

# Penalty of leadership

## Eldorado and Seville are nice, but that's not enough

By Gary Witzenburg  
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It was a big Lincoln-Mercury press conference and everyone who was anyone in the automotive press was there. The L-M boss was singing the usual happy tunes: improved this, better that for '87; increased '86 sales of almost everything.

One reporter asked about the Continental Mark VII, the nice but non-traditional Lincoln luxury coupe that had been largely shunned by high-buck buyers since it replaced the brick-shaped Mark VI three years ago. "Mark VII sales are substantially up for '86," the exec replied. And he rattled off the numbers.

"Could that have anything to do with the new Eldorado?" the reporter asked.

It was an honest question, but it brought laughter. "We'll take 'em any way we can get 'em," said the exec, grinning widely. His audience cracked up again.

**YES, INDEED**, the all-new Eldorado and Seville introduced last year have been the best thing that has happened to Lincoln since Iacocca invented the "opera" window. Just as that rounded, new-look Mark VII had driven luxocoupe buyers by the thousands to the popular previous-generation Eldorado in 1984-85, now the traffic is flowing back the other way.

But why? What is so wrong with these latest top-of-the-line Cadillacs?

Some might say they're just too darned smart for American luxury buyers and there may be some truth in that. Yet at 188 inches long on a 108-inch wheelbase, they're smack in between the 187-inch Mercedes 300E and the 189-inch BMW 528e. They are some 17 inches shorter and 300 pounds lighter than the old Eldo and Seville they replaced, but they're not exactly *small*.

Others argue "styling" and I agree. To my eye, the fronts of these cars look fine — elegant, expensive, very Cadillac. But I think they're dumpy, frumpy and uninspired in back, especially the Eldo, and in profile they look too much like GM's smaller, much less expensive N-cars (Pontiac Grand Am, Olds Calais, Buick Somerset/Skylark). Worse, they somehow look smaller than they really are.

**BUT THE** fundamental problem with these cars, I believe, is one of focus.

"The new Seville is designed to appeal to the traditional Cadillac buyer as well as a

rapidly growing segment of young and affluent luxury automobile buyers who demand state-of-the-art technology and high quality," the '86 press release stated. But by aiming somewhere between these very different tastes, Cadillac seems to have missed them both.

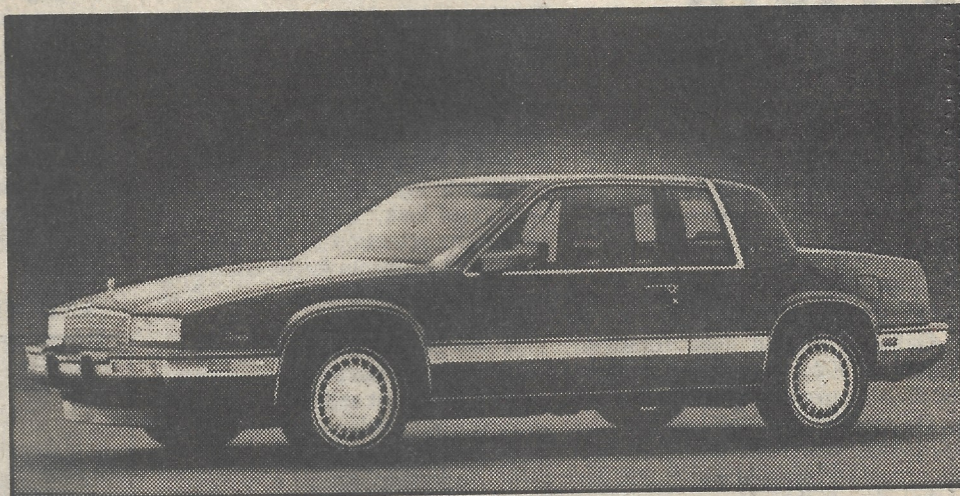
The traditional buyer sees these new Eldos and Sevilles as too small and understated. The "new values" buyer sees them as too traditional and conservative.

And that's a major shame, because both Cadillac variations of GM's sophisticated new E/K platform (which also carries Oldsmobile's Toronado and Buick's Riviera) are pretty terrific cars under their misdirected

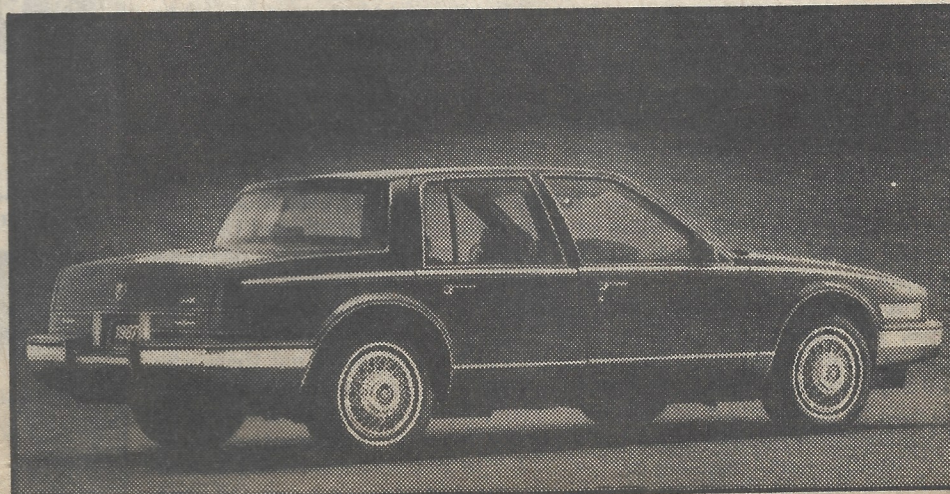
skins. Get past your first impressions, strap yourself in for a drive and you'll find a lot about them to like.

**WITH INDEPENDENT** strut suspension, a Corvette-type transverse rear leaf spring, precise power rack-and-pinion steering, four-wheel disc brakes, automatic load leveling and a taut yet surprisingly compliant "Touring" suspension option, this pair need apologize to no one for their ride and handling. Slightly larger standard tires and new "deflected disc" struts for the Touring option improve things even more for '87.

Please see **Cadillac / 2F**



Eldorado Biarritz looks very good for '87, but maybe not enough like a Cadillac.



Cadillac's new Seville aims at two markets and is not right on with either one.

# Cadillac Eldorado, Seville are nice, but that's not enough

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Cadillac's exclusive 4.1-liter aluminum block (with cast iron sleeves) fuel-injected V-8 is rated at a piddling 130 horses, yet its low-end torque and the four-speed automatic overdrive transaxle's well-chosen ratios render it lively enough for most American drivers.

A viscous torque converter clutch (also a Cadillac exclusive) improves economy without the usual grab and shudder. This engine is also extra-smooth and its trick three-way hydro-elastic mounts absorb what little noise and vibration it does generate.

IN FRONT of the driver in the Eldorado's quiet, comfy cabin are

blue-green vacuum-fluorescent digital displays for speedometer, odometer and fuel level. A standard driver information center on the vertical console gives time, date and outside temperature, plus selectable readouts for fuel economy (instant or average), fuel used, driving range and engine data (tachometer, coolant temperature and battery voltage, but no oil pressure).

Unfortunately, there's a flaw: when the range drops below 30 miles or so — just when you really need to know how much juice is left and how far it's likely to take you — the system leaves you stranded with nothing but a flashing "E" on the fuel display and "LOW RANGE" on the DIC. You know you're low, but *how* low is "LOW?"

The standard Eldo has understated gray interior trimplates, but a tasteful rear walnut treatment is optional (standard in Seville and Eldorado Biarritz). Seats are cashmere and leather, with full leather optional and both the tilt/telescope wheel and the shift lever are leather wrapped. Six-way power seat is standard for the

**"We'll take 'em any way we can get 'em."**  
— EXECUTIVE  
Lincoln-Mercury

driver, optional for the passenger.

While the back seat is not exactly commodious, it will hold two or even three adults.

I liked the soft but persistent "bing-bing" tone of the turn signals and the ergonomically excellent power-window switches on the door armrest, but not the "pump-to-set" parking brake (common to all E/K cars). It's awkward and inconvenient.

Interior storage is good for a Cadillac, but uncompetitive with luxury imports. The upward-opening glovebox is large enough (the fuses are inside it) and there's a double-bottomed tray with cassette racks under the center armrest. A tricky rotating gizmo in the console gives a choice of cup holder, coin slots or a useless flat surface. But there are no door bins or handy open trays at all.

OTHER WORTHY features include new vehicle ID tags on major body parts (in addition to considerable other theft-deterrence measures), standard "twilight sentinel" (for those who can't be trusted to control their own headlights), power outside mirrors, wheel locks, anti-lacquerative windshield and corrosion protection enough to rate a five-year, 100,000-mile rust warranty.

Now, if they'll only fix the styling. Any change to the clumsy, overdone '80-'85 "bustleback" Seville would have been welcome and, in fact, the new one's looks have grown on me a lot this year. But the otherwise excellent Eldorado may be a case of one "downsize" too many.

Even as one who has criticized GM's somewhat dated and conservative design in recent years, I'll confess to being very fond of the previous ('79-'85) Eldorado's classically crisp shape and proportions. Did it really need to be smaller, stubbier and plumper in its latest incarnation?

Appreciate their looks or not, though, it's hard not to love the way these cars drive.

# Wright Bonneville is restored to flagship status

From page 1F

business school guru. And both involved the first Pontiac.

Oakland was in deep financial trouble in 1924 when Sloan ordered the division to come up with a new car to fill the market slot between the low-priced Chevrolet and the mid-

And he won, even though Chevrolet and Oldsmobile (and Buick and Pontiac and Cadillac) were using the same engine.

IN THE '80S, GM began to move away from uniformity back to stressing the differences between its car lines. Ironically, at the same time it began to style all its cars with the same "GM look," a fact that did not escape the attention of Lincoln's agency. The Lincoln might not be the most elegant car around, but it does not look like a Ford.

It was decided that Chevrolet — which for years has sold the Corvette, one of GM's most expensive cars, and still sells the Caprice, a larger car than one can find at a Pontiac, Olds or

Under pressure from dealers, Pontiac was given the full-size rear-drive Parisienne for '83, a car which had no following in the United States because it had been sold only in Canada.

Now, with the '87s, the Bonneville is the standard Pontiac again. The Bonneville name has been an American institution ever since the first Bonneville appeared as a special fuel-injected V-8 model to top the Star Chief line.

AND WHAT of the new Bonne-

ville? Best ever. It is not as European as it looks, so don't be frightened off by its super-yuppie styling. It is American: soft, comfortable and power assisted. But it is also precise, a good performer, a car which is always under control, unlike many of its wilder ancestors. A very civilized car.

It comes as a four-door sedan, with 3.8-liter fuel-injected V-6 as standard. The SE version has tighter suspension and a wonderful sound — almost like an old dual-exhaust V-8 Bonneville.

EXAMPLE

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