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THE HOW-TO GUIDE FOR VINTAGE CAR ENTHUSIASTS

ONE-UP IN THE STATUS WARS

Strutting with the impressive '58 Cadillac Brougham

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Brougham Sweet Brougham

When image is everything, this 1958 Cadillac Eldorado is all you could want and more.

BY DAVID TEMPLE

Photos by the author

From its introduction in 1953, the Eldorado was one of the ultimate-possessions of the status-seeking socialites. The name, synonymous with gold and riches, was a stroke of genius. Cadillac was in fact golden. Their cars ruled the luxury-status field. The Eldorado was automotive elegance taken to a higher level. When Cadillac flaunted its motto as the standard of excellence, the Eldorado was its shining star.

It originally was designed as a limited-edition convertible, so that, like a priceless treasure, only a limited few would have access to this level of motoring elegance. When a hardtop was presented to the public, the name Eldorado Seville was chosen to further its blue-blood pedigree and the convertible version became the Eldorado Biarritz.

Then came the elegant Eldorado Brougham: created from the best features of three Motorama show cars. Design influences from the 1953 Cadillac Orleans, 1954 Cadillac Park Avenue, and the 1955 Eldorado Brougham show cars are frequent. The Orleans was a pillarless four-door sedan with center-opening doors and a wraparound windshield (introduced to the public on the 1953 Eldorado). The Park Avenue flaunted an egg-crate style grille and brushed aluminum roof. The Motorama Brougham most closely resembled the car later put into production.

General Motor's chief stylist Harley Earl created the Motorama so the company could gauge public reaction to experimental automotive concepts. The feedback he was receiving in 1954 gave him a very good idea of what potential Cadillac buyers desired. Earl said the Brougham concept "was created with the intent of capturing the appeal of those who wanted the finest product, whether it be their home, clothing, jewelry, or their car ..."

The 1955 Motorama Brougham featured pillarless, center-opening doors, lounge seats, a vanity case and a brushed aluminum roof. Compared to the production Cadillacs, it was lower (height, 54 inches) and shorter (length, 210 inches). It featured

The Feature Car

The 1958 Eldorado Brougham seen on these pages is owned by Charles Decker Barnette of Texarkana, Texas. Barnette, an attorney, acquired the car in 1984 after noticing it being driven in town. He was so surprised upon seeing the rare Cadillac for the first time that he almost lost control of his own vehicle. Negotiations were soon underway for the collectible car, but after a few days Barnette traded his 1957 Cadillac Fleetwood along with the proverbial "arm and a leg" to acquire ownership of the Brougham.

The Eldorado needed exterior work including new paint and some chrome replating, but was still presentable in its original state. The car no longer had the glove box amenities or the items originally stored in the rear center arm rest. Furthermore, the original forged aluminum wheels had been replaced with 1953 Eldorado wire wheels.

Fortuitously, Barnette was able to trace much of the car's history. It was originally sold in Kansas City, Missouri. The third owner, the late Jerry Morton, former president of United Engines in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, had the car's air springs updated with a Firestone system used on recreational vehicles. According to Barnette, the system is reliable. Morton was the owner who had kept the special items from the glove box and armrest. He also had the original wheels. Barnette purchased the items and now the only missing pieces are the atomizer and the original perfume bottle. A nearly exact copy of the perfume bottle was purchased through Arpege. Barnette's good fortune of locating these unique parts is comparable to the proverbial needle in a haystack.

In 1991, the car underwent selective rehabilitation. Fresh paint, rechromed bumpers and refurbished forged aluminum wheels were accomplished at that time.

Years earlier the seats were reupholstered. The original pattern was duplicated, but not with the correct material, although the material used has a stock appearance. The door panels, headliner, dash pad, and the upholstery on the back side of the front seat remain original.

Mechanically the vehicle needed only a new water pump. Aside from the updated suspension and a balanced engine, Brougham number 590 has been relatively maintenance free.

Barnette enjoys driving his prestigious Cadillac and says the car is really more for the "sporty minded" than the chauffeur-driven crowd.

quad headlights (which at the time were illegal in some states).

In early 1954, Earl discussed the idea of a limited-production Brougham model with Cadillac general manager Don Ahrens. The idea was given serious consideration, but was later rejected as too costly. However, when word that Ford Motor Co.'s new Continental division had been created to compete with Cadillac and a Mark II would soon be available, cost factors were forgotten.

At the inaugural 1956 Motorama showing, a prototype Eldorado Brougham was unveiled. Additionally, a Brougham Town Car — a classic-era-inspired design with an open chauffeur's section and enclosed passenger compartment trimmed in beige broadcloth and gold ornamentation went on display. The (half) roof was covered in padded black leather. Unlike the Brougham prototype, this vehicle was a nonfunctional, fiberglass show car. (See sidebar.) It may have been given serious consideration for production, but it never made it and just the one show vehicle was assembled.

The public first glimpsed a production model Brougham Dec. 8, 1956, at the New York Auto Show. By March 18, 1957, GM began releasing Broughams to their dealers. The announced list price was a stratospheric $13,074 — considerably more than the $8500 originally foreseen.

What you got for $13,074

For the list price of a 1957 Eldorado Brougham, one could purchase a new Cadillac hardtop coupe ($4677), Buick Series 40 Riviera hardtop coupe ($2204), Oldsmobile Rocket 88 Holiday hardtop coupe ($2854), a Pontiac Chieftain Catalina hardtop coupe ($2529), and still have more than $800 to put down on a new Chevrolet! What made the Brougham so

The center-opening doors of the pillarless sedan led to a luxurious interior that included stainless steel tumblers, in case the occasion called for cocktails.

expensive? Standard equipment included a 325-horsepower, 365-cubic-inch V-8 with dual four-barrel carburetors; air conditioning; individual front and rear heating systems with underseat blowers; a six-way power seat with memory settings; power windows; power ventipanes; automatic power door locks; power deck lid; Hydra-Matic transmission; air suspension; automatic headlight dimmer; and a brushed stainless steel roof. (See complete list on page 19.) There were 45 interior combinations with either lambskin or Karakul carpeting and 15 exterior colors.

Originally the car was also scheduled to have disc brakes, Hydra-Matic transaxle and fuel injection.

Two interior features of distinction are the contents of the glove box and rear center fold-down armrest. No ordinary glove box, this treasure chest was stocked with luxury — a fold-out shelf where six magnetic stainless steel tumblers were stored, a cigarette case, a tissue dispenser, a vanity case with mirror, lipstick and coin-holders. The vanity case came wrapped in a cream-colored flannel material.

Eldorado Brougham Production Totals

1957	1958	1959	1960
400	304	99	101

The rear center armrest (when folded) could also be opened to access a variety of prestigious necessities as well: the Cross sterling

Regarding Restoration

There are a number of things to consider concerning the restoration of a Brougham. Perhaps the most important of these is the completeness of the vehicle. Brougham parts are very difficult to locate. None of the body panels interchange with standard Eldorados. In fact, there are few items that are not unique to the Brougham.

One caution comes with buying NOS parts represented as Brougham pieces. Some sellers and buyers will mistakenly assume that 1957/58 Eldorado Seville and Biarritz parts fit the Brougham. Not so. The Brougham was essentially a limited-production "dream car." As a consequence, there were few replacement parts available when the car was new. Today even fewer exist.

If Brougham restoration is in your future, join one of the clubs listed at the end of this article. Members have a wealth of knowledge concerning these special Cadillacs. Parts will be easier to track down also.

pencil and notepad, the leather-backed mirror (color coordinated, of course), a perfume atomizer, and Arpege perfume.

Air Suspension

The Eldorado Brougham's air suspension was an automotive first. It's been described in many ways, but a Cadillac news release explained the system as developed "from the principle that air is a compressible, easily controlled medium with outstanding damping qualities. When controlled as in the Cadillac system the air does not transmit road harshness or vibrations."

Air suspension was intended to provide the Eldorado Brougham

with the smoothest and most constantly level ride ever known to a passenger car. Unfortunately, as sophisticated as the system was (composed of four air spring assemblies, three leveling valves, a control solenoid assembly, and an air compressor and accumulator) it did not significantly improve upon the ride qualities of steel springs

A July 1957, *Motor Trend* drive report was mildly enthusiastic: "A rough, busted-up three miles of ancient concrete road provided a good place to drive both a conventionally suspended Cad 60 special and the new airborne Brougham. There is no doubt that the ride is amazingly improved, but riders and driver too (through the entire structure) still feel shocks; the edge or sharpness of the bump and rebound is taken away."

Although the ride qualities were at least as good as a conventional arrangement, its reliability was not. Leaks were a constant source of irritation as the Brougham owner soon discovered. The first sight of a new $13,074 automobile sitting almost flat on the pavement must have been quite a shock. This flaw, in a car that cost substantially more than a new Rolls-Royce Saloon, was intolerable (not to mention embarrassing) to a Brougham owner, and many had their air suspension replaced with steel springs.

Standard Equipment

- 365 cid V-8
- Hydra-Matic transmission
- Air conditioning
- Individual front and rear heating systems with underseat blowers
- Six-way power seat with memory settings
- Automatic power door locks
- AM radio with front and rear speakers and automatic power antenna
- Electrically operated trunk lid
- Fully carpeted trunk
- Air suspension
- Power windows and ventipanes
- Power steering
- Power brakes
- Automatic headlight dimmer
- Front and rear fold-down armrests - rear contains pencil, note pad, mirror, Arpege, atomizer
- Electric drum dial clock
- Cigarette lighters - two front, two rear
- Automatic engine starting and restarting
- Polarized sun visors which darken by tilting
- Tinted glass
- Forged aluminum wheels
- Brushed stainless steel roof
- Wide oval narrow-band whitewall tires
- Quadruple horns

Basically, the system worked in the following manner. As weight was added to the car, the body and frame settled under the load. When the frame lowered, the leveling-control valve arms rose. High-pressure air flowed into the air springs, thus raising the frame and body. As this took place the valve arms would move down toward their normal position, shutting off the supply of high-pressure air from the accumulator. Once normal

Most Fabulous '50s show cars met with a sad ending.

"Scrap it." These were usually the words spoken which sealed the fate of many of the fantastic concept cars of the '50s. Most were destroyed after their usefulness was exhausted. Too bad. Many car enthusiasts would sell their soul to the devil in trade for a Motorama car, even though many were nonfunctional — no drivetrain and built of fiberglass. Others were fully functional, but essentially untested for road worthiness and considered too risky to sell to the general public. (Chrysler Corp. apparently did sell a few of its show cars, however, and Harley Earl used the 1951 LeSabre as his personal transport for a while.)

Fortunately not all of these cars were destroyed. Chicago night club owner Joe Bortz has tracked down and purchased many of the more famous show cars. Most had deteriorated and needed restoration, but were generally complete. One of his finds was the fiberglass (nonfunctional) 1956 Eldorado Brougham Town Car. It was discovered in a salvage yard where it resided for about three decades. The yard owner apparently didn't have the heart to destroy it. Only a few people knew of it and although serious offers were made to purchase it, the salvage yard owner feared he would be sued by Cadillac if the company discovered he didn't scrap it. Eventually Bortz learned of the car's whereabouts and was able to persuade the owner to part with it. Bortz later sold the one-of-a-kind show car to another collector who reportedly not only intended to restore it, but add a drivetrain to it as well. Sadly, the current owner became ill shortly after the purchase and the effort has been set aside for now.

There are others — the Orleans, the Park Avenue, the '55 Brougham, and the prototype that debuted at the January 1956 Motorama. These cars are thought to have been destroyed, but then again ...

Clubs

The Brougham Owners Assn., Inc.
19 Manning Drive
Berea, OH 44017
216/243-0726

Cadillac LaSalle Club
223 S. Fairfield Rd.
Devon, PA 19333
610/688-7747

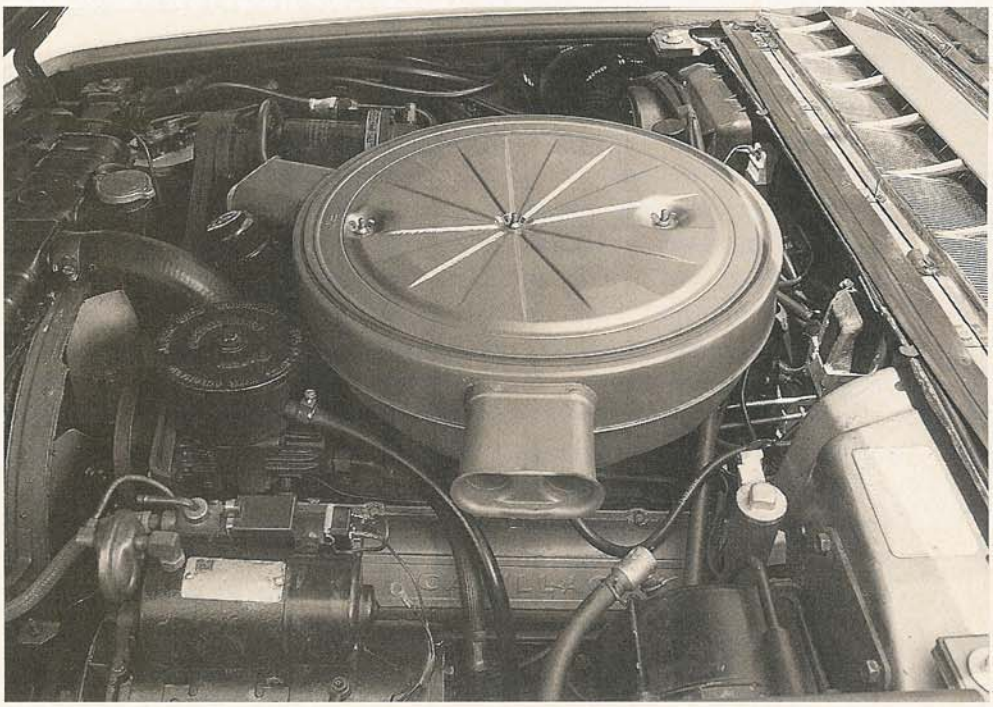
Resources

Classic Chrome c/o John Petros & Associates, Inc.
140 South 7th Avenue
Maywood, IL 60153
708/948-8363

Mastermind, Inc.
32155 Joshua Drive
Lake Elsinore, CA 92530-9624
909/674-0509

height was restored, this action ceased. A similar action took place when weight was removed from the vehicle. The air compressor maintained 110 to 130 psi in the accumulator tank via a pressure-limit switch. Air taken from a line attached to the air cleaner was compressed and forced into the accu-

Three two-barrel carburetors fed the 335 horsepower engine. The automatic headlight dimmer was one of many conveniences.



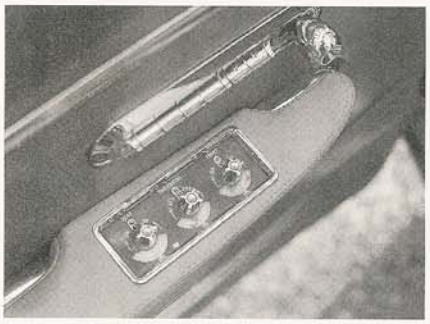
mulator tank through an air line leading from the compressor.

The compressor was driven by an electric motor and received lubrication from the engine's oil system. The control-solenoid assembly was composed of two valves. One pair served to lock out air to the air lines for parking, tire changing, or for any reason it became necessary to prevent the operation of the leveling system. The other set of valves regulated slow or fast leveling as needed.

Other notable features on the Brougham included the automatic restart should the engine stall in traffic. Turning the key to the "on" position and putting the gear selector in "park" or "neutral" would automatically start the car. For safety, the car would not start if either rear door was open. The AM radio was all transistor with an automatic power antenna and front and rear speakers. Externally the brushed stainless steel roof was perhaps the car's most distinctive feature. (Owners were advised to maintain the roof's appearance with a paste wax using only a fore/aft motion.)

Production for the ultra-sophisticated Cadillac totaled just 400 units in 1957. Obviously there is a limited market for cars in this price range as the Continental Mark II priced at $10,000 demonstrated. But Cadillac had an image to protect and the Eldorado Brougham had the power and prestige to do this. In this regard, it didn't matter that production for 1958 totaled only 304 units. Little was changed for the '58.

A trio of two-barrel carburetors replaced the dual fours used previously. Horsepower was increased through raised compression ratios that jumped from 10-to-1 to 10.25-to-1. A few new exterior colors became available and upper door panels were covered in leather instead of being painted. ■



The Brougham used air suspension in an attempt to offer the most comfortable ride. Other conveniences proved to be more reliable.

1958 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham

GENERAL	
Front engine, rear-wheel-drive hardtop	
Base price	$13,074

ENGINE	
Type	Ohv V-8
Bore x stroke	4.00 in. x 3.63 in.
Displacement	365 cu. in.
Compression ratio	10.25:1
Carburetor	Three two-barrels
Power	335 bhp at 4800 rpm
Torque	405 lb.-ft. at 3400 rpm

DRIVETRAIN		
Transmission		4-speed automatic
Gear ratios (:1)	Trans.	Overall
1st	3.97	13.34
2nd	2.55	8.57
3rd	1.55	5.21
4th	1.00	3.36
Final drive ratio (:1)		3.36

SUSPENSION & BRAKES	
Front	Independent, self-leveling air springs
Rear	Live axle, self-leveling air springs
Brakes (f/r)	Drum/drum, power assist

STEERING	
Ratio	19.5:1
Turns lock-to-lock	4.25
Turning circle	42 ft.

MEASUREMENTS	
Wheelbase	126 in.
Length	216.3 in.
Width	78.5 in.
Height	55.5 in.
Tread (f/r)	61.0/61.0in.
Weight	5315 lb.
Ground clearance	5.3 to 6.3 in.
Fuel tank capacity	20 gal.
Tire size	8.40x15 in.

CALCULATED DATA	
Weight per bhp	15.87 lb.

PERFORMANCE	
0-30 mph	4.9 sec.
0-45 mph	7.3 sec.
0-60 mph	12.9 sec.
Top speed	110 mph
Quarter mile	20 sec. at 76 mph
Fuel consumption	12 mpg