

# Collectible AUTOMOBILE

1967-68 Ford Mustang and Shelby GT  
Continental Mark II and Cadillac Eldorado Brougham  
1977-89 Dodge Diplomat: Negotiating Turmoil



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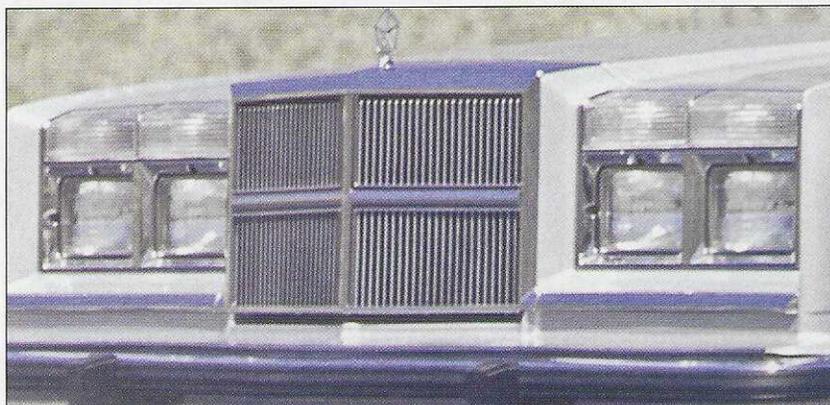
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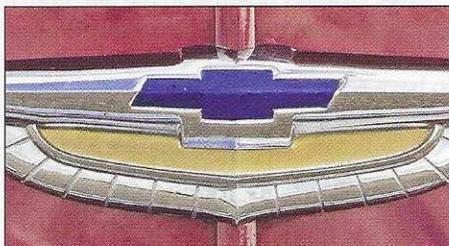
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# The 1956-57 Continental Mark II and the 1957-58 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham

by Gary Witzenburg

**I**t was the Fabulous Fifties, and the U.S. economy was on a postwar roll. General Motors' Chevrolet Division had launched its Corvette sports car for 1953 and a handsome new line of cars with an eager new V-8 engine for '55. Ford had countered with its 1955 Thunderbird and its own fine-looking lineup of cars that same year.

But some leaders within both competing companies wanted something much more. They wanted to design, develop and produce nothing less than America's finest and most expensive cars capable of out-classing anything made in the United States and Europe. But they clearly wouldn't be sold as Chevrolets or Fords.

So, what happened when two hard-charging competitors took on the same daunting challenge at about the same time? Would the resulting products be similar? No, they would not.

Just look at these two extra-special American luxury chariots. The 1956 Continental Mark II was not a Lincoln, rather it started as a product of a new division positioned higher than the Ford Motor Company's prestige make. It was a gracefully proportioned, cleanly styled, and understated two-door hardtop coupe toting its spare tire under a soon-to-be-signature bulge on its trunk. Simply put, it was meant to recapture the glory of Edsel Ford's original Lincoln Continental.

Over at General Motors, the 1957 Eldorado Brougham was installed as the top Cadillac offering and included in the Eldorado line that already featured some of the highly respected marque's priciest products. It was a chrome-laden, feature-loaded, ultra-lux four-door hardtop sedan that looked like it stepped straight out of the latest Motorama—because it did.

Yet there were similarities under their very different skins. Both rolled on 126-inch wheelbases. The 218.4-inch-long Mark II was two inches longer than the 216.3-inch Brougham, and the former

## Two surprisingly different approaches to the same basic question.

was also slightly taller at 56.3 inches versus 55.5 inches for the Cadillac. Both were very low for the time, thanks to specially designed frames that enabled their bodies to sit lower to the ground, not unlike late-Forties "step-down" Hudsons.

The Mark II was powered by Lincoln's new 368-cid four-barrel V-8 with an estimated 285 horsepower, the Brougham by a 325-bhp, 365-cid Cadillac V-8 fed by twin four-barrel carbs. The Continental's engine held a slight edge on torque, 402 pound-feet versus 400.

### The Continental Mark II

#### The Idea

As Continental enthusiasts know, the Mark II's story dates back to the late Thirties and Edsel Ford's creation of the original Lincoln Continental. As the story goes, Henry's only child returned from a European tour with the idea of creating just one "truly distinctive" car for himself—and maybe a couple more for his two oldest sons—that would incorporate some of the most desirable attributes of the best cars he saw in Europe. He supervised designer Eugene T. "Bob" Gregorie and the build of a prototype cabriolet on the bones of a Lincoln Zephyr, then used the car while vacationing in Florida. And so blown away were the well-heeled folks who saw it, he returned home with some 200 orders.

That led to a run of 5322 Continentals, 3045 coupes and 2277 cabriolet convertibles, between late 1939 and 1948, when that aging, still-Zephyr-based model was discontinued in favor of much-needed higher-volume products. But its loving

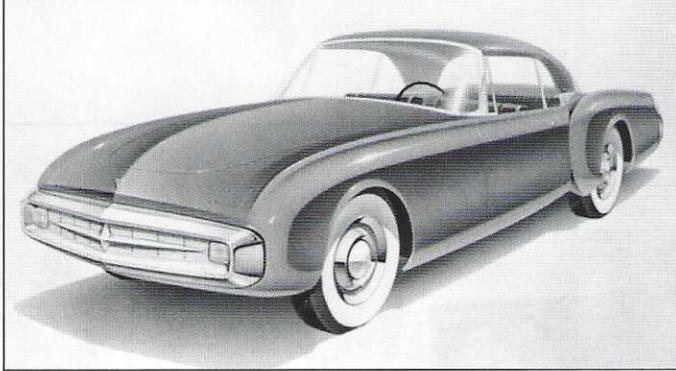
owners and wishful non-owners reportedly wrote hundreds of letters passionately demanding a suitable replacement. In one, author John Steinbeck called his Continental convertible, "the most beautiful car ever made in America" and begged to be "high on the list" for one of the first new Continentals. "I had many cars in my life, but none that so satisfied my soul as the Continental. She was a real lady."

So, Ford Motor Company formed a committee in 1952 to investigate the potential of future car models, and it came up with two recommendations. First, a line of new mid-price models placed above Mercury to compete with GM's Oldsmobile and Buick, and second a very high-priced luxury car. The latter would lead to the 1956 Continental Mark II, the former to the 1958 Edsel. A Special Products Operations team, later the Special Products Division, led by William Clay Ford—the youngest of Edsel's three sons and brother of company president Henry II—was charged with pursuing the ultra-lux car.

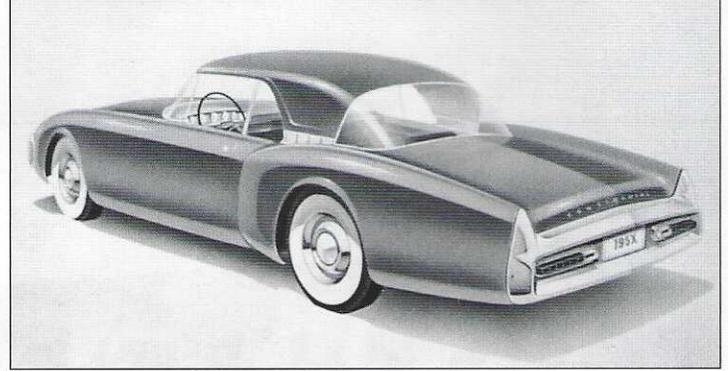
When Ford designers went to work to create essentially an American Rolls Royce in the formidable image of the original Continental, a quartet of independent stylists was also brought in to offer their best efforts. Special Products started with just two people—a chief stylist and a chief engineer—under Bill Ford, but by 1955 Continental had grown into its own stand-alone Ford Motor Company division. One of the first tasks that original trio took on was an intensive study of what made that first Continental so compelling and enduring.

"The original Continental," they concluded, according to January 4, 1955 speech by then-Continental Division assistant general manager Ben D. Mills to the New England Section of the Society of Automotive Engineers, "filled a gap in the passenger-car market by offering





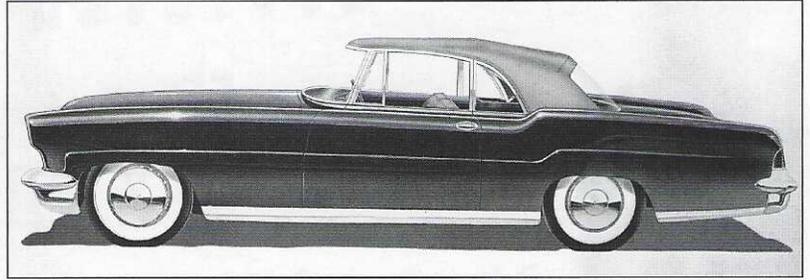
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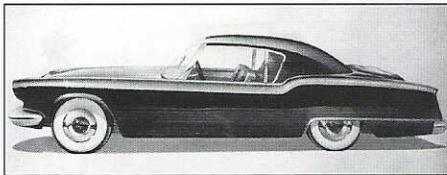
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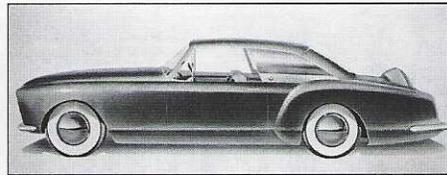
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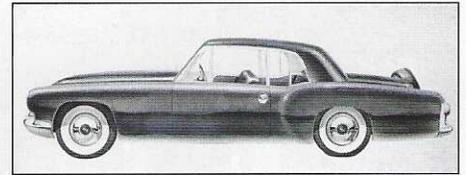
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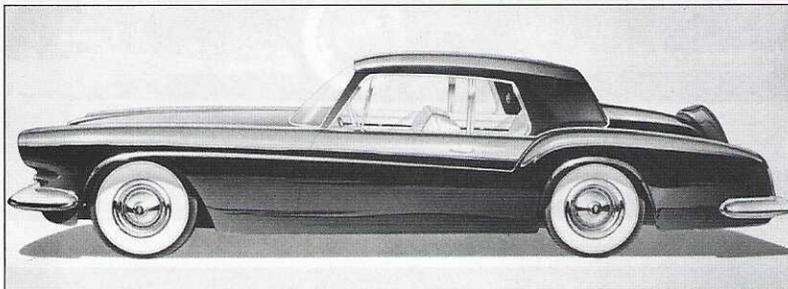
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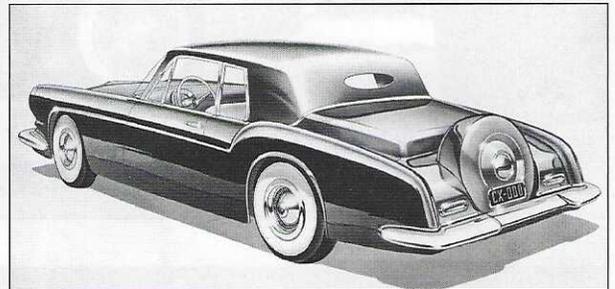
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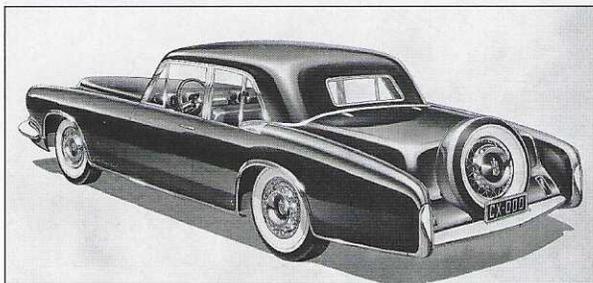
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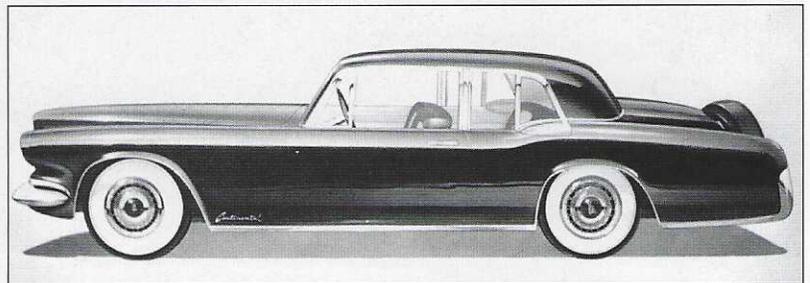
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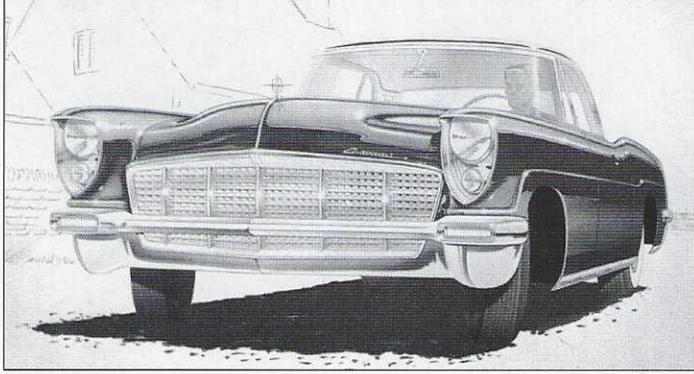
a vehicle whose beauty lay primarily in its honesty and simplicity of line...the concept of the original Continental has withstood the test of time, and this is because of its sound proportions and the functionalism of its design."

From the beginning, the younger Ford later stated, there were four major design objectives: "1) The new Continental was to have distinctive styling...based upon clean, classic lines rather than modern-

istic innovations. 2) The new car was to include technological advancements and special features which would enhance its value to the customer in terms of comfort, durability, safety, performance, and prestige. 3) The overall height of the car was not to exceed 58 inches. 4) There was to be maximum interchangeability of chassis parts with Lincoln, including engine, transmission, rear axle, and suspension."

The Ford stylists designed "...a series

of logical successors to the most recent Lincoln-Continental—the 1948 model." They first drew up a car that could have been the 1950 model, and then moved on to another that might have gone on sale for 1953. Then came a more modern design that could be put into production for 1956. "They called it 'modern formal,'" Mills enthused, "and defined it as a functional, enduring design emphasizing an air of distinction and elegant



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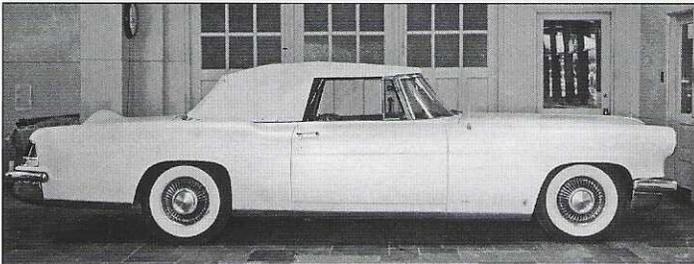
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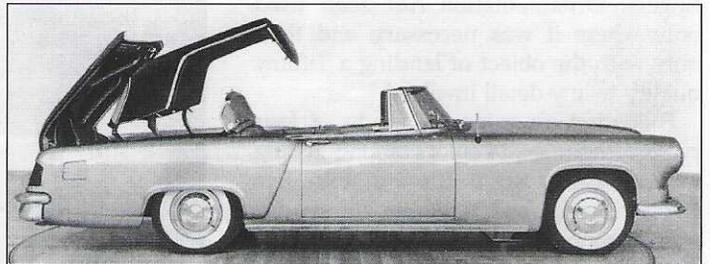
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1-11. A design competition was staged in April 1953 to decide what the Continental Mark II would look like. Designers taking part included Walter Buell Ford (1, 2, and 6), Rhys Miller and Arnott "Buzz" Grisinger (3), George Walker (5, 8-11), and Vince Gardner (7). John Reinhart's design (4) from the Special Products group was unanimously chosen by the executives that reviewed the competing designs. 12, 13. Sketches by Charles Phaneuf of the Special Products Division from 1953 and '54 point the way

to the production Mark II. 14. Phaneuf also sketched a Mark II convertible in 1954. 15, 16. A single Mark II convertible prototype was built by coachbuilder Derham. The car was used as a show car and later was driven by William Clay Ford's wife. It eventually entered a private collection. 17. The Continental Division engineered a retractable hardtop for the Mark II and built this prototype, but the idea was transferred to the Ford Division and put into production as the 1957-59 Ford Skyliner. 18. Quad headlamps were proposed for 1958.

simplicity. The beauty of this design lies in its proportions and fundamental composition of line and form; it symbolizes lasting quality and good taste and appreciation of things beautiful."

### The Launch

Nineteen-fifty-six was a memorable year in America. Dwight D. Eisenhower was re-elected president, Dr. Albert Sabin developed the oral polio vaccine, Grace Kelly married Monaco's Prince Rainier III, Congress approved the Highway Act enabling construction of the U.S. interstate highway system, and Elvis Presley was enjoying huge popularity. Most importantly for our story, Ford's fledgling Continental Division launched its super-luxury Mark II.



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Such a special car rated a special launch, so a Mark II was the centerpiece of the "Continental Salon," a Paris-themed street display, complete with a 60-foot replica of the Eiffel Tower, that

was set up inside the Ford Rotunda in Dearborn. On October 4, 1955, William Clay Ford, company vice president and group director, hosted a private showing of the car "for more than 300 press, radio, and television representatives attending a Ford-sponsored national press meeting."

Two days later, the Mark II was publicly unveiled at the Paris Motor Show. Back home, Detroit-area Ford employees and families were invited to visit the Rotunda and view the Continental Salon over the weekend of October 8-9. The October 14 issue of the *Ford Rouge News*, a company newsletter, reported the employee preview attracted approximately 28,000 visitors. The Salon opened to the public on October 21, the same day the new Continental arrived in dealer showrooms.

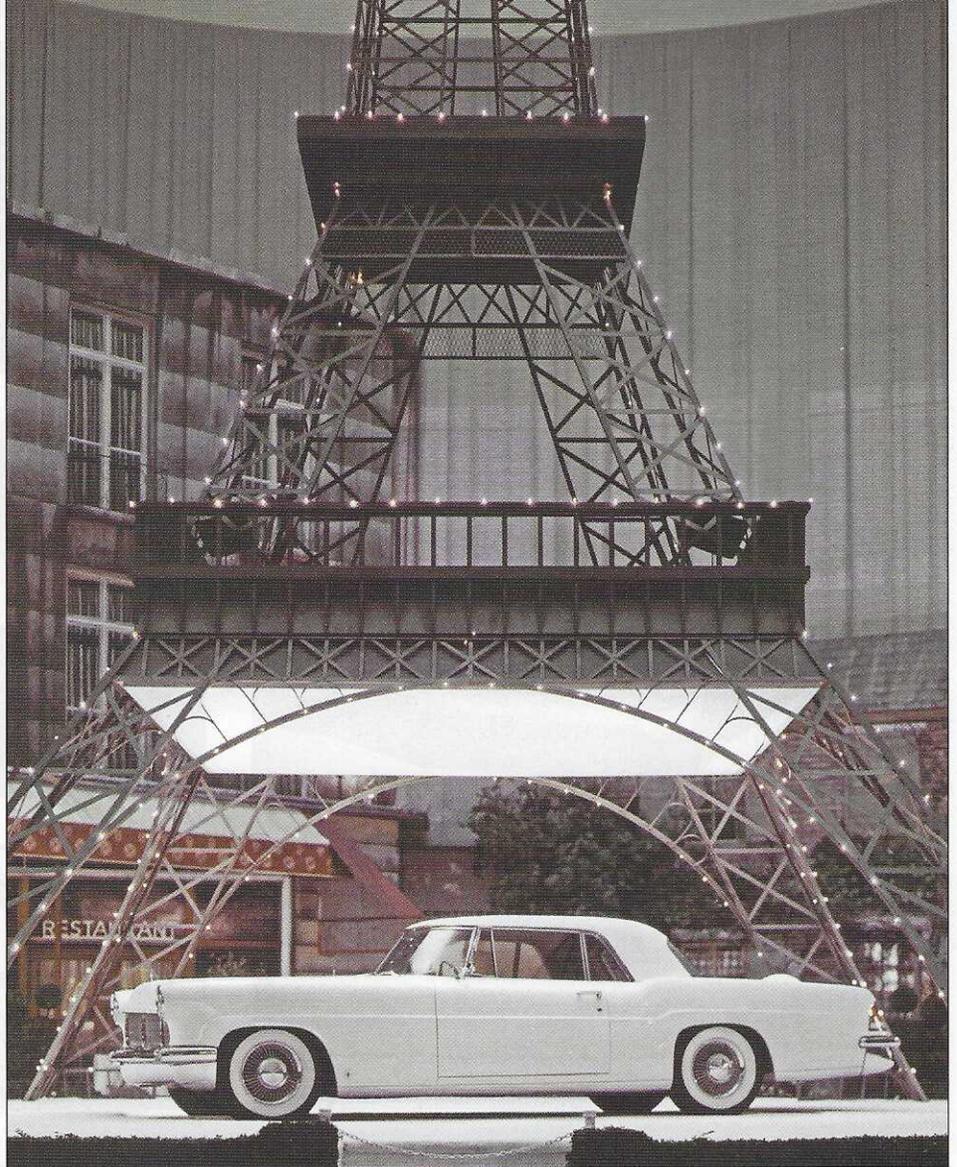
A full year earlier, Bill Ford had told the first national meeting of the Lincoln Continental Owner's Club that a new Continental was coming, the division had leaked basic info about it, and early build cars had started in invitation-only showings in key cities for prominent celebrities, politicians, and business leaders. All this pre-launch promotion resulted in enough orders to keep Continental's dedicated assembly plant busy for the next seven months at the planned rate of just 14 cars per day toward a projected annual total of 3000.

Soon after its launch, Continental chief stylist John M. Reinhart discussed the car in a November 28, 1955 speech to the Cincinnati Chapter of the Society of Automotive Engineers. "The exterior was styled to reflect a long, low, lean appearance," he said. "A spare tire embossment has been retained to eliminate use of the older spring steel tire cover, which exercised tempers and caused pinched fingers. Ornamentation has been used only where it was necessary, and then only with the object of lending a Tiffany quality to any detail involved."

Following an extensive study of four paint companies, 14 colors of long-lasting lacquer paints were chosen, with five two-tones combos available by special order. Among the examples of their attention to every detail were the car's unique door-lock covers, its hand-built wheel covers, and classic Continental Star hood ornament. One idea they lifted from Cadillac was hiding the fuel filler under the left-rear taillamp.

### The Pursuit of Quality

Reinhart described the interior as "designed without superfluous roominess...to give the driver the personal feeling that the car was designed specifically for him," adding that the steering column was short, well supported, and more nearly horizontal than in other cars. "Extensive research was conducted to seek out new developments in fabrics and leathers from all over the world," he said. Scottish leathers were selected to cover moldings, seat bolsters, and the instrument panel, while American fabrics were found "to equal or surpass European silks and satins in wearability, fade characteristics, and bleeding." Full instrumentation, including a tachometer and clock, was in four round dials in an upright pod, while heating and ventilation controls were vertical-sliding levers above the transmission hump.





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1. A Paris-themed display, complete with a replica of the Eiffel Tower, was set up inside the Ford Rotunda to help introduce the Mark II in October 1955. 2. William Clay Ford (center) and a colorful array of Mark II scale models. 3-5. The 1956 Mark II came fully equipped, with the significant exception of air conditioning. It's easy to spot a '56 with the optional air conditioning, just look for the small scoops on the rear fenders (4). (Owner: Robb Petty)

Under the car, a unique, modified, ladder-type, “cowbelly” frame with side rails that dropped low between the axles optimized interior floor width and headroom while providing “exceptionally good” torsional rigidity. The otherwise standard Lincoln suspension—control arms and leaf springs in front, longitudinal leaf springs in back—was improved with ride-smoothing “hydraulic rebound cutoffs,” temperature sensing thermostats, and hydraulic pitch control within the shock absorbers. Each chassis was dynamometer-tuned, its wheels carefully balanced and their alignment adjusted to super-tight tolerances before its body was mounted.

He then discussed some of the many unique tests and checks designed to make the Mark II the highest-quality car available at any price. With two coats of lacquer, each baked and hand-sanded, “it takes longer to paint the body of

the Continental Mark II than it does to completely assemble other fine cars,” he said. And “there are nearly 50 inspection points scattered through the Continental plant.” Each car’s sheet metal was inspected at supplier plants by Continental quality engineers before being shipped to the assembly plant, the front-end pieces were fitted to extremely tight tolerances, and nickel-plated chrome parts were subjected to anti-rust salt-spray testing three times more severe than usual.

A new V-12 was briefly considered, but the Mark II ultimately shared Lincoln’s new 368-cid V-8. A horsepower rating was not released, but the company said that its output was “more than adequate for top performance.” Each Mark II engine was disassembled, balanced, and dyno tested with its transmission, then full-vehicle tested again for 12 miles on the dedicated plant’s ½-mile test track.

Every “Turbo Drive” three-speed auto-

matic transmission was tested in a vehicle before being shipped to the plant, then again coupled to an engine on a dynamometer, then a third time on the test track. Each customer-ready car was wrapped in a fleece-lined, canvas and plastic cover for shipment.

Standard equipment included virtually everything available at the time: power steering, brakes, front seat, windows (including vent windows), AM radio, heater, cloth or leather upholstery, full carpeting, tubeless whitewall tires, full wheel covers and dual exhausts. Some 75 percent of Mark IIs were equipped with air conditioning, the only major option at \$595. Among the media reviewers, *Motor Trend’s* Walt Woron found the car amazingly quiet and reasonably quick with 0-60 acceleration of 11-12 seconds.

*Popular Mechanics’* Floyd Clymer wrote in the September 1956 issue that its “handling qualities are a combination of those found in sports, foreign and conventional U.S. cars.” He went on, “I have very few complaints about the Continental Mark II and, quite frankly, it is a much better car than I expected.”

But would enough deep-pockets buy-



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ers go for such a car at the 1956 price of \$9695—the equivalent of about \$115,500 today—to make the Continental Mark II and its fledgling new Division a sustainable venture? “We’re satisfied that there is a demand for this sort of vehicle,” Mills asserted in that January 4 speech. “We have surveyed this market as best we know how and have come to the conclusion that there are still thousands of people in the United States and abroad who can afford the luxury of this kind of product, who have the taste for the finest design and the best quality.”

“I don’t know of any other American automobile that is designed to appeal to the ultimate in discriminating taste, as we believe the new Continental will, or that is built in comparatively low volume with painstaking attention to every detail of manufacture in order to achieve, as nearly as possible, perfection in quality. ... Young Bill [Ford] has supervised the design and engineering of an automobile that we sincerely believe would make his father proud.”

1-7. The Mark II’s design prioritized simple clean lines with a minimum of ornamentation. The car was largely unchanged for 1957, but a series of minor tweaks raised the output of the Lincoln-based V-8 engine to 300 horsepower, a center crossmember was removed from the frame, and the intake vents for the optional air conditioning were relocated. As with the previous year, only a single body style was available, a two-door hardtop coupe. It was priced from \$9966. (Owner: Robb Petty)

### The Cadillac Eldorado Brougham

#### The Show Car

Meanwhile, cross-town rival General Motors was displaying eye-popping ultra-lux Cadillac “dream cars” at its traveling Motorama shows. At the 1953 Motorama, the Cadillac Orleans concept sedan—billed as America’s first genuine four-door hardtop with a wrap-around windshield and pillarless roof—drew more potential buyer attention than a flashy Cadillac “Le Mans” convertible. Reaction to the Orleans sedan, said an April 1955 *Motor Trend* article by Don MacDonald, “indicated that the majority of solid citizens wanted at least four seats, four doors and a metal roof.” This opinion was backed up by public reaction

to the handsome Cadillac “Park Avenue” concept sedan at the 1954 Motorama.

MacDonald pointed out that while GM at the time built a wide variety of cars for just about everyone, it did not offer a really cheap small car or a “10-Grand Cadillac aimed at the man who can afford whatever he considers best in an automobile.” While the former idea was explored but dropped due to a perceived lack of customer interest in that era of post-World War II prosperity, the latter was an intriguing possibility. “By the time the 1954 Motorama had played to its six cities, the route, to Harley Earl, the vice president of styling at General Motors was crystal clear,” MacDonald wrote, opining that “it had little to do with the forthcoming Continental.”



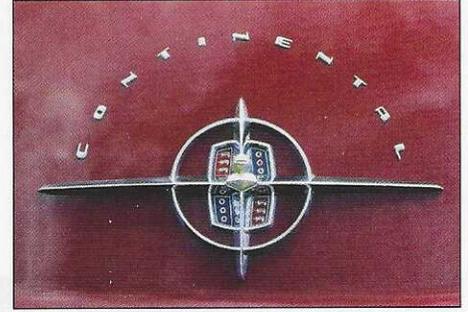
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Earl then created GM's next Cadillac dream car for the 1955 Motorama, and christened it "Eldorado Brougham." He described its creation exclusively to *Motor Trend* for the magazine's April 1955 issue which had picked it as the Motorama show car it would follow "from conception to birth." "The Eldorado Brougham," Earl wrote, "as a show car destined for possible production, was created with the intent of capturing the appeal of those who demand the finest product, whether it may be their home, clothing, jewelry, or their car... and specifically things exclusively tailored to their taste.

"There was never any question, except perhaps for aesthetics involved, about the nature and physical qualities of this car. Our intentions are to provide our exclusive clientele with a compact, personalized automobile, easy to operate and employing our latest knowledge of style and engineering. From the outset it was apparent that we must incorporate certain features known to be acceptable to our customers by virtue of Motorama experience and reception of our regular production cars, such as pillarless body construction, panoramic windshield, pivoting front seats and such landmarks as gull-type front bumper, egg-crate grille, rear fender fins, and projectile shapes on the rear fenders similar to the 1955 Eldorado convertible."

It is interesting that Earl called the Eldorado Brougham "compact," apparently because at 209.6 inches in length, it was 6.7 inches shorter on a five-inch-shorter 124-inch wheelbase compared to Cadillac's standard 1955 Series 62 sedan. It also crouched a substantial 7.7 inches lower at just 54.4 inches.

It was May 4, 1954, when Cadillac Styling studio chief Ed Glowacke got Earl's green light and detailed direction to design the clay model that would lead to a fully functional show car for the 1955 Motorama. "The general upper structure design of the Park Avenue was decided upon," Earl wrote, "and then greatly improved by allowing the window frames to drop with the side glass and by eliminating entirely the side pillar. The brushed aluminum roof and the paint panel toward the rear were retained."

Earl related that similar attention to detail was extended to the show car's interior: "It was decided that the space between the two front seats and two rear seats be utilized for map and vanity compartments. All control locations were readjusted many times to provide the greatest accessibility and legibility for the driver. The seat contours were altered several times and the cushion construction changed to provide maximum comfort for all. ... We contacted domestic and foreign manufacturers of fine fabrics and

leather goods, and specially prepared materials were gathered for a final choice. Special paint was also being formulated. ... All details during this period, such as Insignia, instruments, trim moldings and general coachwork, were carefully scrutinized for richness of quality and jeweler finish—nothing was left to chance."

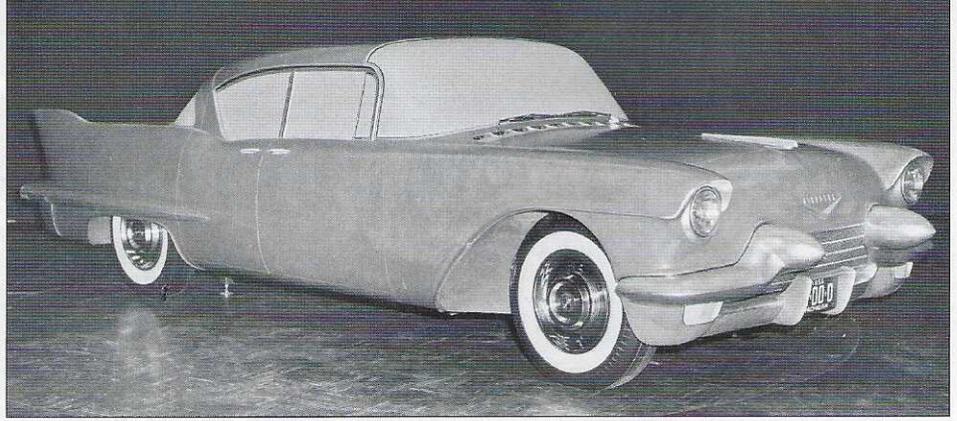
Even after suffering some smudging to its fresh paint during shipping and damage to its body when it fell off its jacks during pre-show preparation, Earl's Eldorado Brougham debuted on schedule at the Motorama in New York's Waldorf Astoria hotel on January 19, 1955. "Those who didn't already know through the grapevine that the car might be produced had heard Harley Earl drop a strong hint to this effect on the Arthur Godfrey TV show the morning before," MacDonald reported.

### The Launch

In contrast to Continental's multi-faceted promotional effort for its 1956 Mark II, Cadillac did comparatively little to promote the launch of its ultra-lux car. A pre-production prototype Eldorado Brougham appeared at the same October 1955 Paris Motor Show where the Continental Mark II debuted, and a Town Car variant wowed the 1956 Motorama crowds. Cadillac issued a press release on November 29, 1956 announcing that the

Cadillac Eldorado Brougham, "an all-new five-passenger super-luxury sedan," was in limited production. "The Brougham, with completely new styling and numerous engineering features never before incorporated in any car, marks one of the most important 'firsts' in automobile history," Cadillac general manager and GM vice president James M. Roche asserted in the release.

Cited among its special features were its pillarless four-door styling, brushed stainless-steel roof, low 55.5-inch height enabled by a new-design tubular-center X-frame and its air suspension, which replaced conventional coil springs with air springs at all four corners, a central air compressor, and leveling valves to keep the car riding level regardless of load and road conditions. Also touted were anti-dive control built into the spherical-joint front suspension and a new high-roll-center, four-link rear suspension said to minimize shake and roll and improve



control on rough roads. Controlled by an Autronic Eye, the outer headlamps had both high and low beams for city driving plus inner lamps that added bright "spotlight" beams for country driving—interestingly, this system was not yet legal in all states but was soon universally legalized and widely adopted. The powertrain paired a 325-horsepower high-performance, twin four-barrel Cadillac V-8 with a "new and improved" four-speed Hydra-Matic transmission.

The B-pillarless design was achieved with latching plates mounted on stalks that were raised 14 inches from the floor for both the conventional front, and the front-opening, "suicide-style" rear doors. Switches prevented shifting the transmission into gear if any door was not fully closed, and all doors could be power locked from the driver's seat.

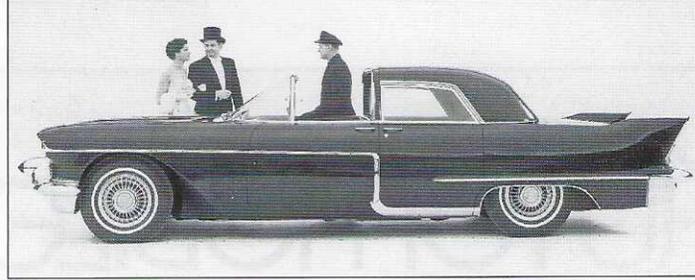
Speaking of seats, the Brougham's six-way power driver's chair offered a "Favorite Position" dial in the left-front

armrest and moved down and back for easy access, then back to that favored position when the door was closed. Instrumentation included water temperature, fuel level, an oil gauge and an ammeter, and there were warning lights for low fuel level, high engine temperature, low oil pressure, low battery charge, and low air-suspension pressure.

Carpeting was a choice of mouton lamb skin or high-pile nylon Karakul, and no fewer than 45 choices of trim



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1, 2. The basic shape of Cadillac's 1957 Eldorado Brougham had been decided by January 14, 1955, but many details were not yet final. 3. Cadillac's Eldorado Brougham Motorama dream car in New York City at the Waldorf-Astoria in late January 1955. 4-6. Cadillac showed this Eldorado Brougham Town Car at the 1956 Motorama. 7. A pre-production Eldorado Brougham at the Paris Motor Show in October 1955, the same venue where the Continental Mark II was introduced.

through both front and rear outlets, the rear ones operated individually by the passengers. The tires were an industry first 8.40×15 "low-profile" design with thin whitewalls, mounted on 15-inch forged aluminum wheels.

The antenna for the new pre-selector, all-transistor AM radio—with front and rear speakers—rose to roof height when the set was on and retracted into the right-front fender when it or the ignition was turned off. There was also a button that raised the antenna higher for maximum range. Even the trunk could be unlocked, raised, lowered, and locked by controls located in the glovebox.

Priced at an eye-watering \$13,074—equal to about \$150,000 today and not quite double the 1957 Eldorado Biarritz convertible's and Eldorado Seville hardtop coupe's \$7286 stickers—the Brougham, described as "...an automotive dream which has become a reality," debuted at the January 1957 National Automobile Show in New York City. This was followed by private showings at select dealerships in February, just three months before production of the '57 Continental Mark II was discontinued—the Brougham's most obvious competitor was already on its way out.

A March 18, 1957 release stated that Cadillac had begun shipping Broughams, "the most advanced automobile ever built," to dealers. "We spent two years readying the Brougham for production," Roche asserted, "and for valid reasons. The exclusive nature of the automobile called for special tooling and assembly preparation to assure the Brougham reaching the nation's highways [was] the finest automobile ever built. ... Some features which were pioneered on the

*continued on page 34*

and color combos were offered, plus two special-order trims. The sun visors were polarized, and wide center armrests separated the seats front and rear—the front one could, uncomfortably, accommodate three-passenger seating while the rear one contained a notepad and pencil, a vanity mirror, and an atomizer containing an ounce of Arpège Extrait de Lanvin, a pricey, luxurious French perfume. The extra-wide, illuminated glovebox came loaded with a cigarette case, a tissue dis-

penser, a vanity compact with lipstick, stick cologne, a set of drinking cups with magnetized bases and a full-length vanity mirror that folded out to become a horizontal shelf.

With the Brougham's ignition switch on, the engine automatically started when the shifter was in Neutral or Park. Power steering, brakes, and windows, including the ventipanes, were standard, as were tinted glass and air conditioning. A special heating system warmed the car



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original Brougham experimental car more than two years ago—such as the four-headlamp system and the automatic “favorite position” power seat—already have gained recognition as Cadillac engineering firsts.” This release also touted the car’s industry first air suspension as “one of the most significant passenger-car engineering advances in recent automotive history.”

Perhaps a bit surprisingly, this truly spectacular new Cadillac earned little press attention and few drive reviews. *Automotive News* reported, “A maximum production total of 1500 units has been set, but it is extremely doubtful that this figure will be reached.”

“Newest all-new car on the road today...Full-sized scale model of last year’s Motorama dream car...Air suspension here at last...Probability of fuel injection...” was how an introductory piece in the January 1957 issue of *Motor Trend* started. When Joe Wherry drove a Brougham for *MT*’s July 1957 issue, it was as part of a story about air suspension.

**The Finales**

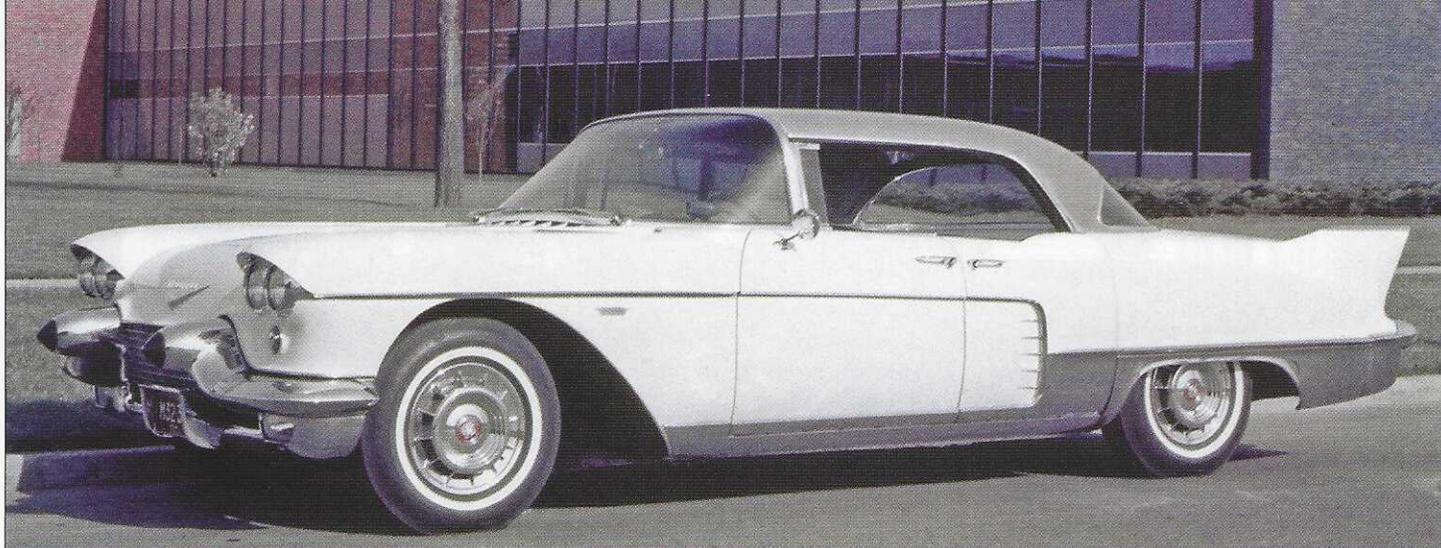
For the ‘57 model year, the Mark II’s V-8 received a one-point bump in compression to 10:1, a new Carter carburetor, a paper-element air filter, and other engine upgrades that were good for a 15-horse-

1-5. Cadillac began shipping Eldorado Broughams in March 1957. Visually, it was clearly related to the series of show cars displayed during 1955 and '56, with highlights including a set of four headlamps and a brushed stainless steel roof panel. The glovebox contained a number of extras including a set of drinking cups and a lady’s compact (5). 6-8. A then-new Brougham photographed by auto writer Joe Wherry in 1957. 9. The rear armrest was home to an atomizer full of Arpège Extrait de Lanvin, a luxurious French perfume.

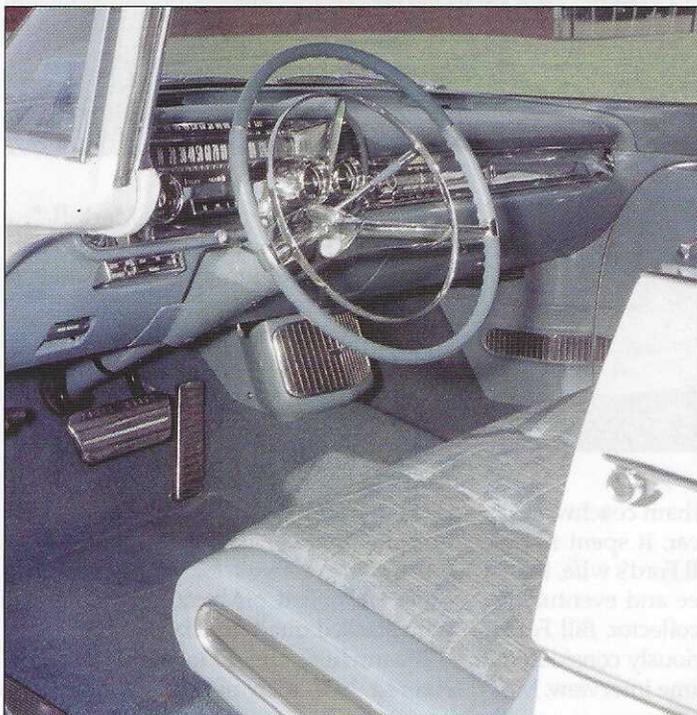
power increase to 300. There were also transmission and differential improvements, four new acrylic lacquer colors, and a sticker price increase to \$9966. In addition, the center frame member was removed to reduce weight, and the air conditioning intakes were relocated.

But with Ford reportedly losing about \$1000 on each Mark II sold, the Continental Division was closed in July 1956, before production halted May 15, 1957. The car’s dedicated Allen Park, Michigan assembly plant was transferred to Edsel, and later became a pilot plant for pre-production vehicles.

Historians have reported contradictory Continental Mark II production numbers



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over the years, but Ford itself stated in the May 7, 1957 press release announcing the end of Mark II production, that the total was exactly 3000 cars. It detailed that 1231 cars were built in the 1955 calendar year, and another 1325 were completed by the end of 1956. The calendar-year 1957 total wasn't spelled out, but arithmetic suggests it was 444.

In the same release, Ben D. Mills, Lincoln Division general manager and a Ford vice president, was quoted, "In slightly less than two years, the Mark II has established a reputation for quality and distinction out of all proportion to its planned low volume. The prestige that accrued to Lincoln Division and Ford Motor Company is of substantial value to all Ford car lines." In addition, there was no shortage of big names owning



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Mark IIs including Nelson Rockefeller, Barry Goldwater, the Shah of Iran, Frank Sinatra, Cecil B. DeMille, Jack Warner, R.J. Reynolds, Bill Harrah, and Henry J. Kaiser.

The Mark II was succeeded by a new Mark III for 1958, which was little more than a retrimmed variant of the year's new king-size Lincolns. These cars were built on a newly designed unitized platform and available in a quartet of two- and four-door body styles.

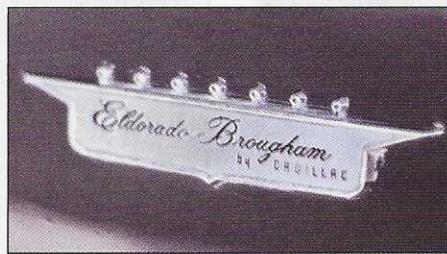
So what went wrong? Historian Jim Farrell interviewed William Clay Ford for the September-October 1996 issue of *Continental Comments*, a publication of the Lincoln and Continental Owners Club. Farrell posed a question about why the Mark II was a two-door design, rather than a four-door, and Mr. Ford responded



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in part, "...the market survey didn't ask whether potential buyers wanted a two door or a four door. ... The original Continental was a two door, so we made the Mark II a two door. But Doug's right. (Doug McClure, Continental Division Sales Manager) As far as the market went, it was a two-door car in a four door market." Farrell, in his book, *Ford Design Department Concept & Showcars 1932-1961*, relayed that according to McClure, "the decision to build a two-door Continental, instead of a four-door car, was a fatal flaw in their initial planning, but it was not discovered until after the Mark II went into production."

One Mark II prototype convertible was



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built on contract by Derham coachworks. After duty as a show car, it spent some time being driven by Bill Ford's wife, then was sold to an employee and eventually passed on to a private collector. Bill Ford told Farrell it wasn't seriously considered for production. In the same interview, Mr.

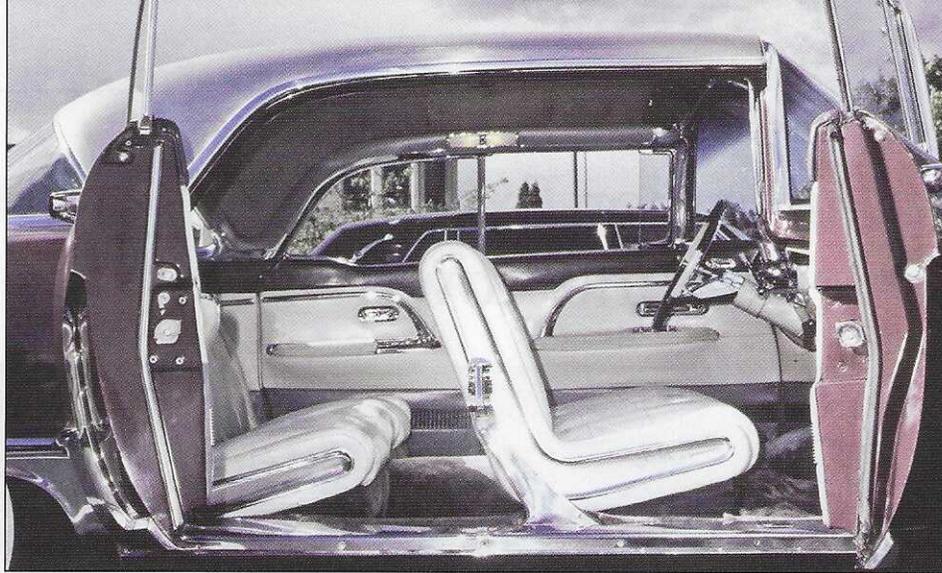
Ford stated that a four-door Mark II "... was not part of the original program and nobody at the beginning even considered a four door model as a future Mark II."

The Continental Division invested a lot of time, and more than \$2,000,000, designing and developing a retractable hardtop Mark II, but that complex feature eventually ended up on the 1957-59 Ford Skyliners. The Mark III Berlina, an exclusive four-door hardtop on the 1958 Lincoln unibody chassis, was explored but never approved for production. The same fate killed off a facelifted Mark II with stacked quad headlamps.

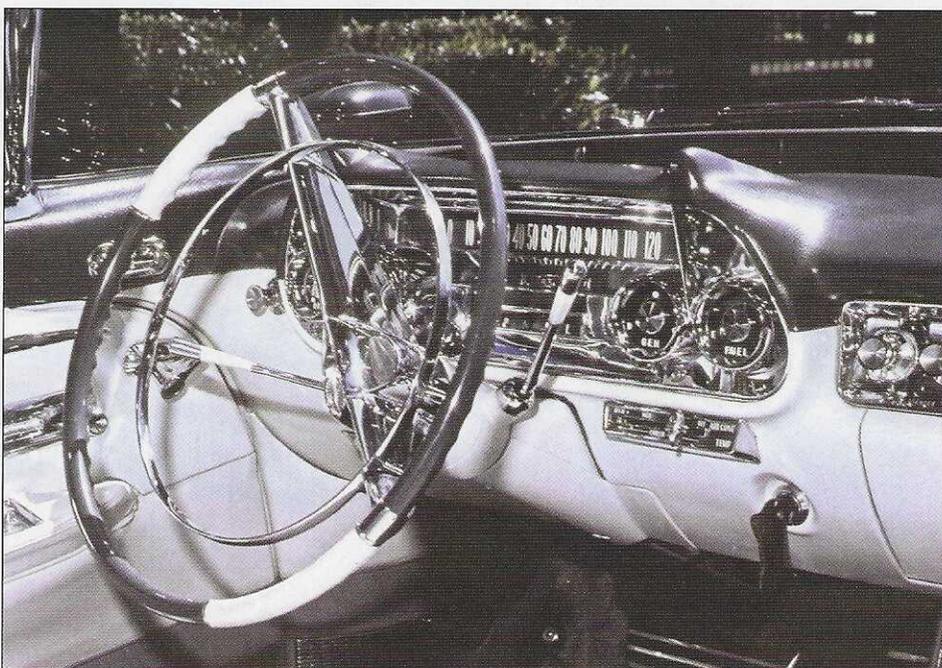
Meanwhile, the Eldorado Brougham entered 1958 with new hub caps, some



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1-5. After the short 1957 model year, the Eldorado Brougham returned for 1958. There were some fairly minor changes including a new tri-carb set up for the V-8 and subtly changed hub caps, while leather trim replaced paint on the upper door panels. After a production run of 400 of the 1957 Eldorado Broughams, Cadillac only made 304 of the '58s at its plant in Detroit. (Owner: Ken Gimelli)

fresh exterior colors, and minor interior changes including leather-covered upper door panels. Its V-8 was boosted to an impressive 335 horsepower with a compression increase from 10.0:1 to 10.25:1 and a trio of Rochester two-barrel carburetors replacing the pair of Carter four barrels.

But sales dropped from the 1957's paltry 400 units to just 304 of the '58s. It was rumored that GM lost \$10,000 on each one. The Brougham was restyled for 1959 and its largely hand-built assembly moved from Cadillac's Detroit plant to Turin, Italy, where Pininfarina put

together only 99 examples of the 1959 model, followed by 101 '60s. And that, was that.

Both the Continental Mark II—despite its intensive efforts to ensure flawless quality—and the Eldorado Brougham suffered customer-frustrating service issues, the latter mostly due to its innovative but troublesome air suspension. Some owners simply replaced the air bags with conventional coil springs to avoid continuing problems. In retrospect, it's probably best that the Cadillac never received fuel injection.

Along with Floyd Clymer's road

test, *Popular Mechanics* ran a series of comments from Mark II owners in the September 1956 issue. There were many positive comments, but also a surprising number of gripes about a variety of things including reliability, paint quality, and the lack of personal attention or contact from the maker. One biting comment came from an owner identified as an executive from Arkansas: "Hardly think anyone would buy this car except for prestige. It's hard to get into. Uncomfortable in the back seat. No particular speed. Everything very average except for price." An inventor from Maryland was disappointed that the car was fitted with wheel covers rather than genuine spoked wheels. "Very cheap for a \$10,000 car."

As Tim Howley wrote in the August 1993 issue of *Collectible Automobile*<sup>®</sup>, about the only two major things the Eldorado Brougham and the Mark II shared in common were "great styling and poor sales." Perhaps each was also a reflection of the two very different men who spearheaded each car's development and their motivations. William Clay Ford looked to the past to follow his father's lead, while Harley Earl aimed to put one of his futuristic Motorama showstoppers on sale to the public. Understandably, these two paths led to very different automobiles. And as limited-production offerings with stratospheric prices they were never envisioned to sell in great numbers. **CA**

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