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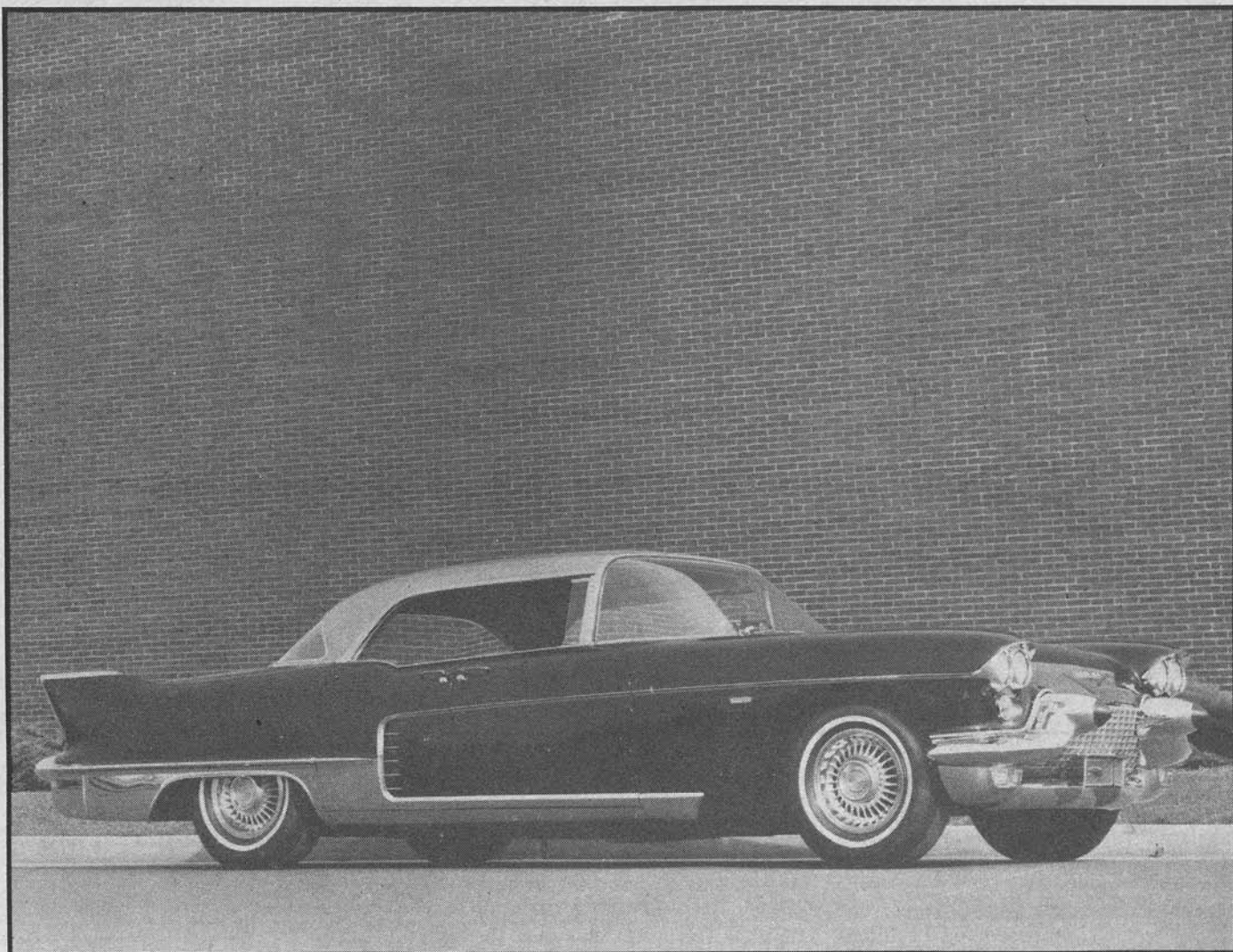
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GTO Judge on Trial



1954 Ford: Breaking With the Past
1956 Chev: Even Hotter Hot One





The 1957 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham. Among the many firsts on this vehicle were the narrow white wall tires and an all transistor radio.

The Eldorado Brougham

Designing elegance

Back in the Fifties, Harlow Curtice, as president of GM, made the statement that one of the key factors in the success of General Motors was the "attitude of the inquiring mind" and the quest for a "better way" that charac-

By William D. Siuru, Jr.

terizes the company and all its divisions. The Eldorado Brougham demonstrates to the max this corporate philosophy.

The Eldorado had been a Cadillac nameplate since 1953 when the first

limited edition convertible was introduced. Through the years, Cadillac built the Eldorado a cut in luxury even above the normal Cadillacs and used it as a sounding board for trying out new ideas on the public. However, the Brougham was the most unique Eldorado ever produced. While the other Eldorados, at least until the front wheel drive model was brought out in 1967, were essentially modified and uprated Cadillacs, the Brougham was entirely different vehicle sharing almost nothing in its design with the rest of the line.

The Brougham was designed in 1954 as a dream car for the General Motors Motorama of 1955. Many of its features were derived from the 1953 Cadillac Orleans and the 1954 Cadillac Park Lane with its brushed aluminum roof. Both of these were one-off show cars displayed at previous Motoramas. The Brougham was the result of many years of research and experimentation by the "inquiring" engineers and designers at GM. The goal was to build the finest car possible. When the dream car was shown in New York, Miami, and Los Angeles, it was an immediate success, drawing much attention. By the time the car was displayed in San Francisco, GM had decided to offer this Eldorado as an exclusive, limited production ultra-luxury car. But there was much more behind this decision than just the favorable public reaction. Word was out that Ford was to unveil its Mark II Continental in 1956 and GM did not want to be without its own super luxury car.

Two years of concentrated development and testing would be completed before the first production 1957 Eldorado Brougham would roll off the Fisher Body Fleetwood assembly line in March 1957. However, it can hardly be said that the Brougham was mass produced in the normal sense, for the Fleetwood plant would only make 704 cars in two model years. Nor was the Brougham a money maker for GM. But as Cadillac's General Sales Manager, James Roche, had said, "Cadillac doesn't expect to make real money on the new Brougham." However, it is doubtful that GM ever dreamed just how much it would lose. Each Brougham cost \$10,000 more to produce than the \$13,000 selling price.

Just about everything on the Brougham was unique, starting with the tubular center X-frame without side rails. This frame increased tor-

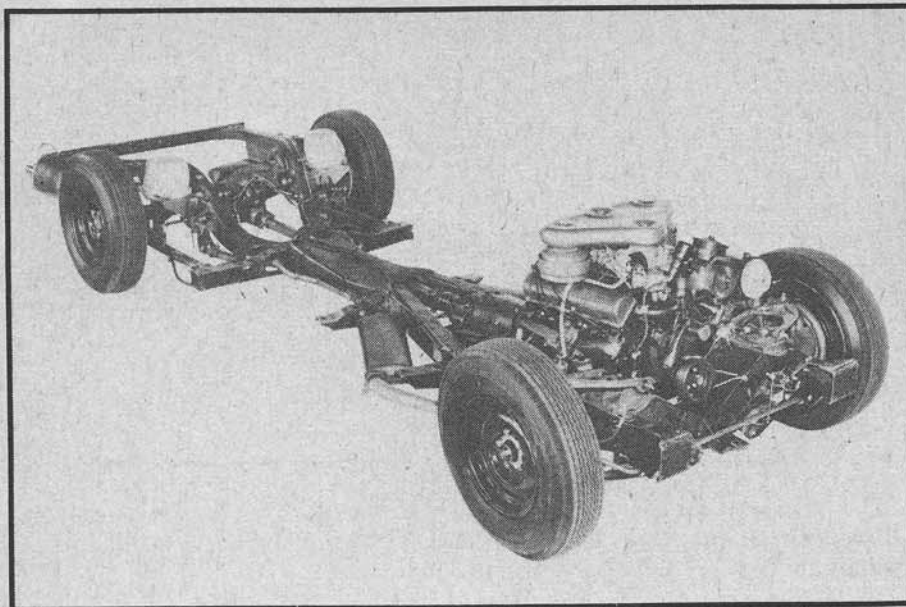


This drawing shows the Brougham as it appeared in the Motorama shows. As you can see, there are many differences between it and the Brougham that actually went into production.

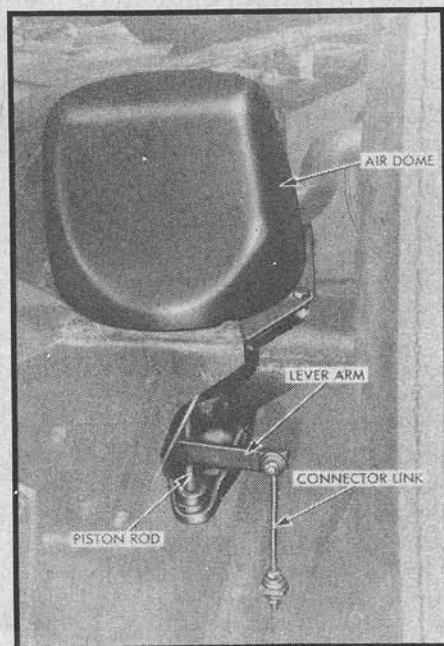
sional strength for the 5400 pound car and gave a lower floor pan. This latter feature allowed the Brougham to have a total height of only 55½ inches while still retaining ample headroom inside. It was a true pillarless sedan with suicide rear doors.

However, the most unique and advanced feature had to be the air suspension system. This system replaced the conventional coil springs in the front and the semi-elliptical leaf rear springs found on contemporary GM cars as well as the shock absorbers. At each wheel there was an air spring consisting of an air dome chamber, rubber diaphragm, and retaining plate and piston. The bullet-like piston and tough rubber diaphragm were fitted in the carefully machined dome which in turn was secured to the frame of the car. The air in the dome acting on the rubber diaphragm provided both the springing and damping action required for a smooth, yet controllable ride. Compressed air for the system came from a compressor with its own integral motor that was mounted on top of the generator. Compressed air was stored in an accumulator or air storage reservoir that was located just forward of the radiator. The air suspension system used on the Eldorado was different than systems offered on other GM cars later, in that the air was supplied from the outside atmosphere rather than being a completely closed system.

Three leveling valves, one for each rear spring and a single one for the front springs controlled the flow of air going to each spring and controlled the height of the car which was kept con-



The '57 Brougham chassis featured the new Cadillac tubular center X frame and an air suspension system.



Here is the air spring assembly part of the Brougham's air suspension system.

stant irregardless of the passenger and luggage loading. The valves were mechanically activated by a rod which reacted to the vertical motion of the wheel supports relative to the frame. Other valves in the system allowed the air suspension to be locked out for wheel changing and to differentiate between changing the load in the car and the reaction to road irregularities when the car was in motion.

The air suspension system was not known for its reliability. It was com-

plex, parts were costly, and replacements, especially the air domes, were frequent. In fact many Brougham collectors and owners have replaced the air system with more conventional, but more reliable coil springs at a cost of \$300 to \$500. Once the air domes were blown they could not be repaired, and replacements soon became unavailable. When the system leaked, the car slowly sank until the body nearly sat on the ground, creating a rather weird sight. By starting the compressor, the car could be pumped up to its normal height.

For all its sophistication, the results produced by the air suspension system were disappointing. The ride while soft and cushiony, was really no better than more conventional luxury cars. Cornering, road feel, and handling were a real bust. Thus the much publicized suspension system turned out to be the Brougham's major weakness.

The car came equipped with a 365 CID V-8 that put out 325 hp. Being the days of cheap and plentiful gasoline, it was equipped with twin four-barrel carbs and a compression ratio of 10:1. In 1958, the carburetor setup was changed to three two-barrels. This powerplant was teamed up with a four speed Hydramatic automatic transmission.

On top of this special chassis was placed the Brougham's beautiful body. It was low and sleek. From its pillarless top made of brushed stainless steel to its tasteful stainless steel panels covering the lower portion of the rear quarter panels and rocker panels, the Brougham was a real head turner wherever it was seen. Naturally, there were the characteristic Caddy fins. The Brougham was one of the first cars to use a four headlight system that would become so popular in 1958. The quad headlights were touted as one of the new ideas from GM. The hood was hinged at the front, unusual for Detroit iron.

Opening the door and sliding into the driver's seat, you at once knew that you were in probably the most luxurious Cadillac ever built. This was a five passenger vehicle. The front seat could accommodate three with the wide center arm rest folded back. Because of the car's low profile and the protruding propeller shaft, the back seat was made for only two. There was a wide arm rest in the center that had a storage compartment that contained a note pad, pencil, portable vanity mirror, and even a perfume atomizer

filled with Arpege Extrait de Lanvin.

There was a six-way power seat in front. But this was no ordinary power seat. When the front door was opened, the seat moved back to its most rearward position to ease entry and exit. Once the doors were closed, the seat moved back to the favorite position that had been previously dialed by the driver. In other words it was a power seat with a memory. All the windows, including the wind vents were naturally power operated. The trunk lid could be unlocked, opened, closed, and locked by a master switch located in the glove compartment. Speaking of the extra wide glove compartment, it was fitted with a cigarette case, tissue dispenser, vanity compact and lipstick, four gold finished drinking cups, and a full length, metal backed acrylic vanity mirror that folded out horizontally to form a shelf. The instrument panel used both gauges and idiot lights for fuel level, water temperature, oil pressure, and ammeter. Additionally, a light warned of low air pressure in the suspension system.

Air conditioning was standard. There were three individually controlled heaters, one in front and two under the seat heaters for rear passengers. All doors could be locked by the driver. The rear doors locked automatically when the transmission was placed into a drive gear. Also, if a door was left ajar, the car could not be shifted into a driving position until the door was closed. To start the Caddy, one only had to turn the ignition switch on and place the transmission selector to neutral or park. The power antenna went into action whenever the radio was turned on, raising to roof level for reception in the city. It could be raised further by an override switch. The Brougham was available in 15 exterior colors and a total of 45 standard and two extra cost interior trim and color options were available that included a choice of lamb's skin or high pile nylon carpeting.

To make all these devices and gadgets work, the Brougham had over 160 electric motors, relays solenoids, switches and light bulbs. Consequently, it almost took a full time mechanic to keep the car in tip top shape.

Cadillac put a lot into each Brougham. It took 13 days to build each one, and, while many standard Cadillac parts were used, each part was specially chosen for its near perfect tolerances. Finishing was superb,



A 1958 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham.

which you could verify by feeling beneath the doors, under the hood, and behind the bumpers. Doors swung open and closed with a feather like touch. Because of all the equipment under the hood, the battery was located in its own compartment in the trunk.

The Eldorado Brougham sold for slightly more than \$13,000. Everything on it was standard equipment. This was a considerable amount in the late Fifties when even a standard Cadillac could be had for slightly more than five grand. Even its nearest competitor, the Continental Mark II could be had for just under \$10,000. The Mark II was produced in 1956 and 1957 and a total of 3000 were produced compared to only 704 Broughams. For 1959 and 1960, the Eldorado Brougham was completely restyled along the lines of the Cadillac Fleetwood and was built in Italy by Pininfarina. Only 200 of these latter day Broughams were built and their quality didn't measure up to the Broughams made in the United States.

The Brougham, while not a best seller, did leave its mark on the Cadillac line. Many of its features, ideas, and innovations would be seen on Cadillacs for years to come. 