engine was legendary for its quiet and smoothness. It had also been around since the mid-1920s. Cadillac's 1949 high-compression V-8 was just as smooth, almost as quiet, and would leave the Packard standing in the dust. In 1949, Packard crowed about its automatic transmission, dubbed Ultramatic. The motoring press shared Packard's high opinion.<sup>111</sup> However, Cadillac had an automatic transmission in 1941, and you had to be an engineer to understand why (or even if) Ultramatic had anything over Hydra-Matic.

Another Packard issue was its lack of product segmentation. From the end of the war until 1953, it was virtually impossible to tell an inexpensive Packard sedan

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<sup>110</sup> A typical Packard ad from 1925 dismissed the idea of the annual model change by stating that "Packard cars are not depreciated by frequent and needless changes in design." Advertisement in *New York Times* June 28, 1925, page XX11.

<sup>111</sup> "50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Packard has Automatic Shift" *Motor* May 1949, pp 66-67, 176, 178.

from the one at the top of the line. The primary differences were length and interior fittings. In the status conscious postwar period, this was a fatal flaw. For example, Packard prices (limousines and convertibles excluded) ran from \$2,250 to \$4,175. The biggest difference was seven inches of wheelbase, all of it used in the front fenders. Interior and trunk space were unaffected. The buyer who spent four thousand dollars was no more comfortable than the buyer who spent two thousand. Interior fabrics were superior on the more expensive car, but the seat frames over which they were spread were identical. So was the dashboard that the driver faced.

Simply put, in its advertising, engineering, or styling; Packard just did not give the buyer enough of a reason to spring for the more expensive car.

In 1953, Packard – under the leadership of new President James J. Nance – would try to regain some of its luster in the luxury car world by spinning off a new brand, Clipper, to sell its less expensive products. It would also produce a new high-fashion convertible, the Caribbean to provide what modern marketers would call a ‘halo’ effect. The Clipper was basically trimmed down in an effort to make the Packard look more exclusive. Midway through the 1953 model year, Nance announced a 120,000 unit production goal.<sup>112</sup> They fell short of the goal by almost 30,000 units. Yet, for Packard, 1953 was a pretty good year. It was certainly better than 1954, with its dismal 31,291 output.

Finally, in 1955, Packard came out with the car it should have had in 1951. It featured Packard’s first V-8, which broke no new ground but was a thoroughly competent powerplant. The new styling was far more modern, and was available in

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<sup>112</sup> “As Motor Goes to Press” *Motor* April 1953, page 36.

tri-tone paint schemes. The real news, however, was a suspension system that amazed the motoring press. This combination of torsion bars and a “levelizer” represented a huge advance in creating a smooth, level ride. Even some in the non-motoring press believed that this could be a real game-changer.<sup>113</sup> Packard doubled its advertising budget to announce that “Nothing on earth rides like the new Packard.”<sup>114</sup>

It was not to be. For the last decade, Packard had been a rather tired also-ran, and its name no longer summoned the respect that it had before the war. Packard’s ill-considered marriage to Studebaker in 1954 brought stability to neither partner.<sup>115</sup> Serious production problems plagued the company as it was rolling out the new car. The diminished dealer network had trouble getting the credit to buy the cars the factory needed to sell. Nance thought that the advertising program was lackluster. In the end, 55,517 units rolled out of the factory gate, not enough to save Packard. The next year was worse. Packards would be marketed in 1957 and 1958, but these were little more than rebadged Studebakers with the Packard V-8 and no one was fooled. There were no 1959 Packards of any stripe.

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<sup>113</sup> “Packard Offers V-8, New Suspension” *Motor* January 1955, pages 36-37, 136, 138; Don MacDonald, “Spotlight on Detroit” *Motor Trend* February 1955, pages 10-11, 57; “Designing for a Comeback in the 1955 Race” *Business Week* January 8, 1955, pages 118-122.

<sup>114</sup> 1955 Packard advertisement reproduced in James Ward, *The Fall of the Packard Motor Car Company* (Stanford: The Stanford University Press) 1995. Ward’s chapter on this period “Life or Death for Packard in 1955” provides many of the details that follow.

<sup>115</sup> See Ward, Chapter 9 “The Shotgun Wedding.”

Section 10

**Groping toward an image – Lincoln and Imperial**

Lincoln after the war was in some ways worse off than Packard. As stated above, Lincoln's parent firm – Ford Motor Company – was in chaos when the war ended. The Ford Motor Company did its first postwar across the board restyling for the 1949 model year. The 1949 Ford had a simple, almost minimalist design that was well received. The 1949 Mercury, for the first time since its 1939 debut, was significantly different stylistically from the Ford. Its design, too, had broad appeal and has since become iconic, owing in part to its being driven by James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. It is hard to look at the 1949-1951 Lincoln without thinking that the Ford designers had simply run out of ideas. It was divided into two series. The upper series, dubbed the Cosmopolitan, was stylistically forgettable, being perhaps the purest form of the inverted bathtub ever to roll down the road. The lower series, which Ford did not even bother to give a model designation, took the Mercury body and put the Cosmopolitan's grille on it.



1950 Lincoln advertising from *Newsweek*. The 1950's were little changed from the 1949's.

Cosmopolitan is on the left, lower series on the right.

Source: Author's collection.

At least the advertising for the Lincoln was better than Packard's was. Here the cars were given a context that related to the luxury image that Ford wanted the Lincoln name to carry. But the Lincoln of this period shared a problem with Packard. Ford management seems to have been unsure whether the Lincoln should compete with Cadillac or Buick. They wanted the volume that came with the upper-middle price range and the status that came with luxury. They tried to use the Lincoln brand to try to do both, with mediocre results. Production for all Lincolns was 73,507 in 1949, but then fell off almost two-thirds, to 28,190 in 1950.

Lincoln's 1952 restyling was, like Packard's 1951 effort, thoroughly conventional. Actually, it was very possible to think that the 1952 Ford, Mercury, and Lincoln all shared a common body shell that had been "stretched" to fit three different wheelbases, as the 1946-1950 Packards had been. The irony was that this was not the case. The Ford engineers built three completely different body shells that simply looked a lot alike. Owing to this situation, the controller of the Lincoln-Mercury division calculated Lincoln's amortized cost for body tooling to be six times that of Oldsmobile, Buick, and Cadillac.<sup>116</sup>

Despite this, Lincoln was developing a reputation of its own as a luxury car that still had some sense of handling. The 1952 sported two major engineering changes over its earlier counterparts. A modern V-8 far more in line with the Cadillac engine replaced the "Flathead" V-8 that had been based on old Henry's 1932

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<sup>116</sup> Thomas E. Bonsall discusses this situation at length in Chapter 5 of his *Disaster in Dearborn: The Story of the Edsel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2002).

engine. It also was underpinned by a substantially improved “ball joint” front suspension. Lincolns did very well in the brutal Carrera Panamericana road race in Mexico, and Ford saw that this fact became well known. By 1955, *Motor Trend* referred to it as the “Engineer’s fine car” and mentioned that it possessed “roadability unsurpassed for this class instead of higher horsepower.”<sup>117</sup> This reputation was not, in and of itself, enough to displace Cadillac, but it was a considerable achievement.

Unfortunately, this reputation would not last. The Lincolns of the 1956-57 generation were significantly heavier and did not handle quite as well as their predecessors. In 1958, Lincoln would again be restyled in a conscious attempt to out-Cadillac Cadillac. Most dimensions (headroom, legroom, overall length, etc.) of the Lincoln were marginally greater than the corresponding dimension on the Cadillac. The overall effect was not pleasing and only 29,684 of the 1958 models were sold, as opposed to 121,778 Cadillacs.

Chrysler seemed to be unsure as to whether it wished to keep Imperial at all. In 1946, as stated earlier, the Imperial line was whittled down to a very few limousines and nine-passenger sedans. Imperial had never been a brand name on its own, but until 1955 carried the Chrysler brand with Imperial being a trim level. When Chrysler restyled all of its cars for 1949, it opted away from the bathtub and went for the box. They did, however, give the Imperial a six passenger sedan that was marginally better trimmed than the next-lower New Yorker series and priced on the upper side of the Cadillac range. From 1949 to 1954, the Imperial was largely

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<sup>117</sup> “1955 Buyers Guide” *Motor Trend* March 1955, pages 30-31.



Sales improved slightly, but were hardly stratospheric, with 11,432 copies produced in 1955.

In 1957, Chrysler products underwent a change that made the “hundred million dollar look” look like an opening skirmish in its challenge to General Motors. The effect on G. M. and Harley Earl was significant, and will be discussed later. This second major style change significantly increased sales, although the increase was short lived. Imperial sales tripled in 1957 to 35,793 units, before settling down to a pace that was roughly half of the 1957 high for 1958, 1959, and 1960. A commonly held belief within the automotive enthusiast community is that Chrysler production capacity was severely overtaxed in 1957 and that quality suffered significantly. This, in turn, caused a rapid deterioration of Chrysler’s reputation which expressed itself in declining sales.

## Section 11

### **Competition from below**

Even as Cadillac reached its greatest position in terms of market dominance, another car’s performance was about to pass it. Ironically, it was to be another G. M. offering – the 1955 Chevrolet. Prior to 1955, Chevrolet’s image was that of a workaday, rather uninspiring car powered by a six-cylinder engine that went back into the 1930s. It had always been on the tailing edge of technical improvement, as witness the fact that it did not get an automatic transmission until 1950 – when all other G. M. cars had one by 1948. It was, however, the most popular car in America.

At the same time, the Ford V-8 was coming on fast. By the mid-1950s, most of the issues left in the wake of Ford's chaos of the 1940s had been dealt with. Almost as though Henry Ford II was seeking revenge for the drubbing that his grandfather had received at the hands of Chevrolet in the late 1920s, Ford was determined to displace Chevrolet as the best selling car in America. Chevrolet engineering, under the leadership of Ed Cole, who would eventually become G. M. president, put on a full court press to make sure that did not happen.

Before going to Chevrolet, Cole had been one of the engineers who played a major role in the revolutionary 1949 Cadillac engine discussed earlier. He took the same bag of tricks to Chevrolet and designed the now-legendary Chevy small block V-8. Harley Earl contributed a body that could easily be confused for a smaller, cleaner Cadillac, and an automotive legend was born. Ford responded by increasing the power of the modern overhead-valve V-8 it had introduced the year before. Plymouth put the largest engine it had ever built into a limited-production series that it called the Fury, and the horsepower race among the "low priced three" was on. This was a seismic shift in the automotive landscape. Enthusiast interest began to shift away from Cadillac and other high-performance luxury cars and toward less-expensive, but no less powerful, automobiles.

Not that Cadillac was worried. As the 1955 model year began, Cadillac still had 90,000 unfilled orders left over from 1954.<sup>118</sup> The contest that Cadillac was interested in was a challenge from Lincoln.

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<sup>118</sup> Whyte, "The Cadillac Phenomenon", page 106.

## Section 12

### **The Continental road to El Dorado**

Lincoln's most focused and most costly attempt to dethrone Cadillac dated from 1952. A committee set up by Henry Ford II devised a strategy to overtake not just Chevrolet, but all of General Motors. The plan included moving Mercury up the food chain to compete with Buick and the creation of a new brand, eventually dubbed the Edsel to do battle with Pontiac and Oldsmobile. Lincoln was to become a more direct competitor of Cadillac. At the pinnacle of the Ford revival would be a revival of Edsel Ford's pre-war masterpiece, the Continental, to stake out a position above Cadillac in price, and hopefully prestige.<sup>119</sup> Put under the leadership of Henry Ford II's younger brother, William Clay Ford, the program produced a clean-lined two-door hardtop coupe that looked like nothing else on the road. Its debut model in 1956 also had a price like nothing else on the road, with the exception of Rolls-Royce, \$9,695. The nearest competitor that Cadillac had, the Eldorado Convertible cost \$3000 less.

As it turned out the Mark II would be a sales flop, selling 2,556 units in 1956 and 444 in 1957 before Ford pulled the plug on it. In retrospect, it was the wrong car with the wrong price.

It was also promoted in the wrong way. James Adams could have told them what was wrong. Many people today would evaluate the two advertisements printed above and consider the Continental ad to be superior. Of the two, it is the less wordy. The overall ad is less gaudy, more ethereal. Continental's line, "For the man who

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<sup>119</sup> Bonsall, *Disaster in Dearborn: The Story of the Edsel*, pp. 73-74.

knows the secret of being inconspicuously important” appeals to higher motives. The Continental is seen, perhaps, as the automotive equivalent to Philip Johnson’s glass houses or Jackson Pollack’s abstract paintings.



1956 Lincoln Continental Mark II and 1956 Cadillac Convertible Ads  
Sources: Continental – Antique Automobile Club of America Library, Cadillac—National Geographic, June 1956

However, James Adams’s ads sold a lot more cars than Johnson built houses or Pollack painted abstracts. It makes sense to reevaluate the ads according to Adams’s criteria:

Whatever people buy, they buy it not for the product itself; but for the satisfaction they hope it will give them. This applies equally to motor cars, to food, to clothing, to cosmetics, and so on throughout the range of manufactured products.

Real merchandising success occurs when a product is advertised and sold on the basis of the particular type of satisfaction it may be expected to render.

Cadillac cars, for instance, have been sold for decades as a lift to a man's pride—as a symbol of success.

Cosmetics are bought, of course, to make women more attractive to men. If there were no men, there would be no market for cosmetics.

My experience has convinced me that advertising is most successful when it pictures and exploits the end results of a product-when it pictures the human satisfaction the product may be expected to render.<sup>120</sup>

The Cadillac ad shows the Cadillac in isolation at the top of the page.

However, at the bottom we see it again, or at least its most identifiable design feature, the fin. We also see context – a home, a pool, and a group of attractive people enjoying themselves. The Lincoln ad promotes the desire to be inconspicuous. The Cadillac ad told its 1956 audience that they would be attractive, prosperous, and socially at ease. The Lincoln ad told this same audience that they would be invisible. And, just imagine it, being invisible would only cost \$3000 extra.

Cadillac's own Motorama experience told them what they believed another part of the answer was. According to enthusiast historian David W. Temple, part of the answer was seen by Harley Earl in 1953, "Though the [two door] Le Mans grabbed the attention of many during the Motorama tour, Harley Earl observed that those who would actually 'back up their approval with a check' showed a preference for the [four door] Orleans."<sup>121</sup> The reaction to following year's Park Avenue was similar. By this time, the coming of the Continental had become one of Detroit's worst kept secrets, and the decision was made to work toward production.

Had G. M. known that the Continental Mark II would lay a giant egg, perhaps the Cadillac Eldorado Brougham would never have been built. At the time, though, there was the very real fear that Cadillac could be caught flat-footed and allow

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<sup>120</sup> James R. Adams, *Sparks Off My Anvil: From Thirty Years in Advertising* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pages 64-65.

<sup>121</sup> Temple, *G. M.'s Motorama*, page 108

Lincoln to establish a niche in the highest end of the luxury car market. The heirs of the men who had built the V-16 knew the effect that a “halo” product could have. Under the circumstances, Cadillac had to develop an ultra-luxury car of their own, and the Motorama’s Orleans pointed the way that they would go. The car that would become the 1957 Eldorado Brougham would be one of the most carefully developed models in the history of the industry.

Given that a titanic battle for luxury dominance appeared to be heating up between G. M. and Ford, it was natural that there would be much whispering going on in the automotive press. Unlike Harley Earl’s 1928 LaSalle or William Mitchell’s 1938 Cadillac Sixty Special, the Eldorado Brougham would be the product of many stylists. The overall parameters of the project were developed by Earl during the first half of 1954. A variety of stylists in the Cadillac studio worked within those parameters under the direction of Ed Glowacke.<sup>122</sup> This was standard practice within G. M. Design under both Earl and Mitchell, who took over the studio when Earl retired in 1958. The process was then to choose the best aspects of several designs and create a composite clay model.<sup>123</sup>



1953 Cadillac Orleans Show Car  
Source: General Motors Historical Collection

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<sup>122</sup> Hendry, *Cadillac*, p. 298

<sup>123</sup> Don MacDonald, “Behind the Styling Curtain”, *Motor Trend*, July 1954, page 37.



1954 Cadillac Park Avenue Show Car  
Source: General Motors Historical Collection



1955 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham Show Car  
Source: General Motors Historical Collection

The Eldorado Brougham of 1955 was a kind of “progress report” on the project. A special lowered chassis was delivered to the styling department and the actual construction of the car took about 70 days, and it was barely finished when the Motorama opened on January 19, 1955. Notable additions were quad headlamps, then a new idea, and air suspension. From the Park Avenue show car, the Eldorado Brougham borrowed its trademark brushed stainless steel roof panel. From the Orleans, came the four-door system that abandoned the traditional center pillar and in which the rear doors were hinges at the rear and both sets of doors latched into a short chromed post attached to the floor.



Views of a 1957 Eldorado Brougham  
Source: St. Louis Car Museum

Meanwhile, the proposed price of the new car escalated. Price targets of \$8,500 and \$10,000 were passed and the final product premiered at \$13,074<sup>124</sup>, a record for a post-war American car. At that price, the customer had a right to expect the finest in finish and fittings, and that is what he or she got. There were, however, rather few who opted to get one. Production never even came close to even the low numbers posted by the Continental. Only 400 were built in 1957 and another 304 in 1958. The next year production was moved offshore. For some reason, perhaps because the leaders of Cadillac were not yet ready to admit a costly mistake or in an attempt to give the car some continental flair, the 1959 and 1960 models were shipped to Italy to be bodied by the Peninfarina firm. Only 99 were built for 1959, and 101 were constructed during 1960. At that point, the project quietly died. From that time on, neither Cadillac nor Lincoln would attempt to market a car in the Rolls-Royce price range.

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<sup>124</sup> “As Motor Goes to Press”, *Motor*, February 1955, page 35; “As Motor Goes to Press”, *Motor*, October 1955, page 35; “As Motor Goes to Press”, *Motor*, June 1956, p 34; Hendry, *Cadillac*, p. 300

Why did Cadillac fail to make a place in the ultra-luxury market? Obviously, the answers to such a question are speculative, but most likely the largest element was the relationship between cost and price. Very limited production simply does not work with modern tooling costs for reasons explored earlier. However, there are so few potential customers in that market that production must be very limited. Another reason for this failure is the fact that, when compared with the normally produced Cadillac, the Eldorado Brougham just wasn't all that special. Certainly, it was comfortable, well-assembled, and dripped with chrome, but so was the Cadillac Sixty Special at less than half the price.



1958 Cadillac Sixty Special

Source: <http://www.mywvhome.com/web/cars/cars.htm>

One can, however argue that the Eldorado Brougham was not a failure at all. The purpose of so-called “halo” products is not necessarily to turn a profit. Its development gained much favorable publicity for four years before the car went into production. It also doubtless generated a certain amount of showroom traffic, if for no other reason than for the sheer novelty of seeing a \$13,000 car. How many of those lookers became buyers of lesser vehicles was difficult to ascertain then and impossible to figure out now, but some probably did exist.

### Section 13

#### **The end of the era of Sloan and Earl**

Whether or not the Eldorado Brougham was considered successful, the 1957 and 1958 Cadillacs can be said to have been Harley Earl's swan song. In 1958, he reached mandatory retirement age, but that was not the only factor. The easiest to quantify are the numbers connected with the corporate disaster connected with the fact that the 1957 Ford outsold Chevrolet. Ford had been thoroughly restyled, Chevrolet had received a heavy facelift on its 1955 body. At Cadillac, sales declined as well, from 154,577 in 1956 to 146,841 in 1957, and finally to 121,778 in 1958. In light of the 1958 recession, these numbers were not disastrous. Cadillac production had never exceeded 100,000 until 1953. Three factors spelled out the end of the age – slowing sales, the apparent loss of design leadership to Chrysler (about which more will be said below), and Earl's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday came together to indicate that it was time for a new generation to take over. Alfred Sloan, Harley Earl, and Harlow Curtice were retired; James Adams was dead.

Given the auto industry's long development times, it is possible that Earl still exerted some influence over the legendary amount of chrome that was lavished on the 1959 Cadillac, which also featured the tallest fins in history. However, at least one important source says that Earl's influence on the 1959 was very limited. Charles M. "Chuck" Jordan was the chief designer in the Cadillac Studio from October 1957 until August 1962, and served as Chief Designer for the entire corporation from 1986-1992. In an interview published in 2009, he recounted the process by which the design torch passed from Earl's hands in the summer of 1956.

Harley Earl went to Europe in the summer of '56. Sometimes I liked to get away during lunchtime to collect my thoughts, so one day I drove to the Plymouth factory about seven miles away. I thought to myself that these guys must be making their next year's model by now. I think I'll go down and look to see what I can see.

What a shock! There were all these '57 Plymouths backed up against the fence and all I could see were fins. But it was more than the fins. These cars were really sleek, they were lean and they looked like they were moving standing still. The roof was very thin and they had that simplicity and dash that our cars didn't have. Our cars looked cumbersome and heavy and didn't have that contemporary design quality.

I went back to Bill Mitchell and said, "Bill, you better come down and look at what the Plymouth guys are doing for '57." So a couple of chief designers, Bill Mitchell and I went down there and looked at those Plymouths that afternoon. Keep in mind that we were already working on our '59 models that looked like an evolution of the '57 and '58 models.

That same afternoon, Bill started a second '59 design in each production studio. Of course, Bill didn't stop Earl's designs, but he started a competing design that reflected a more advanced look. We really worked fast and hard to get the new design developed in clay. By the time Harley Earl got back and walked into the studio, he was speechless, and he turned around and walked back out. It was a couple of days before he realized he'd better join the party and saw the advantages of what we were doing.

And you know what happened? The '59 cars were spectacular! On the Cadillac, we probably overcooked the design of the fin. Still, it was tame compared to what it could have been. I can remember when the fin on the clay model was higher than the coupe roof.<sup>125</sup>

By 1960, the fins were lowered and the use of chrome was far more restrained. Clearly a corner had been turned.

This is not to say that some sort of golden age at Cadillac ended when the aforementioned gentlemen passed from the scene. During the 1960s and 1970s, Cadillac would sell in numbers that would have made Nicholas Dreystadt's head spin. The division that Dreystadt had been brought in to save because it sold only 6,736

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<sup>125</sup> "Design of the 1959 Cadillac – The Way it Was" *The Self-Starters*, September 2009, pages 8, 10.

cars in 1933 passed annual production of 200,000 in 1966, and over 300,000 in 1973, the model year that ended days before the first Arab oil embargo. When William Mitchell retired in 1977, Cadillac was enjoying a model year in which it would set yet another record, with production of 358,487.

It is, however, highly unlikely that these records would have been set without the work of the men who figure so largely in this paper. It was during this period, starting in 1927 and ending in the late 1950s that Cadillac BECAME Cadillac.

## Chapter 4: Conclusions

It is my purpose in this conclusion to restate and reinforce the thesis given in the introduction of this paper. My central thesis is that a combination of advertising, styling, engineering, and G. M.'s corporate structure took Cadillac from one luxury car among many to being the undisputed leader in the luxury car sector of the market.

1. Cadillac's advertising presented a consistent picture of the product as one of the keys to the "better life" that many, perhaps most Americans desired during the first fifteen years following World War II. This was especially credible in the consumer's mind because it was a theme that was consistent with Cadillac's advertising themes used before the war.

2. The amount of Cadillac advertising made Cadillac a household term describing something that was the best of its type. Appendix C shows that Cadillac was occasionally outspent – by Packard in 1951 and 1953 and by Lincoln in 1953 and 1954 – but Cadillac's was usually the loudest voice and Cadillac's spending shows the most consistently growing advertising budget.

3. All of Cadillac's competitors suffered from a lack of consistency in their advertising and marketing – in tone, in message, and in spending (see Appendix D). When Packard, Imperial, and – to a lesser extent – Lincoln went down-market they found it very difficult, in Packard's case impossible, to move back up-market when conditions for such a move improved. Also corporate turmoil – at Ford in the 1930s and 1940s, at Chrysler and Packard in the mid-1950s – was a detriment compared to G. M.'s relatively consistent governance structure after 1921 under the leadership of Alfred P. Sloan.

4. Cadillac was able to go down-market without having its image as a maker of premium cars suffer. The extent to which Cadillac went down-market can be seen in Appendix E. Cadillac's first venture down-market was with a separate nameplate, LaSalle, which was presented as being *manufactured* by Cadillac, but not that it actually *was* a Cadillac. This meant that LaSalle could advertise on the basis of price, but Cadillac could get away without doing so. Only in 1940-42 was Cadillac extensively advertised on price, but this was abandoned after World War II. When price was mentioned, the overall theme was that it was surprisingly low for a car with Cadillac's quality.

5. For the most part, Cadillac's products were able to live up to their reputation as well designed, comfortable, powerful, and well constructed automobiles.

6. General Motors could provide legions of satisfied customers, some of whom gained the means to live an upper-middle-class lifestyle. Most likely relatively few climbed every rung of the product ladder starting with Chevrolet, then moving on to Pontiac, Oldsmobile, to Buick, and finally Cadillac. However, G. M.'s product policy, going back to the 1920's was to slot its cars at the top of the price class to which the cars belonged. This gave G. M. a reputation as a purveyor of quality products, and Cadillac benefitted from that reputation.

7. Cadillac's styling presented a consistently modern appearance without scaring its inherently conservative clientele. With the possible exceptions of 1957 and 1959, Cadillacs changed just enough to distinguish themselves from the previous year's model, but always carried over some aspects of the previous design (See

Appendix E). The fins, which were at first the most radical part of the 1948 redesign changed only incrementally through 1956. When the fin was drastically changed in 1957, the appearance of the front of the car carried strong echoes of 1956. This did two things, both of them redounding to Cadillac's benefit. First, it reassured this year's customer that his new car would not appear to be hopelessly outclassed in less than a year's time. Second, it gave Cadillac a good reputation for retaining a healthy part of its value when the time came to trade one in. This would then make it easier to sell another new Cadillac to that customer in two- or three-year's time. It would also provide an entrée for the customer who wanted to enter the world of Cadillac but could not quite swing it financially to purchase a gently used two- or three-year-old vehicle – from which he/she could perhaps trade up to a new vehicle sometime in the future.

8. Cadillac consistently made new technologies available to its customers. Among these were high compression V-type engines, automatic transmissions, power steering, power brakes, air conditioning, and cruise control which have become standard parts of the modern driving experience. Others, such as the "Autronic Eye" (an automatic headlamp dimming system) and air suspension proved to be less durable. This was one of the benefits of sitting atop the G. M. pyramid. Anything that another division was working on could and did become available on Cadillac as soon as it became available on one of the "lesser" cars in the G. M. line, and usually well ahead of Packard, Lincoln, or Imperial. Another related benefit was Cadillac's ability to amortize tooling costs over a larger number of units which would, in turn,

be sold in a shorter period of time. This advantage was particularly important in its competition with Packard, which had no corporate parent to pick up some of its costs.

9. Cadillac had momentum. It is a truism that success breeds success.

Cadillac successfully became a part of the “Roaring 20s”, which helped it successfully navigate the Great Depression, which in turn helped it successfully convert to peacetime consumption, which helped it proclaim itself as something more than a car – it had become a sign of a life successfully lived.

On the other hand, one has to ask whether it could have done better. Did Cadillac (or General Motors) make any mistakes that retarded what could have been greater success?

1. In light of more recent events, it appears that the decision to drop the LaSalle was a mistake. When the subject arises, the conventional wisdom vindicates the decision by pointing to the fact that the LaSalle’s replacement in the Cadillac line, the 1941 Cadillac Model 61, handily outsold the 1940 LaSalle. This line of analysis ignores two factors. First, as pointed out above, LaSalle sales were on a steady and strong upward course from 1938 to 1940, and there is no reason to believe that this trend would not have continued into 1941. Second, there is the fact that 1941 was significantly better than 1940 for *all* Cadillac lines except the Series Sixty. For instance, Cadillac’s Model 62 line, positioned one notch above the LaSalle/Model 61, posted 5,900 sales in 1940 and 24,726 in 1941.

That the LaSalle brand long continued to retain a certain amount of brand loyalty can be seen in that there were at least three attempts to revive it – in two small but luxurious show cars built for the 1955 Motorama, in the car that eventually

became the 1963 Buick Rivera after being finally rejected by Cadillac management, and in the car that was badged as the Cadillac Seville in 1975.<sup>126</sup> That this lingering loyalty may have extended beyond the halls of General Motors can be seen in the theme song for the wildly popular 1970s television series, *All in the Family*, in whose theme song the main character, Archie Bunker, crooned, “Gee, our old LaSalle ran great. Those were the days.”

It is my contention that the LaSalle could have provided a badge that could have stopped, or at least slowed, the kind of brand erosion that Cadillac suffered in later decades. By continuing LaSalle, Cadillac would still have had a vehicle that could have served as a test bed for marketing and mechanical innovation without risking the prestige of the senior brand. It had, after all, served this function from 1927-1934. Perhaps such services were little needed in the halcyon post-World War II days, but one can argue that it would have helped keep Cadillac from becoming typed as an “old man’s car” in the 1960s. By the 1980s, Cadillac badly needed the resources that a strong LaSalle brand could have provided.

2. It can be argued that the money spent on the El Dorado Brougham of 1957-1960 was largely wasted. A very low volume car with an extremely high price, the El Dorado was not significantly more luxurious than other Cadillacs and had to bear enormous tooling costs. It, and the Continental with which it was designed to compete, seemed to be an answer to an automotive question that nobody asked.

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<sup>126</sup> The LaSalle Show car is discussed in Temple, *G. M.’s Motorama*, pages 132-135; the Riviera background in Auto Editors of Consumers Guide, *Encyclopedia of American Cars*, page 54; the Seville saga in Hendry, *Cadillac*, page 341.

3. I believe that the 1955 Chevrolet and its successors were very popular mistakes, at least when viewed from the Cadillac perspective. Much of Cadillac's appeal stemmed from its air of exclusivity and power – both mechanical and social. The post-1955 Chevrolets were nearly as powerful and could be very well equipped at a price that was about 60% of the Cadillac. They didn't carry the same prestige, but they did open the door to the position that a Cadillac was only a dressed up Chevrolet.

4. It does seem that there was more than a little complacency that crept into General Motors as a whole and Cadillac in particular by the mid-1950s. After being pioneers in the production of cars with automatic transmissions, power steering, power brakes, etc. through 1953 or so; engineering development at Cadillac was nearly static thereafter. An air suspension developed for the El Dorado Brougham proved to be unreliable, and the absence of a list of engineering accomplishments after that indicated that General Motors just wasn't trying very hard. The sociologist Robert F. Freeland makes a strong case that this was the result of two major changes that happened in G.M. upper management – the retirement of Alfred Sloan and his eventual replacement in 1958 by Frederic Donner and the forced divestiture by DuPont of its holdings in G. M. in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1956 decision in *U. S. v. E. I. du Pont de Nemours, General Motors, et al.* Placing Donner in the Chairman's office put undue power in the hands of the finance sector of the company and stifled product development. Removing DuPont's ownership influence deprived G. M. of the long-term view that having an ownership block that was not part of the company's management had hitherto fore provided. John Z. DeLorean's highly

suspicious “memoir,” *On a Clear Day, You Can See General Motors* makes the effects of the corporate ennui that ensued one of its major themes.

The relative importance of these factors – and other historians may well see factors that I have missed – may be debatable. What is undeniable is the fact that Cadillac was amazingly successful. Its model year 1960 production of 142,184 gave it 70% of the U.S. luxury car market (verses Lincoln’s 24,823 and Imperial’s 17,719) – testimony enough of Cadillac’s commanding position in the marketplace.

That leaves us with one pertinent question yet remaining. What happened, why has Cadillac lost the commanding position that it once held?

For starters, Cadillac lost its position of exclusivity. This happened primarily in three ways.

First, Cadillac production rose to the point where 1956’s banner year would have been an unmitigated disaster in 1976.<sup>127</sup> An air of exclusivity is a necessary component to the ethereal concept of luxury. If everyone can get it, it is no longer desired by those who want “something better.”

Second, Cadillacs were sufficiently well built that they tended to last a long time. Normally that should be an advantage. For Cadillac, it meant that one of its cars might go through three or four owners, each one less prosperous than the last. An anecdote from my own childhood serves to illustrate this point. In 1965, the poorest family on our block drove a salmon colored 1958 Cadillac Sedan de Ville. Its paint was faded, it was beginning to rust out, and the block letters spelling out the car’s brand name on top of the left fin was missing the first L and the second A. My

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<sup>127</sup> Production figures for 1956 ran to 154,577. Those for 1976 were almost exactly double the 1956 figure – 309,139.

father, the owner of a new 1965 Ford Galaxie 500, looked upon that Cadillac with contempt – and had no trouble voicing his opinion about it. It finally died an ignominious death a year or so later.

Perhaps the most important reason that Cadillac lost its exclusivity, though, is the fact that G.M. management did not maintain it. This went back to Chevrolet's successful use of Cadillac-like styling in 1955, but did not really hit full stride until the mid-1960s, when Chevrolet began to market its Caprice model. With an available 427 cubic inch engine and luxurious interior trimmings it sold well – and gave potential purchasers another reason NOT to climb G. M.'s price ladder. By 1976, there was an astonishing similarity between the Chevrolet Caprice, the Pontiac Grand Ville, the Oldsmobile 98 Regency, the Buick Electra 225, and the Cadillac Sedan de Ville. The way to sell more Cadillacs was to lower its price; the way to sell more of the others was to make them more like a Cadillac.

Another set of reasons that Cadillac lost out was that the sort of luxury it represented lost favor with the “baby boomer” generation. Many too many barrels of ink have been spilled in describing the tone of anti-materialism of the late 1960's for me to go into any detail about it here. It is enough to say that the kind of glamour that James Adams depicted in all of those ads had ceased to be attractive. Cadillac was the symbol of an age that was being derided by the sons and daughters of those who had made Cadillac so very successful.

Another key reason for Cadillac's decline was that Cadillac ceased offering its buyers anything new. Once cars had automatic transmissions, power steering, power brakes, power windows, power seats, power door locks, and power radio antennas,

there just didn't seem to be any more to offer. By the late 1960s, automotive innovation, to the extent that there was any automotive innovation was centered in smaller cars, performance in the 1964 Pontiac G.T.O., fuel saving in the 1970 Chevrolet Vega, etc. This was coupled with the fact that government mandates forced the auto manufacturers to focus their engineering resources on decreasing pollution and providing safer vehicles. These changes were necessary, but they were very expensive, and they didn't possess any of the "gee-whiz" factor that had accompanied the first experience of driving without having to shift or of steering with two fingers. In fact, they had the initial effect of making cars less powerful and less fun to drive.<sup>128</sup> Another factor was that by law they had to be applied to all cars at the same time, denying Cadillac the opportunity to appear advanced compared with less expensive cars.

Then came the 1980s and 1990s when most of what Cadillac offered that was new was also bad. G. M. faced a corporate debacle when the initially popular diesel engines that it offered in all of its lines, including Cadillac, turned out to be progressively less reliable once they got a few miles on them. Cadillac's V-8-6-4 variable displacement engine offered increased fuel economy by only running on as many cylinders as the conditions required – more when accelerating, fewer when cruising at a steady speed. It was a sound concept, but was rushed to market before the dealers' service technicians could be properly trained in their maintenance, causing another round of early failures.

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<sup>128</sup> Cadillac's basic engine for 1968 had a power output of 375 horsepower. In 1971 that figure was cut to 345. The 1972 put out 220 hp., the 1974 had 205, and the 1975 had 190. The effect of a nearly 50% drop in power output, even though the car itself was just as heavy, was considerable.

Most of Cadillac's forays into the world of smaller cars fared little better. The 1981-1986 Cimarron was a thinly veiled four-cylinder Chevrolet. This was even worse than the design mistakes described above. Making a Chevrolet look like a Cadillac at least made sense from some perspective, making a Cadillac look like a Chevy was just wrong-headed. The same year, Cadillac substantially downsized its expensive Seville and Eldorado series. Other than the grille and the crest, there was little in the new design that spoke to any Cadillac styling tradition and the cars were fundamentally bland. The first year of the change saw Seville sales cut in half and Eldorado sales go down by more than three-quarters. In 1996, Cadillac tried again to build a small car that would be somewhat sporty and still be a Cadillac when it introduced the Catera. Imported from G. M.'s German Opel division, the "Caddy that zigs"<sup>129</sup> did not look like anything else that G. M. sold in America, but there its virtues stopped. Quality was spotty, some drivers swore by it – others swore at it, and another opportunity was lost.<sup>130</sup>

More recently, there have been signs that Cadillac is coming back. The current Cadillac CTS appears to actually be the car that the Catera was supposed to be – a car that a B.M.W. driver would look at and consider purchasing.<sup>131</sup>

Unfortunately, the rest of Cadillac's line-up is dismissed as rather lackluster,

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<sup>129</sup> Catchphrase from 1996 Catera television advertising.

<sup>130</sup> Cadillac history since the 1970s is still largely in the province of enthusiast historians. Perhaps the most concise treatment of Cadillac in the 1980s is David Holls's appendix to Hendry's *Cadillac*. Holls played a role in designing the 1959 Cadillac and became the head of G. M. Design in 1992. Since he may be labeled as a G. M. partisan, his view should be read with considerable discernment.

<sup>131</sup> Fairly typical of the reception that the CTS has gotten from the motoring press can be seen in the following article from Motor Trend's online edition - [http://www.motortrend.com/roadtests/sedans/112\\_0803\\_2009\\_cadillac\\_cts\\_v/index.html](http://www.motortrend.com/roadtests/sedans/112_0803_2009_cadillac_cts_v/index.html)

including the DTS that replaced the big-volume deVille line. In the midst of G. M.'s bankruptcy woes in the summer of 2009, Bryan Nesbitt was named to be Cadillac's General Manager. As a designer, rather than an engineer or an accountant, Nesbitt's resume is very different from anyone who has ever run Cadillac. He is also unusual in that he did some of his best known work for someone other than General Motors, having designed the successful Chrysler PT Cruiser in the late 1990s. Nesbitt will also have a level of power that no Cadillac General Manager has had in decades, in that he will report directly to Vice-Chairman Robert Lutz.<sup>132</sup>

If Cadillac is able to regain a place of prominence among manufacturers of luxury automobiles, it will be highly significant, in that no other manufacturer had managed such a move. It is possible to go from nothing to acceptance as a luxury marque, as B.M.W. did in the 1980s and Lexus in the 1990s. What has thus far eluded Cadillac, and Lincoln as well, is the path to gaining that acceptance after a period in which the market has determined that you are no longer an important player. The CTS, encouraging as it must be to Cadillac management, is a small car. As such it may well prove to be a fine entre vehicle, but Cadillac still needs a large car that can compete with the Mercedes S-Class, the B.M.W. 7-series, and the Lexus LS. In 2003, Cadillac unveiled a concept car called the Sixteen, intended to evoke memories of the V-16 of the 1930s while being a thoroughly modern car. It attracted considerable notice in the automotive press, much of it positive. Yet six years later, its influence on the large DTS line has yet to be seen.

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<sup>132</sup> <http://www.carbodydesign.com/archive/2009/07/23-bryan-nesbitt-cadillac-manager/>



1993 Cadillac Sixteen Concept  
Source: G. M. Heritage Collection

It may well turn out that the real penalty of leadership that Theodore MacManus discussed in 1915 is that it is impossible to get back once it has been lost.

## Appendices

### Appendix A – The Penalty of Leadership – January 2, 1915

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST 45



# The PENALTY OF LEADERSHIP

IN every field of human endeavor, he that is first must perpetually live in the white light of publicity. ¶Whether the leadership be vested in a man or in a manufactured product, emulation and envy are ever at work. ¶In art, in literature, in music, in industry, the reward and the punishment are always the same. ¶The reward is widespread recognition; the punishment, fierce denial and detraction. ¶When a man's work becomes a standard for the whole world, it also becomes a target for the shafts of the envious foe. ¶If his work be merely mediocre, he will be left severely alone—if he achieve a masterpiece, it will set a million tongues a-wagging. ¶Jealousy does not protrude its forked tongue at the artist who produces a commonplace painting. ¶Whatsoever you write, or paint, or play, or sing, or build, no one will strive to surpass, or to slander you, unless your work be stamped with the seal of genius. ¶Long, long after a great work or a good work has been done, those who are disappointed or envious continue to cry out that it can not be done. ¶Spiteful little voices in the domain of art were raised against our own Whistler as a mountebank, long after the big world had acclaimed him its greatest artistic genius. ¶Multitudes flocked to Bayreuth to worship at the musical shrine of Wagner, while the little group of those whom he had dethroned and displaced argued angrily that he was no musician at all. ¶The little world continued to protest that Fulton could never build a steamboat, while the big world flocked to the river banks to see his boat steam by. ¶The leader is assailed because he is a leader, and the effort to equal him is merely added proof of that leadership. ¶Failing to equal or to excel, the follower seeks to depreciate and to destroy—but only confirms once more the superiority of that which he strives to supplant. ¶There is nothing new in this. ¶It is as old as the world and as old as the human passions—envy, fear, greed, ambition, and the desire to surpass. ¶And it all avails nothing. ¶If the leader truly leads, he remains—the leader. ¶Master-poet, master-painter, master-workman, each in his turn is assailed, and each holds his laurels through the ages. ¶That which is good or great makes itself known, no matter how loud the clamor of denial. ¶That which deserves to live—lives.



COPYRIGHT, 1915, Cadillac Motor Car Co.

Text:

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# The Man at the Window



He is now 46 years old.

He was born, here in Detroit, in 1908. That was thirteen years after the first popping, lurching, horseless carriage swerved through the streets of Springfield, Massachusetts.

The neighborhood blacksmith was thinking of turning his shop into a garage. Sometimes father was heard singing “In My Merry Oldsmobile” from the kitchen bathtub.

Left-hand steering and the baked enamel finish were just being introduced. And automobiles were toys—limited to the city, by the roads—and, by their cost, to the rich.

The year he was born, General Motors was born.

When he was a year old, electric headlights, four-door touring car bodies, dash-panel oil gauges, made their first appearance. And when he was two, Buick built its first six-cylinder car.

He was four when Cadillac introduced the electric self-starter, six when it built the first high-speed V-8 engine, seven when it brought out tilt-beam headlights. Of course, he didn't particularly note this. He was too busy growing.

When he was ten, his family bought their first Chevrolet.

After that, his world really began to spin. There were those great weekends at the lake and vacations on the farm. New roads, straight and flat, were stretching out, connecting everywhere.

By the time he and General Motors were fifteen, there were balloon tires, Buicks with four-wheel brakes, a new auto finish called Duco lacquer, a new gasoline called Ethyl. And he was living in a new bungalow in the suburbs out past Grand Boulevard.

Because now the distance was no inconvenience.

At sixteen, on his way to Boy Scout summer camp, he saw a new thing named the General Motors Proving Ground, and in the next four years he saw some of its products—the first Packard car, an Oldsmobile wearing the first chrome plate, a Cadillac with the first synchro-mesh transmission, a new six-cylinder Chevrolet.

Then he and GM both turned 21 in the year of the crash—1929.

It didn't seem the time to come of age. But there is no progress without faith and they had come too far to give up. He saw the advent of No-Draft ventilation in Bodies by Fisher, Knee-Action springs on GM models, the first all-steel single-piece Turret Top. Sure enough, the same drive to give customers better values that had meant growth in the twenties, meant growth, and employment, in the thirties.

He knew, because he had seen it coming, because his employer was a GM supplier, because he was a GM customer. He saw the new Delco car radios come out, then the new Sealed-Beam headlights, and by the time of the Hydra-Matic Drive, the depression had just about been weathered.

Unfortunately, right around the corner lay another crash—Pearl Harbor.

He was 33 and married and he didn't go at first. In this respect he was different; GM had already gone to war. And when he did get to Camp Hood it was in a GM 6r6, carrying a GM carbine.

Before he got home GM navy fighters and torpedo bombers had flown cover over his convoy. He had walked behind GM tanks, bearing the rocketing

thunder of GM shells up ahead. There was a brief ride in a GM ambulance. And then eventually that storm had been weathered too.

He was hard at work on his 36th birthday, planting new shrubs around the new house in the new suburb. The growing city had surrounded the old house, but moving farther out had been no problem.

Distances were briefer than ever. The next year he followed the announcement of Buick's Dyna-Flow drive, the curved-glass windshields of the Cadillac and Oldsmobiles.

Then on his 42nd birthday he took the family for a drive in their new Chevrolet with Powerglide automatic transmission. They went through the old neighborhood, along Grand Boulevard, past the block-square General Motors Building, and recalled the time when this had been near open countryside. Wheels had shrunk the distances so—had wrought such change.

His own kids are growing up now, talking car talk. They devour the ads and exclaim about power steering, power braking. Their innocent acceptance of the convertible with the powered top and powered windows reminds him of the “one-man top” and tan-glass curtains of his own youth.

He recalls why it is he is standing there, looking in, the man at the window.

He has come down to pick up his new car, the one with the Sweep-Sight windshield. The one with the ground-hugging ride—silent, sturdy, and automatic beyond belief. The one with the sparkling finish and brilliant performance. The one that took 46 years—GM's years, his years—to build. He sees its counterpart in through the window and admires it.

But before he comes in, he allows himself one more reminiscence. The automobile, once a bulky plaything of the wealthy, has now become an American family trademark. All that it stands for in the spanning of time and space is in his hands—together with a comfort of springs and foam and music and climate—together with a guarding of welded steel, triple-plate glass, flashing turn-signals, enormous brakes—together with a dazzling beauty never before known. And he saw it happen.

Now, perhaps you think he is breathing a kind of thanks for this—thanks to General Motors. And perhaps he is. And that's just fine. But the battle for abundance in America was not GM's alone.

In a democracy, if an institution is to grow, it must give the public what it wants, at a price it wants to pay. There is no other basis.

The man at the window has followed the growth of General Motors—has seen it hailed through the newspapers, on the poster panels, over the radio, in the magazines, across the television screens. And it is he who has built General Motors because he liked what he read, and heard, and saw. Because it gave him what he wanted at a price he wanted to pay.

Now, today, there is the 50,000,000th GM car—a glittering, golden Chevrolet Bel Air sport coupe. Because, yesterday, the man at the window bought number 49,999,999.

And that isn't a bad system.

**CAMPBELL-EWALD COMPANY**  
ADVERTISING

Detroit • New York • Chicago • Los Angeles  
San Francisco • Washington • Atlanta • Dallas • Kansas City

Text:

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His own kids are growing up now, talking car talk. They devour the ads and exclaim about power steering, power braking. Their innocent acceptance of the convertible with the powered top and powered windows reminds him of the "one-man top" and isinglass curtain, of his own youth.

He recalls why it is he is standing there, looking in, the man at the window.

He has come down to pickup his new car, the one with the Sweep-Sight windshield. The one with the ground-hugging ride—silent, sturdy, and automatic beyond belief. The one with the sparkling finish and brilliant performance. The one that took 48 years - GM's years, his years — to build. He sees its counterpart in through the window and admires it.

But before he comes in, he allows himself one more reminiscence. The automobile, once a balky plaything of the wealthy, has now become an American

family trademark. All that it stands for in the spanning of time and space is in his hands-together with a comfort of springs and foam and music and climate — together with a guarding of welded steel, triple-plate glass, flashing turn-signals, enormous brakes — together with a dazzling beauty never before known. And he saw it happen.

Now, perhaps you think he is breathing a kind of thanks for this — thanks to General Motors. And perhaps he is. And that's just fine. But the battle for abundance in America was not GM's alone.

In a democracy, if an institution is to grow, it must give the public what it wants, at a price it wants to pay. There is no other basis...

The man at the window has followed the growth of General Motors — has seen it hailed through the newspapers, on the poster panels, over the radio, in the magazines, across the television screens. And it is he who has built General Motors because he liked what he read, and heard, and saw. Because it gave him what he wanted at a price he wanted to pay.

Now, today, there is the 50,000,000th GM car — a glittering, golden Chevrolet Bel Air sport coupe. Because, yesterday, the man at the window bought number 49,999,999.

And that isn't a bad system.

CAMPBELL-EWALD COMPANY  
ADVERTISING

Detroit • New York • Chicago • Las Angeles  
San Francisco • Washington • Atlanta • Dallas • Kansas City

## Appendix C – A Love Affair with Cadillac

*The following is a brief history of Cadillac prepared by General Motors Public Relations department and posted on their website, G. M. Media Online <http://media.gm.com/us/cadillac/en/company/love.html>. It is included so that the reader may contrast the findings in this paper with those from an “official” source. This narrative is, perhaps, most interesting for what it has left out. There is, for instance, no mention of either the Cimarron or the V-8-6-4 engine.*

The story of Cadillac begins in New England where founder Henry Leland worked in the Springfield Armory during the Civil War as a mechanic and later with Browne & Sharpe as a precision machinist. After moving to Detroit, this entrepreneur started Leland and Faulconer, manufacturing castings, forgings, automotive engines and chassis components.

When the backers of the Detroit Automobile Company wanted to liquidate that company, Leland provided the estimate, but recommended that they not go out of business. Instead, he helped them create the Cadillac Motor Car Company, named after Le Sieur Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, the founder of the city of Detroit. In just a few months, the very first Model A Cadillac was exhibited at the New York Automobile Show in January 1903.

While the Model A was a good first effort, it was the 1905 Model D that moved Cadillac into prominence. Powered by a four-cylinder engine, the five-passenger touring car had a wood body with an aluminum skin available as an option.

In 1908, three Cadillacs entered the competition for the Dewar Trophy, awarded annually for the most significant automotive advancement. Before this time, parts were hand-fitted by filing and sanding. Cadillacs featured the first interchangeable parts. Three cars were completely disassembled, the parts scrambled and 90 service parts exchanged and then put back together. This innovation helped Cadillac endure the 500-mile trial that followed, and to win the Dewar Trophy.

Another significant milestone happened in 1908 when General Motors made an offer to purchase Cadillac. On July 29, 1909, General Motors acquired Cadillac for \$5,969,200. GM President William C. Durant asked the Lelands to continue as managers and to operate the company as if it were their own.

About the same time, the Fleetwood Metal Body Company was formed in Fleetwood, Pa. Even then, Cadillac products with sophisticated Fleetwood custom bodies were built for affluent customers, including movie stars, on chassis supplied by Pierce-Arrow, Packard and, of course, Cadillac. The automobiles they created were masterpieces.

The introduction of the first regular production closed-bodied cars by Cadillac in 1910 was also seen as a benefit to drivers. The self-starter was introduced on 1912 Cadillacs, making it easier for men and women to drive cars because they didn't have to crank start them. Cadillac proudly won the Dewar Trophy a second time, this time for its electric starting-lighting-ignition system.

## **1920-1930**

### **Cars with style and elegance**

Cadillac production exceeded 20,000 in 1922. Part of that sales success came from the introduction of the Type 61 that came equipped with a standard windshield wiper and rear view mirror. A new era in automobile design was beginning in the Roaring Twenties with the influence of Harley Earl, who established the first styling department by an automobile manufacturer, the General Motors Art and Colour Section, in 1927.

Former General Motors Director of Styling David Holls said, "Before 1927, Cadillac was a good, solid, substantial car. After 1927, the cars had style and elegance."

Earl began his work at Cadillac by designing the smaller, very stylish LaSalle in 1927. Created to fill the gap between Buick and Cadillac in the General Motors lineup, the LaSalle was advertised as a "Companion Car to Cadillac." LaSalle was always considered to be a sportier, more maneuverable Cadillac, similar to the modern Cadillac Catera.

Cadillac LaSalle was the pace car at the 1927 Indianapolis 500. This was the first time a Caddy would pace the race, but certainly not the last. Cadillacs or LaSalles would be the pacesetters five more times, in 1931 (Cadillac Model 370 V12), 1934 (LaSalle), 1937 (LaSalle), 1973 (Eldorado), and 1992 (Allante).

In its initial year, LaSalle offered eleven body styles on two wheelbases, plus four Fleetwood designs on a 125-inch wheelbase. LaSalle coupes even had a door on the side that opened to provide a compartment for golf bags.

Another Cadillac innovation was the first clashless synchromesh transmission in 1929. Now drivers didn't have to double clutch their cars to avoid grinding gears.

## **1930-1940**

### **Focusing on the driver and passengers**

The Cadillacs of the Thirties defined classic American sophistication and luxury. With the introduction of V12 and V16 engines, Cadillac led the industry in performance and engineering excellence. Designed by Owen Nacker, the V16 engine powered some of the most exciting Cadillac automobiles. This engine wasn't the only innovative feature, because 1930 V16s also included the first vacuum-assisted "power" brakes. Cadillacs were truly becoming driver responsive.

Cadillac continued to pioneer and exert its leadership in other important engineering advances in this decade. Work began on the automatic transmission at Cadillac in 1932. In 1933, the first independent front suspension appeared on an experimental Cadillac and became a standard feature on the GM lineup for 1934.

Bill Mitchell, then only 24 years old, designed the new 1938 Cadillac 60 Special. Bigger than a LaSalle, the 60 special deleted running boards, featured thin window pillars, chrome-plated door window frames, and was designed to be the transition from chauffeur-driven to owner-driven luxury cars. This car would set styling trends for more than a decade.

## **1940-1950**

### **The war years and the good times that followed**

Sophistication, performance and comfort set new standards for the 1941 cars from Cadillac. That year, Cadillac first offered the hydramatic automatic transmission, as well as air conditioning and a gas tank filler cleverly hidden under the left taillight.

Cadillac stopped all civilian automotive production in February 1942 to join the war effort on the homefront. In just 55 days, the first tank powered by two Cadillac V8 engines and two hydramatic transmissions rolled off the line at the Clark Avenue factory in Detroit. Other wartime products included M-8 howitzer carriages, the 1944 M-24 light tank and components for the V12 Allison Aircraft engine. Even General Douglas MacArthur's staff car was a Cadillac, a Series 75.

After the war, cars from Cadillac were again ready to create a higher standard for the world. The 1948 Cadillacs had tailfins for the first time, modeled after the Lockheed P-38 fighter plane. Harley Earl had been inspired by that plane's design and couldn't wait to translate the profile to his cars. Because there was so much excitement about this design innovation, dealers would often park cars in their showrooms with the backs facing the window, leaving the taillights on overnight. The tailfins from these Cadillacs set design trends for decades.

In 1949, Cadillac introduced the high-compression, short-stroke, lightweight "modern" V8. This engine, which was smaller, lighter and more fuel efficient, made Cadillac the fastest, most powerful passenger vehicle in America. At the end of the decade, Briggs Cunningham finished tenth overall in a standard 1950 Cadillac at LeMans.

The Coupe DeVille hardtop was also introduced in 1949, earning Cadillac Motor Trend's first "Car of the Year" award.

## **1950-1960**

### **The height of opulence**

Some of the most significant Cadillacs came off the assembly line during this amazing decade. General Motors held its “Mid Century Motorama” at New York City’s elegant Waldorf Astoria Hotel in January 1950. Among the featured cars was the Cadillac Debutante, which was inspired by the stage play “The Solid Gold Cadillac.” In June of that year, Fortune magazine held a survey among its readers, asking the question, “What car do you think you will buy next?” Cadillac led the survey and also ranked “best looking” and “best value” among luxury models. Cadillac celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1952 with a series of “golden anniversary” models. The introduction of power steering as standard equipment was an engineering enhancement that year.

In 1953, Cadillac introduced the Eldorado, which was the first postwar custom luxury car. This was a magnificent machine, with the industry’s first wraparound windshield and visors, or “frenched” headlights. Special equipment included a metal convertible boot, cutdown doors, leather upholstery, chrome wire wheels, enhanced styling and signal-seeking radio. The Eldorado sold for \$7,750, which was considered a great deal of money at the time, but still an excellent investment.

Restyling efforts to the 1954 Eldorado featured the “Dagmar” front bumper guard design, named after the voluptuous television star of “Jerry Lester’s House Party.” Four-way power seats were also introduced that year.

The 1957 Eldorado Brougham was truly a custom Cadillac. This car featured new quad headlights and a pillarless four-door design. The center-opening doors offered unobstructed entry to the front or rear seats. Standard equipment included low-profile tires, a self-opening and closing trunk, air suspension, air conditioning, and personal vanities that included a small bottle of Arpege perfume. With a brushed stainless steel roof, the Eldorado Brougham had a look like no other car.

Harley Earl’s 1959 Cadillac was the ultimate translation of jet aircraft design. This car has achieved cult status and was the subject of a U.S. Postal Service commemorative stamp in 1996. Fans of the Fifties look to the 1959 Cadillac as a true icon of that amazing decade.

## **1960-1970**

### **Refinement and innovation**

The flamboyant tailfins continued to be refined through 1964 when Cadillac built its three millionth car. However, design enhancements were complemented by several engineering innovations that were introduced in this decade.

In 1962, Cadillac models featured cornering lights and dual circuit braking, both key safety innovations. Also new for 1964 was automatic climate control, which provided “set it and forget it” control of both air conditioning and heating. A welcome cold-weather climate option was electrically heated seats, which first appeared on 1966 models.

In 1967, Cadillac introduced the totally redesigned front-wheel-drive Eldorado. This personal luxury car was built on a completely new chassis. Higher levels of performance were achieved in 1968 with the new 472-cubic-inch engine and again with the 1970 Eldorado, which featured a 500-cubic-inch V8 engine. Track Master anti-skid transistorized rear braking was also available. A magazine survey ranked the Cadillac “most comfortable and easiest to control” among ten German, British and American luxury cars.

## **1970-1980**

### **A world of new challenges**

Passenger security and environmental protection were the focus of Cadillac innovation in the Seventies. Fuel economy had always been a Cadillac trademark, despite the cars’ size and luxury. In this decade, engines were designed for better fuel efficiency and reduced emissions.

In 1971, in order to reduce lead emissions that resulted from the use of premium or high octane gasoline, engines were designed to run on regular fuel. By 1975, the cars were engineered to operate using both regular unleaded fuel and pollution-reducing catalytic converters.

For Cadillac’s 70th anniversary year in 1972, many styling refinements were introduced. An improved bumper-crash absorption system was introduced on 1973 Cadillacs. Driver and front seat occupant safety air bags were offered in 1974, 1975 and 1976 models.

The five millionth Cadillac rolled off the assembly line in June 1973, and yearly production was running at 300,000 or more.

Cadillac introduced the new internationally sized Seville in May 1975. This car was a more compact and maneuverable Cadillac with generous interior dimensions and enhanced fuel economy. Seville featured electronic fuel injection as standard equipment.

As America celebrated its 200th birthday, Cadillac introduced a bicentennial edition of the Eldorado convertible. This patriotic 1976 model was white with red and blue pinstriping, white leather seating with red piping, and wheel discs with white inserts.

The Eldorado for 1979 offered a combination of engineering features not found in any other car, including front-wheel drive, four-wheel independent suspension, and an electronic fuel-injected V8 engine. While shorter in length, head and leg room were greater in the front and rear seats, and there was more usable trunk space.

## **1980-1990**

### **Northstar rising**

The all-new 1980 Seville featured sheer edges and dramatic styling, unlike any other American-built car on the road. For the first time, Seville shared a front-wheel-drive chassis with Eldorado.

John O. Grettenberger, who was named general manager on January 10, 1984, would lead Cadillac for more than 13 years -- the longest tenure of any Cadillac general manager.

As the nation began to enjoy a healthier economic climate, sales of luxury cars increased. Cadillac enjoyed excellent results in 1984, with calendar year sales of 320,017. The convertible returned to Cadillac that year. Production was limited to 2,000 Eldorado Biarritz convertibles.

The 1987 Allante luxury two-door convertible was unique in many ways. The body was designed and manufactured by the Italian firm Pininfarina in Turin, Italy. Bodies were flown to Detroit on 747s for assembly of the powertrain and chassis, creating the world's longest assembly line -- a distance of 3,300 miles. This front-wheel-drive sports car pioneered many Cadillac innovations, including traction control and the Northstar engine.

In the late Eighties, Cadillac engineering, manufacturing and design staffs teamed up to introduce such innovations as the elegant 1989 DeVille and Fleetwood.

At the end of the decade, the 1989 Fleetwood featured a full range of Cadillac styling cues: a subtle suggestion of fins along with rear fender skirts, long, low protective side molding treatment, a stylish chrome radiator grille, and wreath and crest.

## **1990-2000**

### **The continuing rewards of quality**

Cadillac was once again recognized as a world leader in quality when the company was awarded the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 1990. Cadillac was the first automobile manufacturer to win the Baldrige and, as of 1997, was the only automobile manufacturer to ever receive this honor.

In 1992, the introduction of the totally redesigned Eldorado and Seville received additional worldwide acclaim. Seville was the recipient of Motor Trend's "Car of the Year" honors as well as numerous other awards. A year later, Cadillac again created a higher standard in the area of automotive engineering with the Northstar System. The highly acclaimed Northstar System of power and state-of-the-art technology now provides Cadillac drivers an unparalleled balance of efficiency, power, control and safety.

In 1993, the Fleetwood Brougham was completely redesigned and continued the long-standing Cadillac tradition as the choice for professional car conversions, including the presidential limousine.

In 1996, power output for the Northstar engine was increased to 300 hp in the DeVille Concours, Eldorado Touring Coupe and Seville STS.

For the 1997 model year, Cadillac added StabiliTrak, an exclusive safety technology to the Seville STS, Eldorado Touring Coupe and DeVille Concours. In addition, Cadillac redesigned the DeVille, adding a new model, the d'Elegance, which offers a distinctive expression of classic American luxury and the highest level of comfort and classic luxury amenities. Side airbags were also added to all DeVille models. The Catera, Cadillac's entry luxury sedan, was also introduced for 1997. As Cadillac moves toward its second century, this innovative car company proudly continues a rich tradition of bringing sophistication, performance, safety and innovative technology to the market.

Appendix D – Advertising Expenditures by Luxury Automobile Manufacturers 1950-1960

Source: Frederic Stuart, ed. *Factors Affecting Determination of Market Shares in the American Automobile Industry* (Hempstead, N.Y.: Hofstra University) 1965, pages 26-28

All figures in millions of dollars

	Cadillac	Lincoln	Imperial	Packard
1950	2.86	1.96	-----	2.07
1951	2.39	1.82	-----	3.10
1952	3.67	3.14	-----	3.61
1953	3.42	4.04	-----	4.16
1954	3.95	4.32	-----	2.67
1955	5.82	5.23	-----	5.13
1956	6.80	6.12	1.50	3.77
1957	6.91	4.86	1.95	0.91
1958	5.93	3.56	1.97	0.22
1959	6.98	3.06	2.52	-----
1960	7.20	2.79	2.41	-----

Notes: Until model year 1955, Imperial was not an independent brand, being the highest trim line of the Chrysler brand. Packard discontinued independent production in 1956, becoming a rebadged Studebaker for the 1957 and 1958 model years and the brand name was totally dropped thereafter.

## Appendix E – Style Change Index

Source: Frederic Stuart, ed. *Factors Affecting Determination of Market Shares in the American Automobile Industry* (Hempstead, N.Y.: Hofstra University) 1965, pages 87-94.

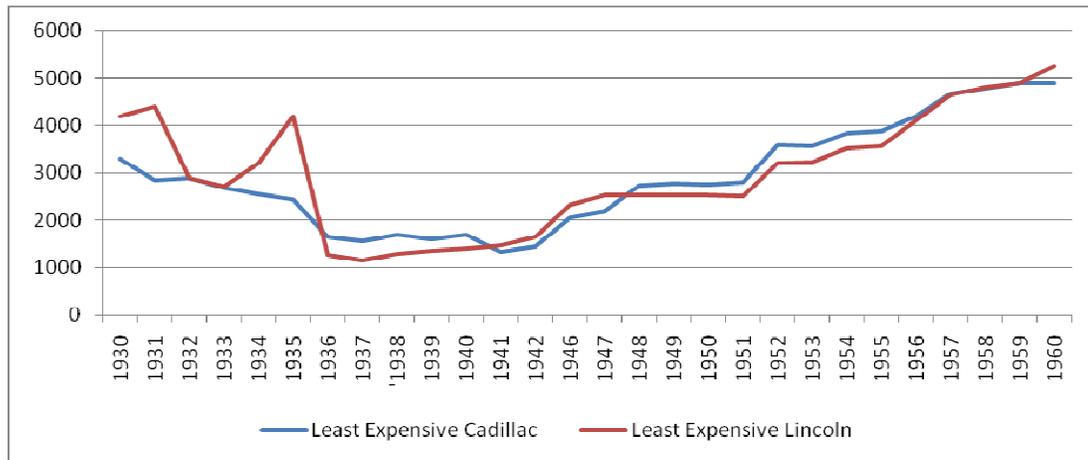
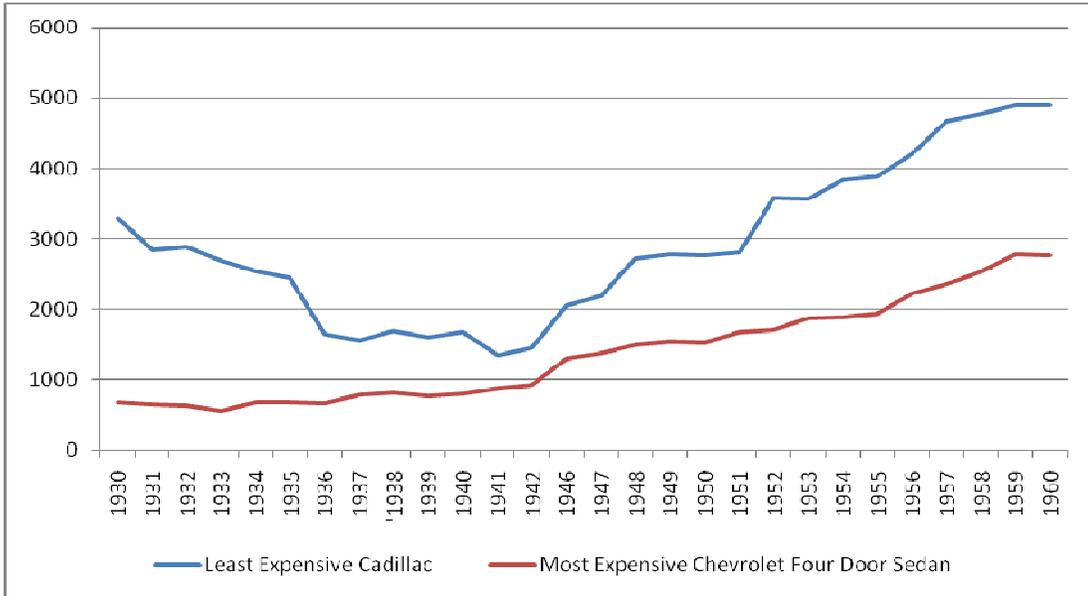
In an attempt to determine the extent to which the annual model change helped to sell cars, a group of students in Hofstra University’s School of Business devised a scale by which the extent to which a particular model year’s car could be quantitatively compared with the same make of car for the previous year. They called this figure the “Style Change Index”. A car in which all components – body, frame, and mechanical – were significantly changed would receive a score of 4.0.

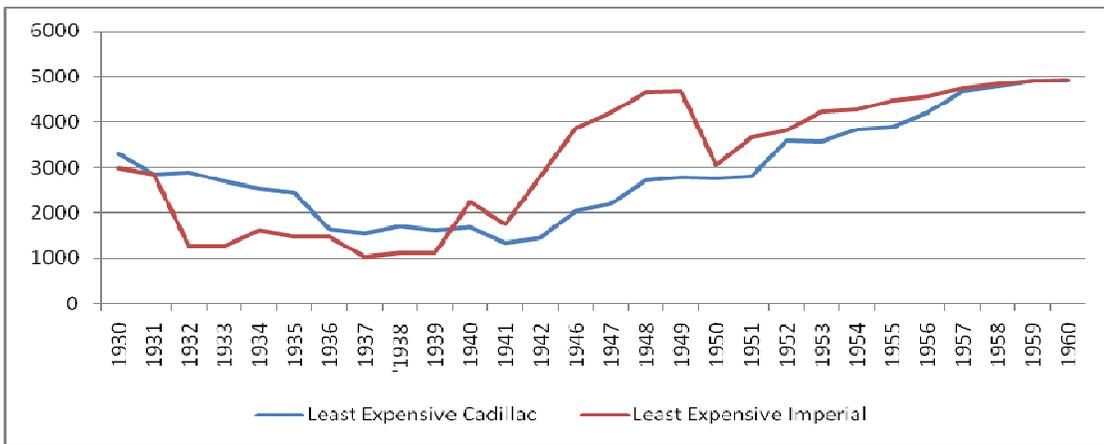
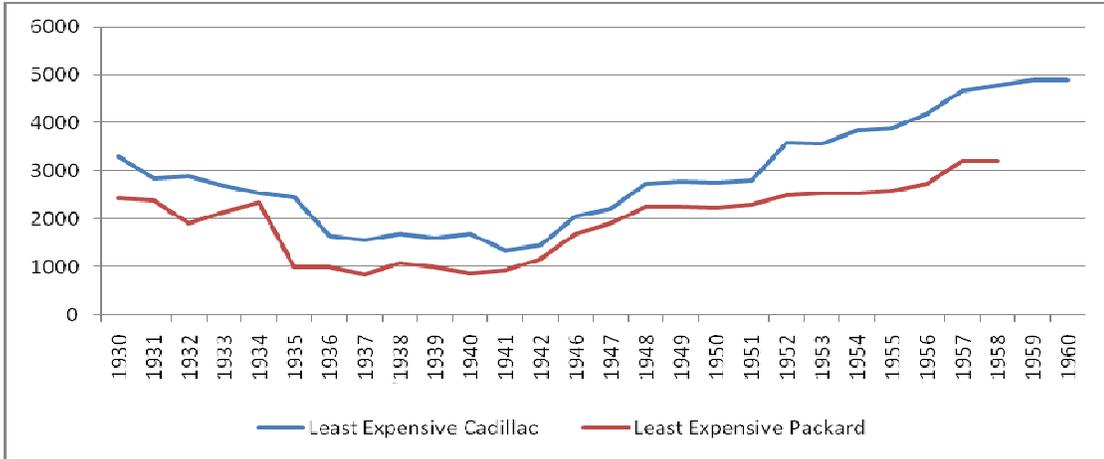
	Cadillac	Lincoln	Imperial*	Packard
1950	0.9	1.0	0.4	0.5
1951	0.4	0.6	1.0	1.2
1952	0.4	1.1	0.3	0.7
1953	0.4	0.4	1.1	0.6
1954	2.0	0.2	0.7	0.5
1955	0.6	0.8	0.5	0.4
1956	1.9	1.8	1.3	1.1
1957	1.2	1.5	2.2	-----
1958	0.4	1.6	1.2	-----
1959	0.9	0.5	1.4	-----
1960	0.6	0.8	1.1	-----

\* Since the study did not specifically break out Imperial, the style change index for Chrysler is used.

## Appendix F. Comparative Price Charts

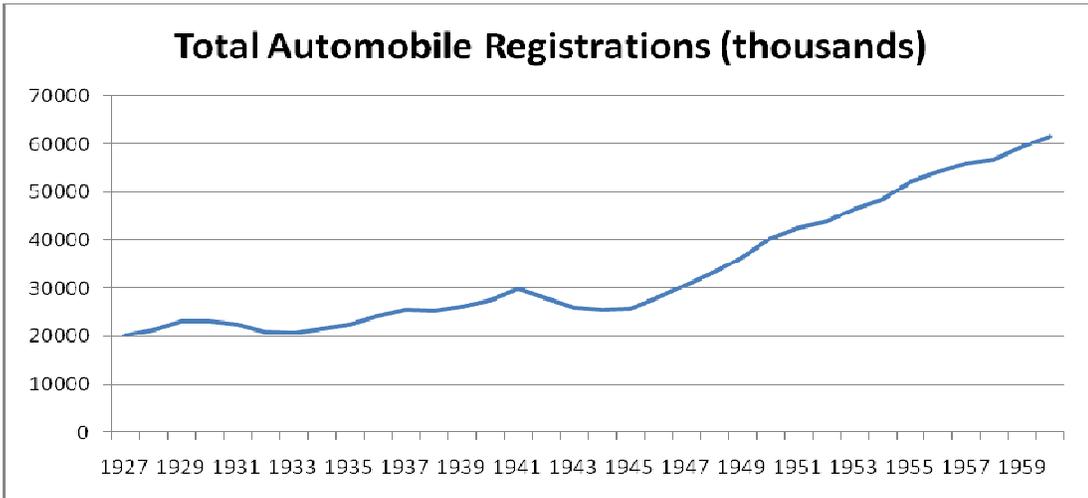
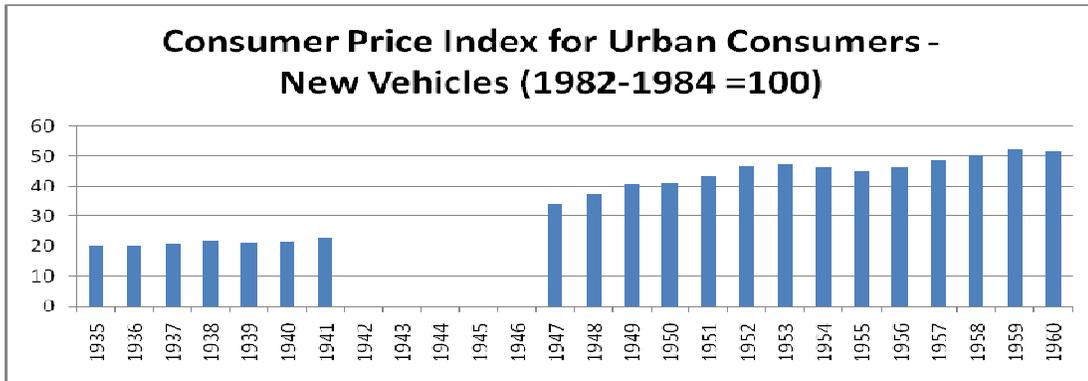
Source: Auto Editors of Consumer Guide, *Encyclopedia of American Cars* (Lincolnwood, Illinois: Publications International) 2006.

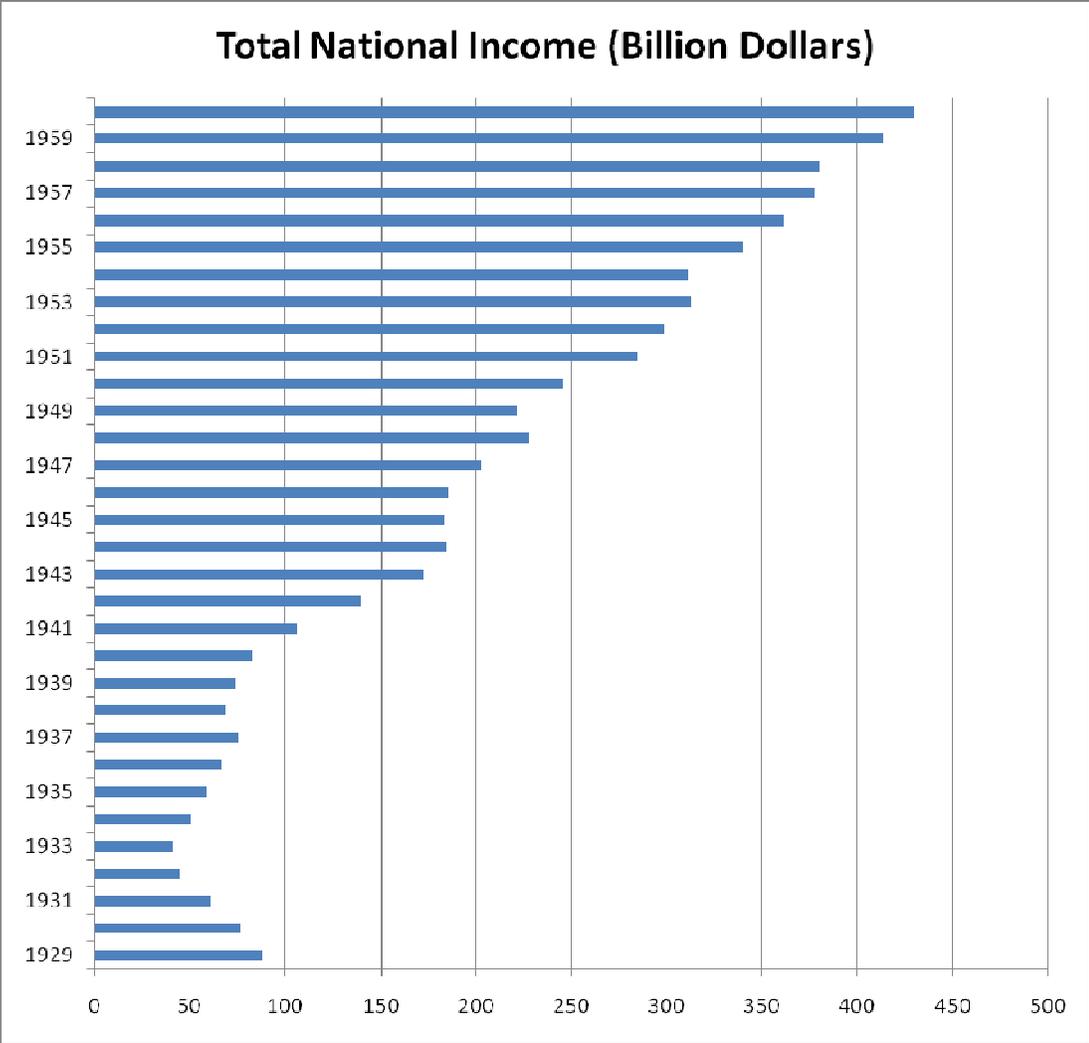




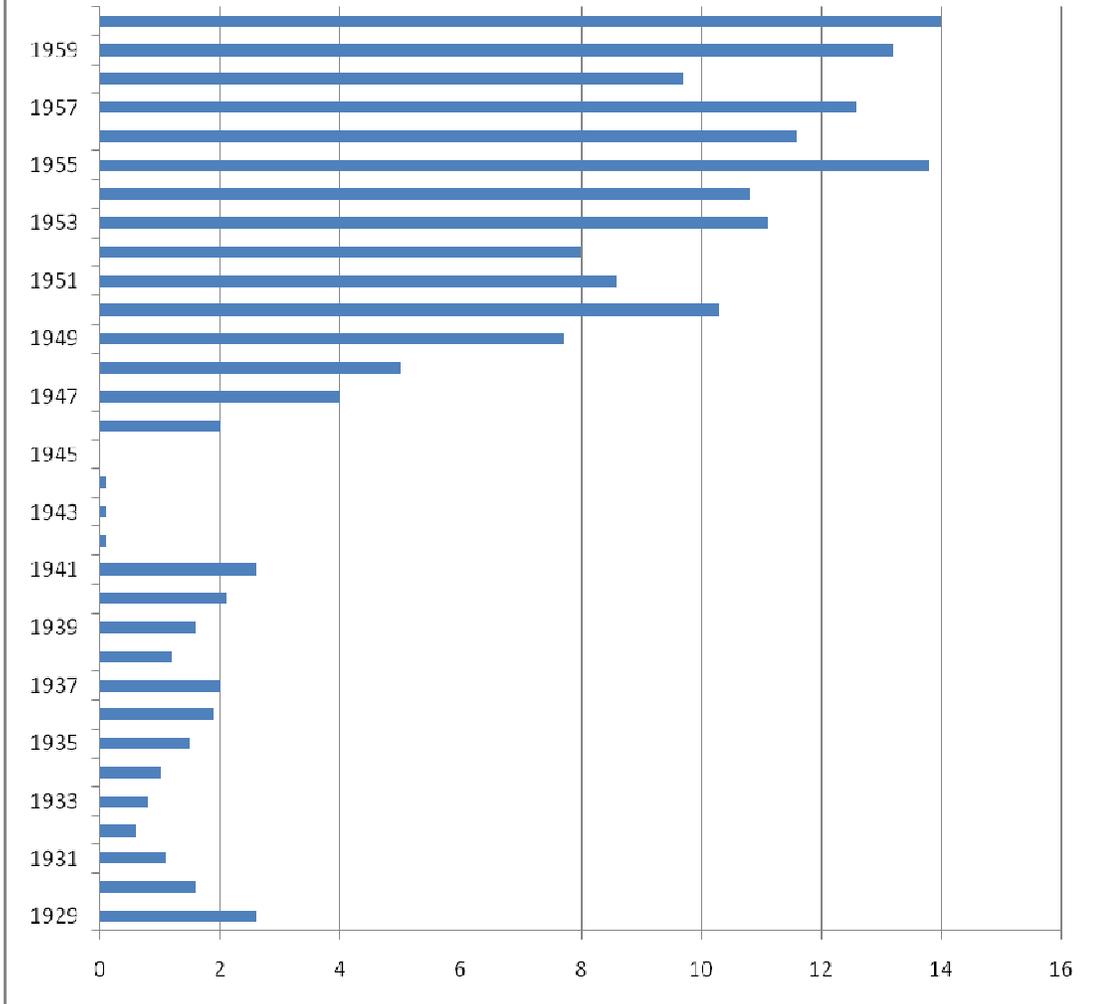
Appendix G. General Economic Information

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition Online





## Consumption Expenditures - New Automobiles (Billion Dollars)



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