

UNITED

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AUTOS '83

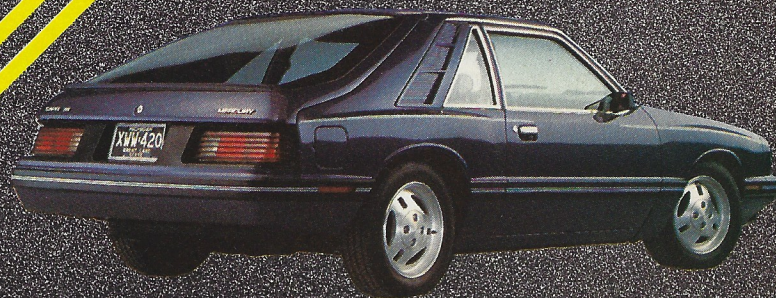
THE FUN IS BACK

Detroit spent a decade slimming down. Now it's bringing gusto back to the American driving machine.

By Gary Witzenburg

Convertibles, high-output engines, sporty performance. It sounds like 1966, but it isn't. It's 1983. A decade and a half after the heyday of Detroit's preeminence in the automotive world, fun is returning to the American car. Fun—with some new technological twists: digital electronic and talking dashboards, superior seats, and great sound systems. U.S. automakers have learned how to build economy into their products. Now they are putting driving pleasure back into them, too. ▶

Mercury Capri



Ford Thunderbird



Ford Mustang Convertible

VW Rabbit GTI

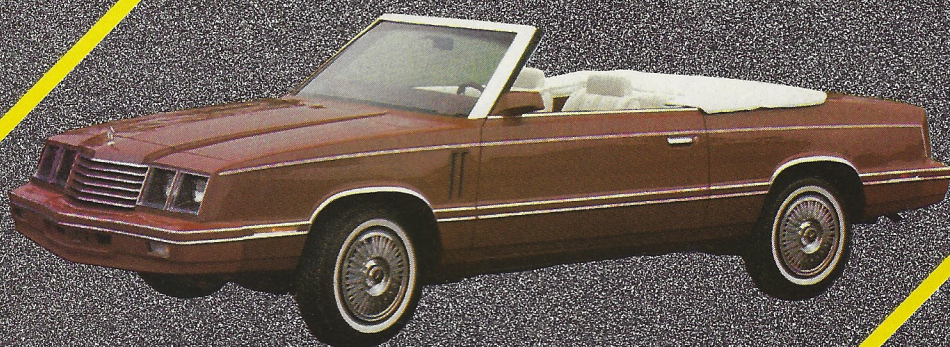




AMC/Renault Alliance



Plymouth Scamp GT



Dodge 400 Convertible



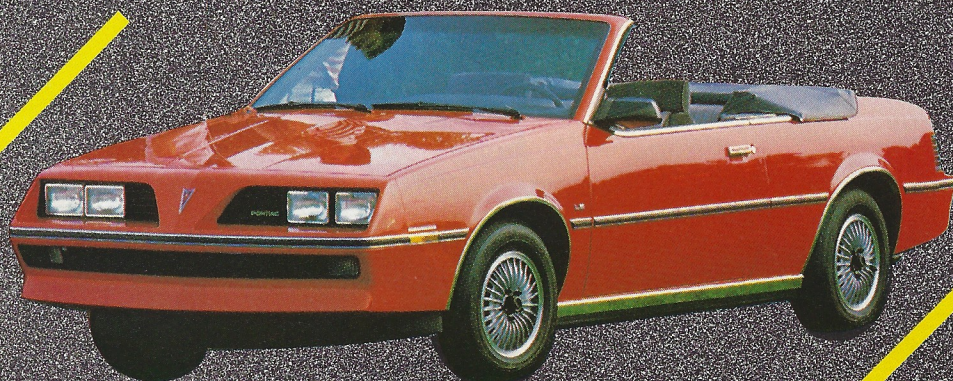
Hurst/Olds Cutlass



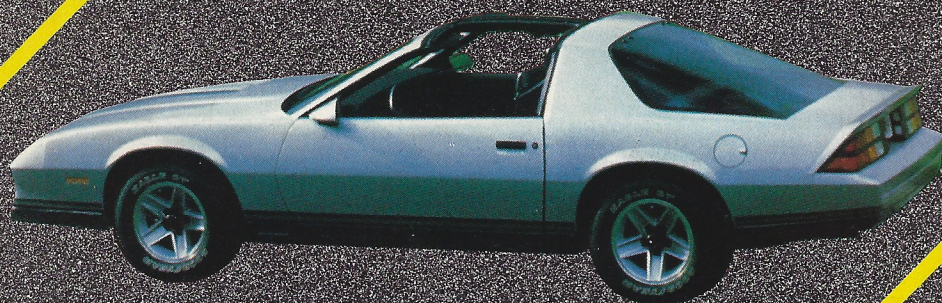
Chrysler E Class



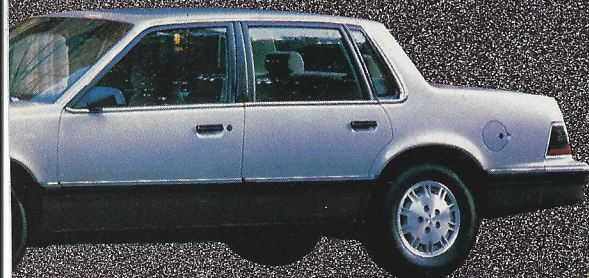
Pontiac 2000 Sunbird Convertible



Chevrolet Camaro



Pontiac 6000 STE



*There are
plenty of
pleasant
surprises,
even for the
cognoscenti.*

Since the industry is offering fewer all-new models this year than in the past, more resources have been available for fine tuning, refining, and improving existing ones. This means better quality and more fuel economy on the one hand, and—perhaps more important to an industry riding out a deadly three-year slump—more fun and performance on the other.

The tough import challenge has been answered. The latest high-tech American cars take a backseat to no one on fuel efficiency.

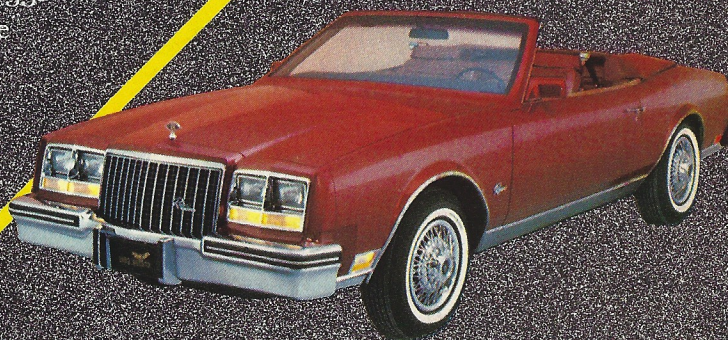
Thanks to a lot of hard work, changing attitudes, and better cooperation among labor, management, suppliers, and dealers, plus increasing use of computer-aided design and manufacturing techniques, domestic-car quality is now competitive and still improving.

The new car year is a lot more than fine tuning, however.

There are plenty of pleasant surprises—even for the cognoscenti.

General Motors has no *totally* fresh car lines for the fall, but there are several very interesting new versions of existing ones. Pontiac's lovely European-style 6000 STE sedan, for example, is a performance version of the mid-size front-wheel-drive (fwd) A-car. It's distinguished by a six-headlamp front (the center ones are fog lamps), aluminum alloy wheels, and full-width "smoked glass" tail lamps. A 135-horse-power high-output (HO) V-6 engine turns on the performance, while electronic ride control and a special curve-straightening suspension intended for serious drivers smoothes out the ride. Inside are multi-adjustable seats, aircraft-style red-lighted instruments, and a stereo system with its own built-in graphic equalizer. Then there's the fascinating (and useful) Driver Information Center to monitor lights, doors, and fluid levels. The ride-control sys-

Buick Riviera Convertible



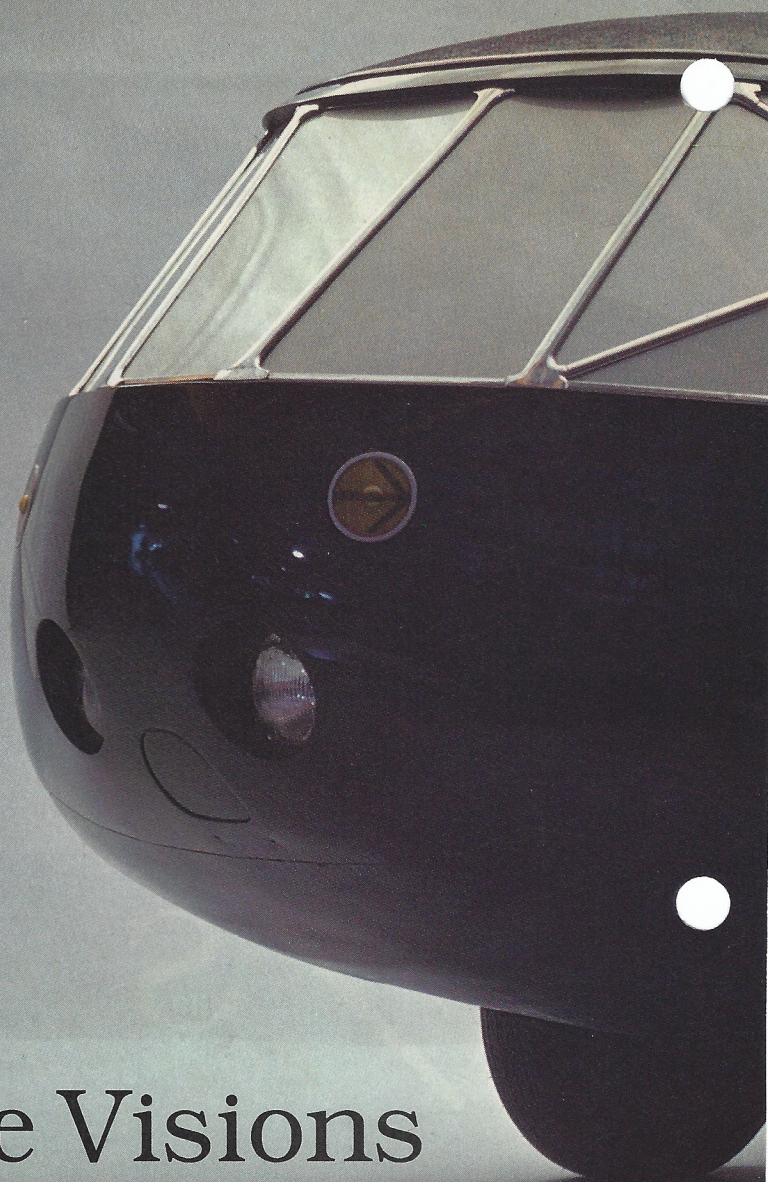
tem compensates for varying loads by pumping extra air into or out of the shocks, and its built-in air compressor can be used to inflate tires or beach balls through a handy valve in the trunk.

Oldsmobile has revived the legendary hot rod Hurst/Olds Cutlass, complete with a 180-hp V-8, three-stick Hurst "Lightning Rod" shifter for the automatic transmission (shift it manually if you want) and a striking black-and-silver paint job set off by aerodynamic spoilers front and rear. Both Olds and the rival Buick have new station-wagon models of their fwd J-cars (Firenza and Skyhawk), and Buick offers exciting T-Type versions of no less than five of its car lines: Skyhawk, Skylark, Century, Regal, and Riviera, the latter pair powered by turbocharged V-6 engines. Cadillac has given its Cimarron J-car a face-lift with a new grille and standard fog lamps.

Soon after the first of the year, there should be beautiful convertible versions of the Chevrolet (Cavalier) and Pontiac (2000 Sunbird) J-cars in dealer showrooms. All the GM J-cars benefit from upgraded engines (a choice of 2.0-liter or an overhead cam 1.8-liter, both fuel injected) for better performance and smoothness, plus increased availability of fun-driving, fuel-saving, five-speed manual transmissions. The stunning Chevy Camaro and Pontiac Firebird also get five speeds, standard in most models, as do the subcompact Chevy Chevette and Pontiac 1000. And while it won't make the fall introductions, look for Chevy's *very* exciting all-new Corvette to hit the streets sometime in March. It's sleeker, smaller, and lighter than the current Corvette and promises much better performance along with cornering capabilities almost unheard of this side of Le Mans and Daytona.

One terrific new option you'll be able to buy for the Corvette when it comes (available right now in Cadillac's Eldorado and Seville, Buick's Riviera, and Olds's Toronado) is the most sophisticated

(continued on page 113)



The Visions of Dreamers

Some of the industry's most wondrous creations never made it to the marketplace.

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1937 AIROMOBILE SEDAN EXPERIMENTAL

Although this three-wheeled, front-drive automobile (right) proved itself a technical success, performing up to 80 mph and averaging 43.6 mpg, its bizarre

body failed to attract financing. The technology of its air-cooled engine was later used in some airplane and helicopter engines.

(continued from page 60)

stereo sound system ever offered as original equipment in any American car. Jointly developed by GM's Delco Electronics Division and the Bose Corporation, a leading maker of hi-fi speakers and electronics, it features four separate speaker/amplifier units with tonal quality acoustically tailored to the interior characteristics of each car.

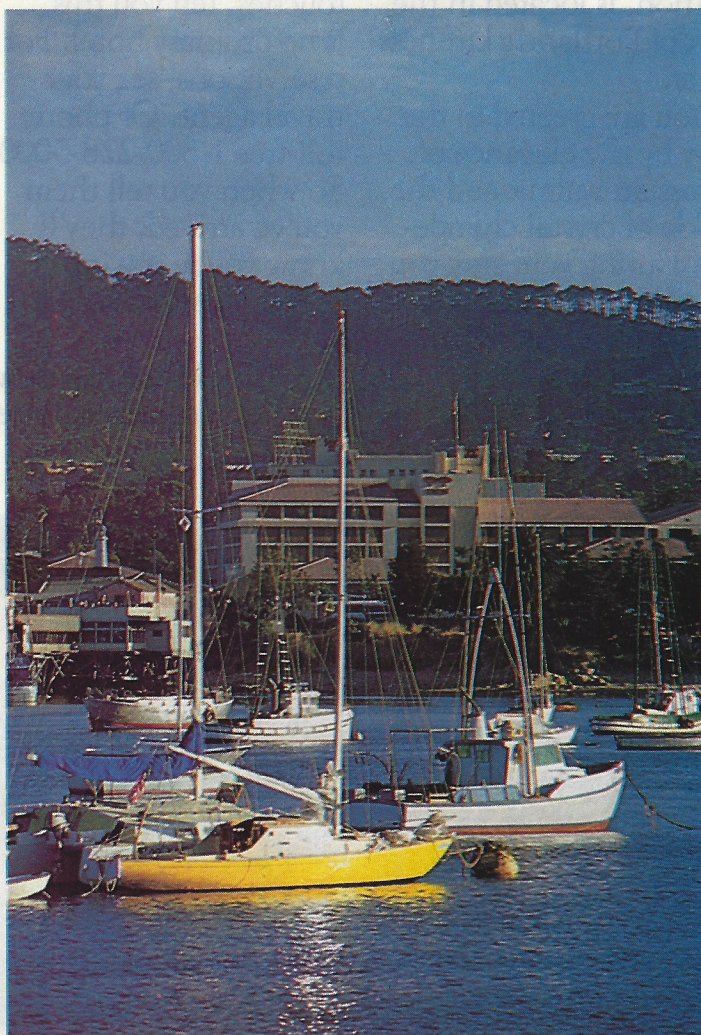
Ford's gorgeous new Thunderbird and Mercury's Cougar, models that are twins under the nameplates, won't

With significant improvement to nearly every car, the domestic industry has never offered better than it's offering now.

be available until next month, but both should set heads spinning. With smooth, rounded, highly aerodynamic styling unlike any production car Ford has built in the past, they set a new trend in design for the company and maybe for the industry. One size down, Ford's Mustang and Mercury's Capri are nicely face-lifted front and rear, the latter with an all-glass "bubble-back" rear hatch. Both will be available as convertibles, and both also get about 15 more horsepower than this year's model, optional five speeds, and additional improvements to their hot 5.0-liter V-8 GT and RS performance versions—and they already were the fastest-accelerating domestic cars on the road!

The intermediate-size sedans, formerly known as Ford Granada and Mercury Cougar, are totally restyled for 1983 and now wear the traditional LTD and Marquis family-car nameplates. These offer a range of engines from a frugal 2.3-liter four-cylinder to a 3.8-liter V-6, and even a propane-powered version of the four. Also on the docket for fall are new GT and RS performance packages for the Ford Escort and Mercury Lynx subcompacts. Besides the usual handling suspensions, fat tires, spoilers, and blacked-out exterior trim, both fea-

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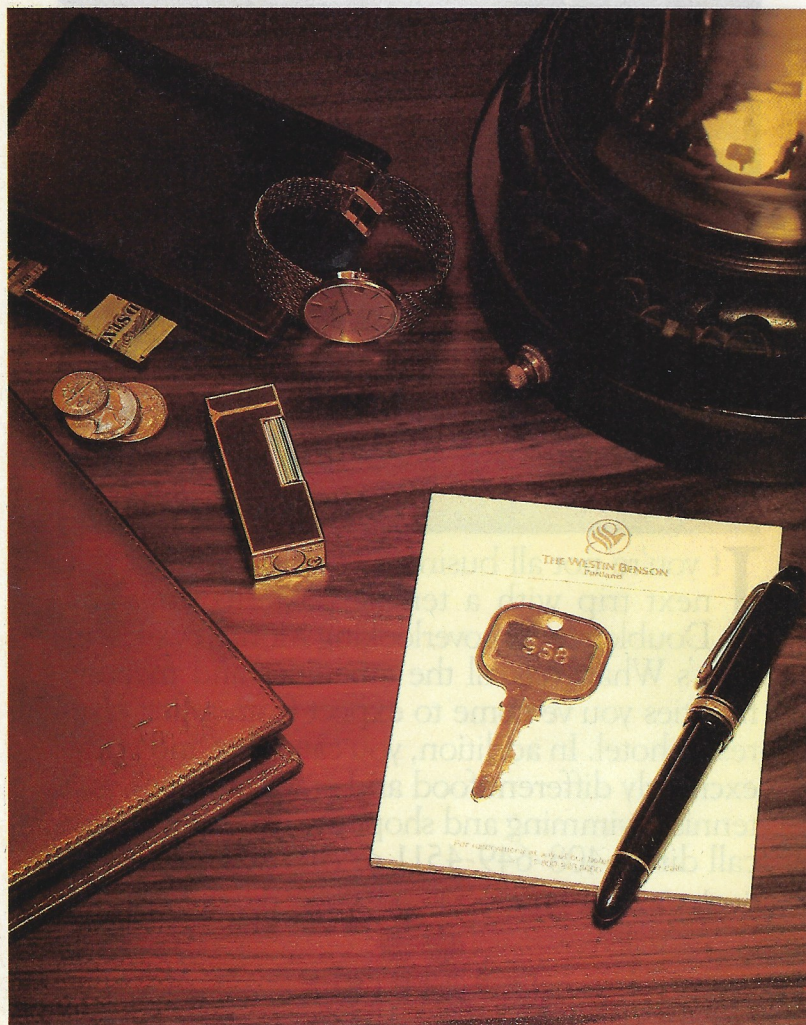
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ture a new fuel-injected version of the 1.6-liter Escort engine coupled to new five-speed manual transaxles to make them as much fun to drive as they are to look at. And all 1983 manual-shift Escorts and Lynxes, as well as the EXP and LN-7 sporty coupés, have a new upshift light on the instrument panel that tells you when changing to the next higher gear will save you fuel.

Chrysler has stretched and plushed its popular K-cars to come up with a pair of really nice front-drive luxury sedans called Chrysler E Class and Dodge 600, and there's a Euro-Sport (ES) version of the latter. These are three inches longer in the wheelbase than the K-based Chrysler LeBaron and Dodge 400 introduced last year, and most of that extra length goes to additional rear seat and trunk room. They offer a choice of Chrysler's own 2.2-liter four—both more efficient and 10-horsepower stronger—or a Mitsubishi-of-Japan-built 2.6-liter "Silent" Shaft four-cylinder, which is more powerful still. Except in the 600 ES (which comes with Chrysler's new five speed), automatic transmission is standard, and there's an optional electronic trip computer and a wonderful 11-function Voice Alert "talking dashboard" reminder and warning system that even thanks you for buckling your safety belts.

A sprightly but fuel-sipping 1.6-liter four from Peugeot of France replaces the 1.7-liter VW-based engine in the Plymouth Horizon and Dodge Omni subcompacts, while the new Chrysler-built five-speed transaxle becomes available in both these and the Reliant and Aries K-cars. The Charger and Turismo performance versions of Plymouth's TC3 and Dodge's 024 sport coupés are even quicker for 1983, thanks to the uprated 2.2-liter engine and the available five-speed gearbox. New for the sporty Plymouth Sapporo and Dodge Challenger coupés (both built by Mitsubishi) is state-of-the-art digital/graphic instrumentation and a terrific six-speaker stereo. Also new is Plymouth's answer to Dodge's delightful Rampage 024-based minicar/pickup, which you'll find filed under Scamp at your Plymouth dealer.

American Motors is touting its fir jointly developed, U.S.-manufactured Renault, the subcompact Alliance. Essentially an Americanized version of the very successful European Renault

9, the Alliance comes in boxy but attractive two-door coupé and four-door sedan variations and is unusually roomy for its size. Long-legged front-seat passengers may want more seat-adjustment ability, but rear-seat travelers have good foot- and legroom thanks to an innovative pedestal seat design. The ride is comfortably smooth, and handling is far better than average for a French-designed

econocar. Power comes from a fuel-efficient, sprightly 1.4-liter four driving the front wheels through a choice of four-speed manual, five speed, or three-speed automatic transaxle.

VW of America finally has a domestic answer to the high-performance European Golf (Rabbit) GTI. Not surprisingly, they call it Rabbit GTI. Its 1.8-liter engine cranks out 90 horsepower, 16 more than the regular Rabbit's 1.7-liter four, and it gets from 0 to 60 mph two seconds quicker than the

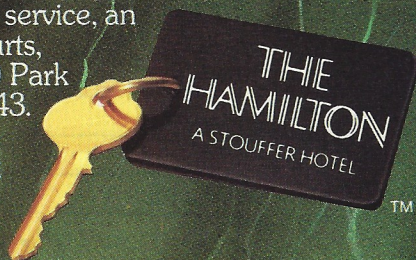
regular. A functional front spoiler, fender flares, GTI badges, black-out bumpers and trim, full instrumentation, sport seats and steering wheel, special handling suspension, vented front disc brakes, five-speed transaxle, and oversize tires on 14-inch alloy wheels are all part of the package. In other words, it's a serious mini hot rod that will add much-needed excitement to VW's U.S.-built Rabbit line.

Call 1983 a transition year if you like, but you can't call it boring. With significant improvement to nearly every car in every line from every company, the domestic industry has never offered more or better than it's offering right now. After a decade of anti-performance regulation, things are finally becoming fun again in Motor City. If the economy improves, the stage is set for the industry's long-awaited comeback. ■



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Jargon Update

Anyone out of the market for the past few years will confront some unfamiliar terms in the car literature of the eighties. Here is an abbreviated glossary:

A-car—General Motors's latest, most luxurious family of fwd sedans. Individual models include Chevrolet Celebrity, Pontiac 6000, Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera, and Buick Century.

fwd—front-wheel drive.

J-car—the smallest fwds from GM: Chevrolet Cavalier, Pontiac 2000, Oldsmobile Firenza, Buick Skylark, and Cadillac Cimarron.

K-car—Chrysler's mid-size fwd cars, the Plymouth Reliant and the Dodge Aries.

Liter—the combined volume (in the metric system) of the cylinders in an engine. Greater volume normally produces greater power.

Spoiler—an aerodynamic device, most often a lip at the rear of the car, that decreases air drag (an "air dam" accomplishes this from beneath the front bumper).

Transaxle—a combination transmission and drive axle found in today's fwds.

Gary Witzenburg is a Detroit-based automobile writer.