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by Bob Stevens

'57 CADILLAC BROUGHAM

THE EPITOME OF OPULENCE

If it had been conceived in Europe, it would have been built for kings. But being an American-bred product it was meant for the affluent in a capitalistic society, i.e. the kings of industry. Realistically, though, anyone with a small fortune back in 1957 could have walked into his local Cadillac agency and driven home in an Eldorado Brougham, the most luxurious, most expensive and most innovative car in its class.

Developed in response to Lincoln's revival of the exclusive Continental, which returned as the Mark II of 1956, the Eldorado Brougham was targeted at the upper crust of the luxury car market. The stylish Continental Mark II was the most expensive American car available in 1956 at \$10,000 a copy, but it was a bargain compared to the fancy Cadillac's \$13,074 list price. And when we say fancy, we mean fancy ... from its stainless steel roof on top, to its built-in bar inside, to its air suspension ride system underneath. It boasted every conceivable comfort and convenience accessory known to man at the time, and the only way to make it more expensive and opulent would have been to gold plate it.

The Brougham harked back to the days of the true American classics, the Duesenbergs, Packards, Lincolns and, yes, V-16 Cadillacs with custom-built coachwork. In fact, not since the fabled V-16s had Cadillac built such an incredible luxury automobile. Unlike the V-16s, the Brougham is not a true classic, but only because it wasn't built during the official classic period (1925-48). It is, though, a genuine milestone car. And the Brougham deserves all the accolades it has garnered, including milestone status.

The idea for the Brougham germinated in the early '50s

Photos by the author

1. It was the most opulent thing on wheels in 1957 ... the absolute king of the luxury cars. Cadillac wanted to prove a point with its Brougham, prove that it could build the ultimate American luxury car. Only 400 of these virtually handbuilt automobiles were made in 1957, and each bore a staggering retail price of \$13,074.

2. The interior was the most extravagant of the era, attending to every need and comfort. Note the fold-down center armrest in the rear; it also provided storage for small items and came from the factory with a note pad and pencil, vanity mirror and a bottle of perfume with atomizer. Also, the rear doors of the four-door hardtop opened in reverse, or so-called suicide fashion.

3. Huge, pointed fins capped off the rear fenders.

with the appearance of the 1953 Orleans, a four-door hardtop one-off show car, and the 1954 Park Avenue, another dream car, but a four-door pillared sedan with an aluminum roof. That brushed aluminum look would be transformed into a natural stainless steel finish for use on the production Brougham.

GM's top stylist, Harley Earl, was convinced that GM's response to the Continental Mark II should come in the form of a four-door pillarless hardtop, as his experience in dealing with affluent car buyers, both privately and on the show circuit, was that they preferred four doors, plenty of interior space, and lots of luxury, but with the handsome look and sportiness of a hardtop design. Earl was further convinced that such a top-drawer edition needed the very latest in interior fashions, drivetrain power and efficiency, technological innovations, comfort and convenience features, and gadgetry. He also wanted it priced just under \$10,000, the retail list of the Mark II.

Earl got all of his wishes but one ... the price exceeded that of the limited edition Continental by more than 30 percent! To put that into perspective, the \$3,074 margin of difference between the exclusive Lincoln and Cadillac offerings was enough to buy a pair of bottom-line '57 Chevy sedans, or one '57 Chevy Bel Air

convertible with \$500 worth of options. For the 13 grand it took to buy one '57 Cadillac Brougham, the buyer could have ordered a fleet of five Chevy convertibles!

To say that one had to be loaded to buy a '57 Cadillac Brougham is like saying one has to be smart to be a brain surgeon. It goes without saying, since 13 big ones back in the late '50s would have bought an attractive bungalow in the suburbs of most midwestern cities. But then the Brougham was something special, nearly a home on wheels. With a list price that exceeded the average man's yearly income, it provided every automotive convenience and feature imaginable

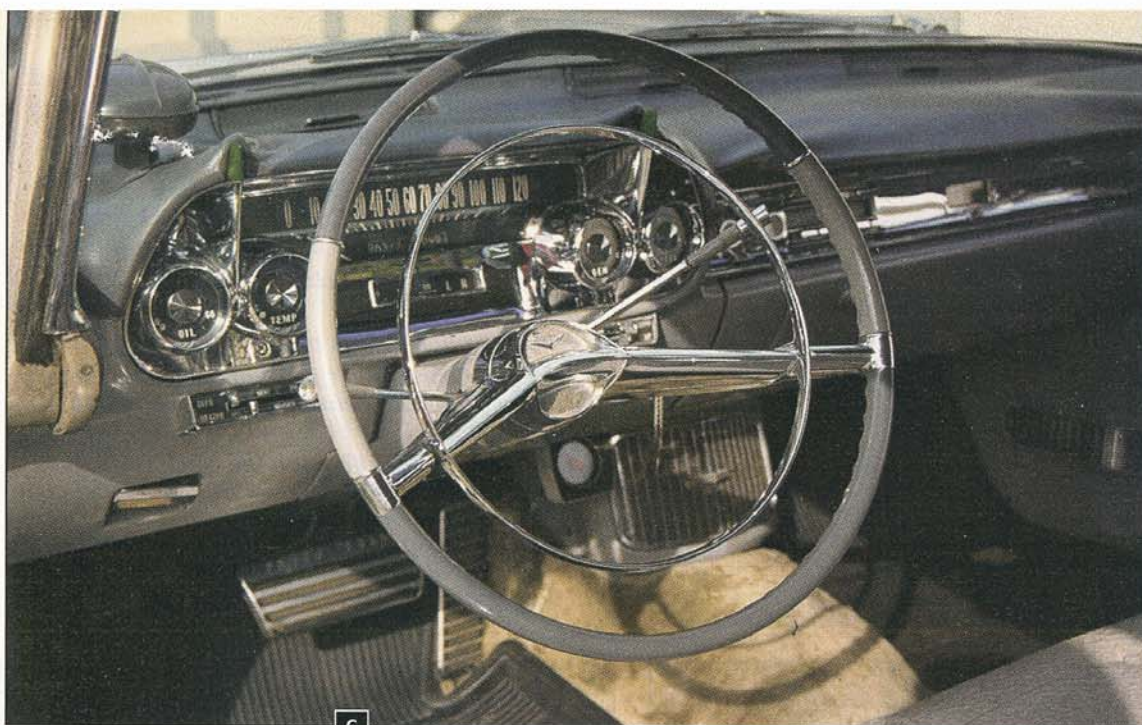


in 1957, including some theretofore reserved for dream cars.

The prototype Eldorado Brougham, a true pillarless four-door hardtop, had its debut as a feature car in the GM Motorama for 1955. Its first showing was in January of 1955, at the Motorama in New York City. On opening days, just hours before the curtain was raised on Motorama '55, the Brougham idea car was damaged in a freak accident on the show floor and some frantic panel beating was necessary to return it to form. During the grand debut, no one noticed the expert repairs.

Brimming in innovation, the Brougham excited the New York Motorama audience. The stainless roof was a novelty, and an attractive one, and the quad-headlamp system drew considerable interest. Also, the exquisite trim and finish impressed everyone. But the most magnetic pull generated by the handsome show machine was its intriguing air spring suspension system, which provided optimum ride stability and comfort for occupants regardless of road conditions, weather, speed, etc. The special setup stirred enough curiosity among the public and press that its use on the production model was virtually guaranteed.

The design of the production model took a lot of additional work, of course, as it had to be built around a somewhat standard platform in the Cadillac lineup. Engineers and designers decided to mate the Brougham concept to the 129.5-inch wheelbase Eldorado chassis, using the hot dual-carb 325-hp version of its 365-cid V-8 partnered with the latest version of the Hydra-Matic transmission. A new tubular X-frame was featured for greater structural rigidity, while allowing for a lowering of the car. The twin four-barrel engine was a marvel of efficiency, in



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6. The dash was beautifully and brightly trimmed. Steering wheel was a real handful, but thank goodness for power steering, which was standard, of course.

7. Pillarless four-door hardtops need something to keep the doors pinned at the middle, and the Cadillac Brougham features this little stub to secure the doors when closed. Rising 14 inches high, the mini post featured chrome plated latches. The doors locked automatically when the car was placed in gear.

8. Large green turn signal indicators are fiber optic fed. Atop the dash (left) is the automatic headlamp dimmer sensor unit, which detects the headlights of oncoming traffic and instantly switches the headlamps on the host vehicle from bright to dim, and then back to bright when the oncoming car passes.

9. The speedometer goes to 120 mph and is flanked by oil and temperature gauges to the driver's left, and generator and fuel gauges to the opposite side. The transmission gear indicator is just below the speedometer.

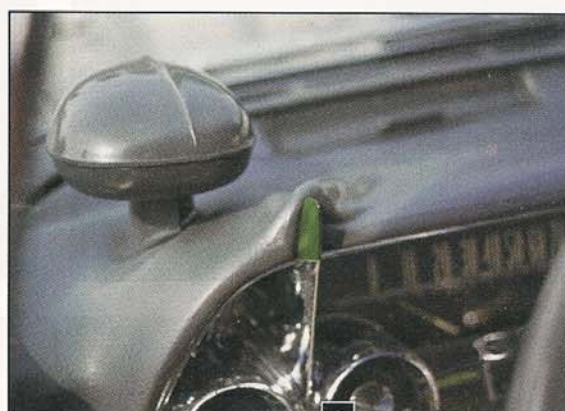
10. Signal-seeking pushbutton radio was standard equipment on the fully loaded Brougham.

11. "Eldorado Brougham" in fancy script appears on the dash.

12. The glovebox door drops down to open up a small bar complete with magnetized shot glasses, etc. The shot glasses disappeared long ago from this car.



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with the "brights on" in terms of wattage output and beam spread. With the standard Autronic-Eye system, the headlights were automatically dimmed when the sensor detected oncoming traffic and then switched back to high beams when the oncoming car or cars passed. (The four-lamp system, incidentally, was illegal in several states, but the laws were soon revised as nearly the entire industry adopted the quad-headlamp setup the following year, 1958.)

The automatic headlamp dimmer is only one of numerous gadgets fitted to the Brougham at the factory. Other features included power steering and



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13. The Brougham needed a big engine to move all that weight and heft, and it had one in the form of a 365-cid V-8 producing 325 hp. Premium fuel was dispensed through a pair of four-barrel carbs.

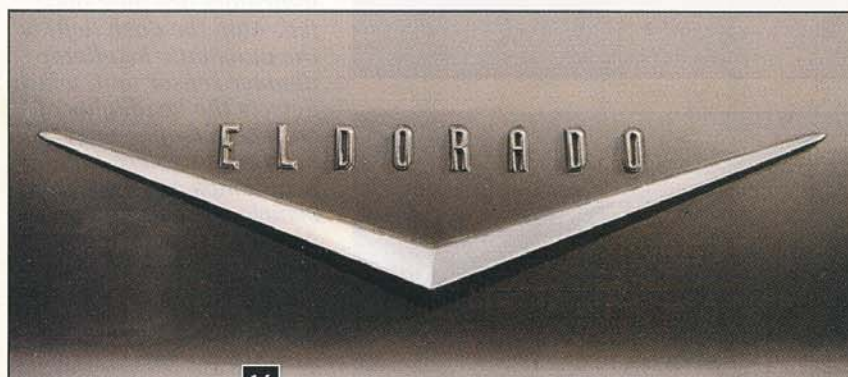
14. "Eldorado" in tall block letters joins an elongated V on the big Caddy's rear deck lid. The same treatment is duplicated up front on the hood.

15. Fender emblems proclaim: "Eldorado Brougham by Cadillac."

16. The gas filler door is plainly marked "gasoline."

17. The gas door doesn't just flip open, but rather slides upward, disappearing into the body and exposing the gas filler pipe and cap.

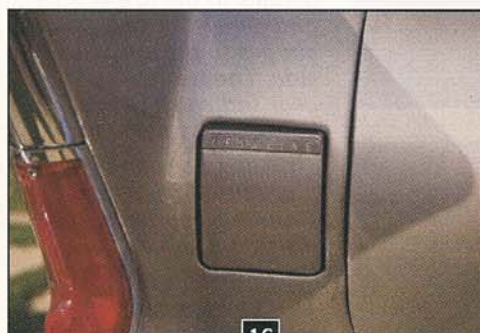
18. The body plate, affixed to the cowl, is deciphered thusly: Style 57-7059X = 57 model year and 7059X is the Eldorado Brougham four-door hardtop; Body No. 157 = 157th Brougham body built; Trim 1212 = special leather and cloth in gray and blue-gray; Paint 149 = Nairobi pearl.



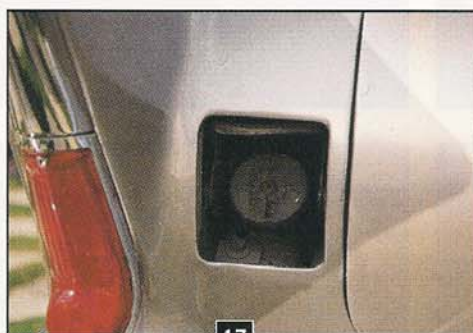
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brakes, electric windows, power seats, power door locks, and a five-motor power system for opening and closing the trunk lid. Yet another trick device on the Brougham is its starting system, which automatically engaged when the ignition was turned "on" with the gear selector in park or neutral. Also, once the transmission was placed in gear, all four doors automatically locked.

Other standard features on this truly loaded Cadillac are E-Z Eye tinted glass; power antenna that rises and lowers when the radio is turned on or off; signal-seeking all-transistor radio with twin speakers; heater and defroster; white-wall tires with a thinner-than-normal one-inch stripe; power vent windows; air conditioning; separate rear-seat heating system; full complement of interior lighting, including units under the hood and in the trunk; full carpeting; interior upholstery combination of leather and fabric; polarized sun visors; fiber-optic

fed turn signal indicators; electric clock; parking brake automatic release; and cruise control. Most of these features, of course, weren't even available on other cars, and in the few instances where they were, they were expensive extra-cost items.

Achieving the pillarless hardtop design necessitated the use of a 14-inch-high locking plate that housed latching points for the rotary-style door locks. They worked well, even after years of wear and use. They were even rather attractive, with chrome plating accenting the stubby little posts; just another in a lengthy series of ornate styling touches.

Other traces of elegance included such niceties as a set of four gold-finished drinking cups that were magnetized and in the glove box, which doubled as a mini bar; tissue dispenser; vanity compact with lipstick and cologne; cigarette case; six-way power seat with memory setting (it also moved automatically so passen-



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19. Cadillac lube plate on the driver's door jamb lists the engine number: 5770101865, which doubles as the VIN. The number is decoded as follows: 57 = model year (1957); 70 = series (Eldorado Brougham); 101865 = sequential production number (1,865th Cadillac produced in '57 model year). The serial number is also cast into the engine block, on a flat machined pad to the right front of the block, and on the right-hand frame side bar right behind the engine support bracket.

20. Turbine-style wheels embrace a colorful Cadillac crest. The Brougham, unlike the rest of the Cadillac line and most of the industry, bucked the trend toward wide whitewalls, using instead a narrower band of white. The tires with the one-inch-wide whitewalls were standard.



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gers could enter and exit with dignity); day-night mirror; a quartet of horns, including a trio of sea-shell honkers and one trumpet, that sounded simultaneously; fold-down rear-seat armrest with a built-in storage compartment containing note pad and pencil, hand-held mirror and an Arpege atomizer filled with Lanvin perfume; and a choice of 45 standard and two special interior trim and color options in leather or leather-and-cloth. The buyer also specified his choice of Mouton or high-pile Karakul carpeting. All the amenities to which the wealthy were accustomed, and more!

Styling-wise, the new Brougham was clearly Cadillac. But its body sculpting just as clearly identified it at a glance as something special. The flat hood and rear deck were actually lower than the fenders, front and rear. Air intakes were mounted atop the front fenders, and contributed to the car's brightwork trim. There was also that brushed stainless steel roof, of course, plus stainless steel skirts complementing the extensive quarter panel trim. The bold grille was gently curved and cellular in design, bordered by the massive front bumper and guard assembly. Pointed, high-rising fins topped off the rear fenders, and cradled thin tail lights. Extra stoplamps were also embedded in the rear bumper, alongside the backup lamps.

The Brougham buyer could skip the regular palette of colors offered by Cadillac, selecting instead from an array of 15 special hues, such as the Nairobi pearl on the featured Brougham.

Cadillac's general manager at the time, James A. Roche, called the Brougham "the finest car possible" in 1957. His sentiments were echoed by the advertising corps. In fact, the division was pretty high on its entire line for '57. "Presenting the most significant advancements Cadillac has ever achieved in styling and design!" is how the luxury automaker presented its lineup.

"Never before has a single year established so many milestones for the world's



SPECIFICATIONS 1957 CADILLAC ELDORADO BROUGHAM

GENERAL DATA

Body style: 4-dr. hardtop
Passenger capacity: 4-6
Base price: \$13,074
Price as equipped: Same
Options: None

BASIC SPECIFICATIONS

Wheelbase: 129"
Length: 216"
Width: 79.1"
Height: 55.5"
Weight: 5,315 lbs.
Front tread: 61"
Rear tread: 61"
Ground clearance: 6.2"

INTERIOR

SPECIFICATIONS

Headroom: 35.0"
Legroom (front): 45.2"

ENGINE

Type: OHV V-8
Displacement: 365 cu. in.
HP @ RPM: 325 @ 4800
Torque @ RPM:
400 lbs.-ft. @ 3200
Compression ratio: 10:1
Bore x stroke: 4 x 3.625"
Induction system: Dual
Carter 4-bbl. carbs
Ignition system:
Delco, 12 volt

Fuel: Premium leaded
Exhaust: Dual
Valve configuration:
Overhead
Valve lifters: Hydraulic
Main bearings: 5
Oil pressure: 30-35 psi

TRANSMISSION

Type: Hydra-Matic
automatic
Speeds: Two drive ranges,
low-range, reverse

DIFFERENTIAL

Type: Hypoid, semi-floating
Ratio: 3.36

SUSPENSION

Front: Air suspension,
ball joints
Rear: Air suspension,
4-link rear axle

FRAME

Type: Tubular X-style

STEERING

Type: Recirculating ball,
power assist
Ratio: 19.5:1
Turning circle: 43.4'

BRAKES

Type: 4-wheel hydraulic,
power assisted

Effective swept area:
210.32 sq. in.

TIRES

Size: 8.00 x 15
Type: White stripe,
4-ply, tubeless

CAPACITIES

Cooling system: 19 qts.
(20 qts. w/heater)
Gasoline tank: 20 gals.
Engine oil: 5 qts.
Transmission: 11.5 qts.
Rear axle: 5 pts.

CALCULATED DATA

HP/CID: .89
LBS/HP: 16.35
LBS/CID: 14.56

PERFORMANCE*

Acceleration:
0-30 4 sec.
0-45 6.9 sec.
0-60 10.9 sec.
Standing 1/4 mile:
17.8 sec. @ 78.5 mph
Fuel mileage: 10-11 mpg
city; 12-14 mpg highway

*Source: Estimates
compiled from test reports
of '57 Cadillac 4-dr. hdtps.,
but not Broughams.

automotive designers and engineers as does the 1957 Cadillac ... brilliantly new in beauty and performance ... with many spectacular and revolutionary achievements," Cadillac boasted.

Officially designated as the Series 70, the Eldorado Brougham was in production only two years, with just 400 examples of the ultra-luxury ride handbuilt in 1957, and another 304 custom assembled in '58. The Brougham name lived on in the Eldorado series of the Cadillac line into 1959 and '60, but it was not the factory custom of 1957-58. The 1959-60 Broughams had coachwork from Pininfarina of Turin, Italy, however, and are still very rare, as only 99 were built in 1959 and 101 in 1960.

But it's still the '57 model that heads up the pack, being the first of its breed. The featured Brougham was acquired by its current owner in 1972. Yes, Edwin A. "Ted" Davidson has owned this behemoth of the highway for more than a quarter of a century. Davidson, a retiree from Santa Ana, Calif., has been an active old car hobbyist just a bit longer than that, and has owned a wide variety of cars, including the one that many credit as inspiring the Brougham, the

Continental Mark II. He also owns Packards, Edsels, Thunderbirds and other Cadillacs and Lincolns.

The top-line Caddy didn't need a whole lot, and Davidson did much of the restoration work on the car himself, including the body work, though he farmed out the paint job. Other than paint, the majority of the car is still factory original, including the interior, glass, mechanics, etc. It's sharp!

Any surviving Brougham is a highly-prized collectible among Cadillac aficionados. It's also one four-door that's worth as much as a two-door hardtop, actually more ... a rare occurrence for a postwar car.

The 1957 Cadillac Brougham remains a neo-classic with milestone credentials, the last of a long line of custom built luxury cars wearing the badge of GM's smallest automaking division. And, as *Motor Life* noted, it was the leading candidate for "prestige car honors of the year for 1957." It lost the sales campaign to the Continental, which posted larger numbers, but it won the title for the most opulent car of 1957 ... and the most expensive ... and the most impressive!

