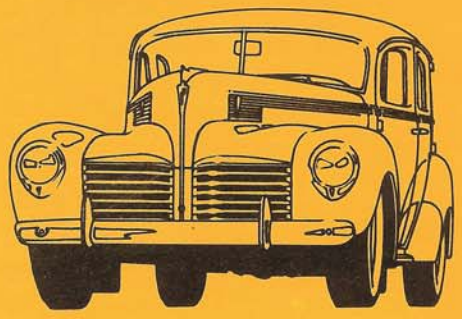
Nov./Dec. 1970

Special-Interest AuToS

a publication of
HEMMINGS MOTOR NEWS



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driveReports

* 1958 Eldorado Brougham
* 1957 Conti Mark II
* 1940 Hudson
* two 1932 Chevrolets
* blown 1954 Kaiser-Darrin

* also

-Fantastic Ford Finds.
-Studebaker at Indy 500.
-Edsel's Hot Rods.
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-Schlock.
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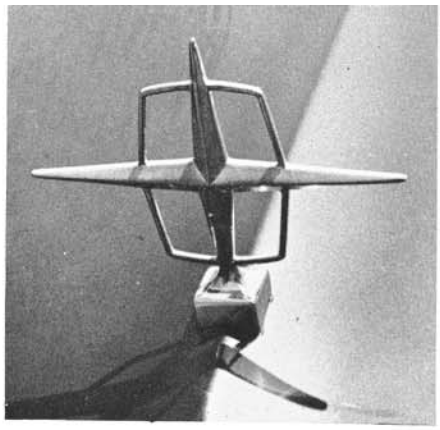


CADILLAC LOST an estimated $10,000 every time a dealer sold a new Eldorado Brougham. Lincoln fared a little better—they lost only about $1000 on each Mark II Continental.

So is it safe to say that both cars ended up magnificent failures? From a cost accountant's viewpoint, yes. From an auto enthusiast's, definitely not.

If you get a chance to examine a 1956-7 Mark II or a 1957-8 Brougham closely, do. Check beneath the doors or the way the hood braces are painted, or run your finger along the lip behind a bumper pan. You'll find them finished with much more care than the exposed surfaces of ordinary cars.

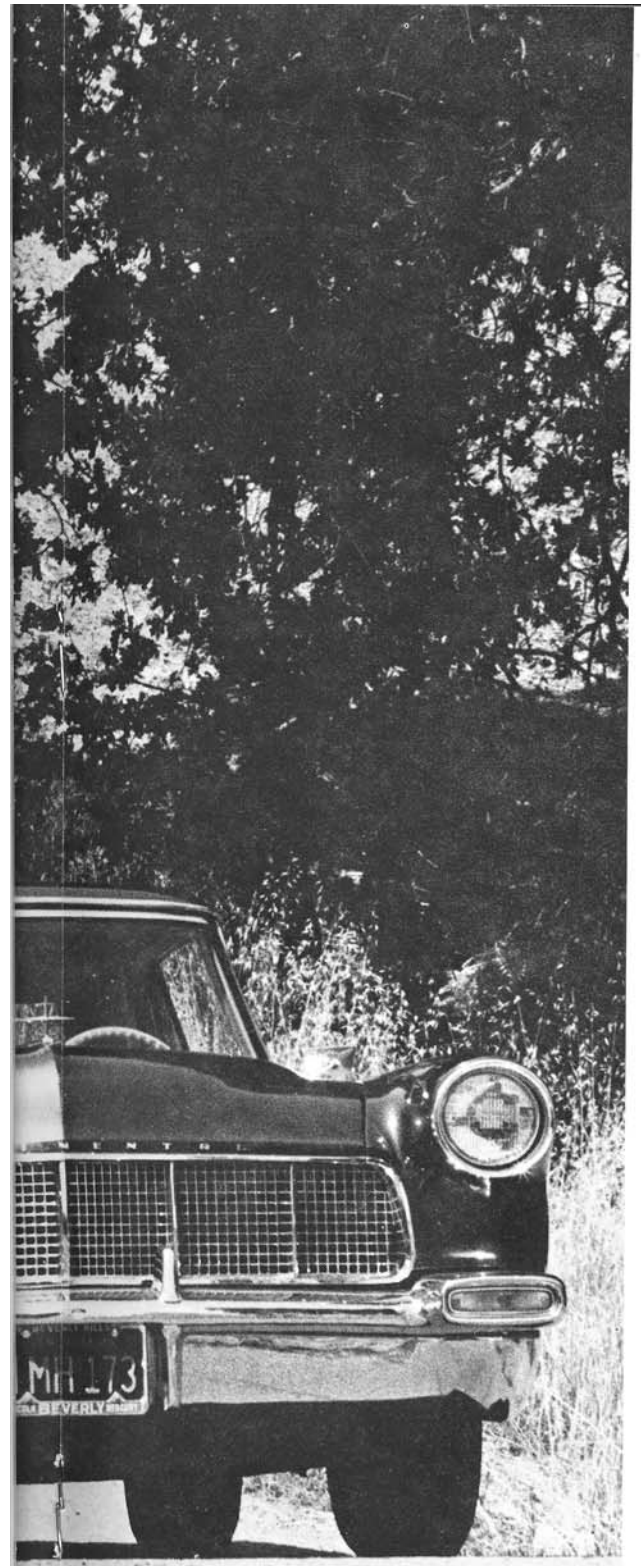
Most people didn't realize it then, nor do they now, but General Motors and Ford were waging a quiet war with these two super-luxury cars. It wasn't the hoot-and-holler sort we're used to among the lower-priced makes—it was very subdued, polite, proper, non-violent, and deadly serious. The Continental came out first, and if it hadn't been for the Mark II, there would have been no Brougham. Both ended up as drastic mistakes. Both companies lost money and to some extent lost face. The market pulse-takers at Ford and GM misjudged the salability of big cars in the late 1950s and didn't expect an economic recession. By 1958, the fickle U.S. car-buying public would swing away from the higher-priced makes and slide into compacts and economy imports.

ever since they'd dropped the "Mark I" in 1948, Lincoln dealers kept asking Ford Motor Co. for a new Continental. Dearborn stalled but finally decided to find out whether a revival would sell.

In early 1952, Ford ordered some Edsel-style market research. It was a tough topic to spell out—no one knew exactly what kind of car the researchers were talking about (including the researchers). According to FORTUNE in an article published at the Mark II's introduction in 1955: "Continental's own delvings into individual net worth, disposable income, multiple-car ownership, private school registration, and the like have led it to conclude that there are 250,000 to 300,000 families in the U.S. that could afford such a purchase. . . . On the other hand, the thinness of the market for a $10,000 automobile may have already been intimated by U.S. sales of similarly priced foreign makes—less than 200 a year."

The Mark II was going to be a gamble, no doubt about that. At stake was that indefinable "Gold Standard" among American luxury cars, a standard held for decades by Cadillac. If Lincoln were ever to capture the Gold Standard, it would have to be with something so sumptuous, so luxurious, so fine (and all those other superlatives) that it would immediately

Mark II Mee



make a prestige car buyer react, "Ah! Lincoln Continental," instead of an automatic, "Ah! Cadillac!"

Ford's researchers—the Davis Committee—recommended to management to go ahead with the Mark II even if it meant losing money. Their report concluded: "Even though not directly justifiable on a financial basis, the institutional advertising value of the Continental... warrants adaptation of the program." In other words, even at a loss, the Mark II would pay its way in publicity and prestige.

Cadillac later said nearly the same thing. "We'll lose our shirt on every one [Brougham] that leaves the plant," confided a Cad exec to a FORTUNE reporter. In 1956, James M. Roche, then Cadillac's general sales manager, confirmed that (to quote AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRIES), "Cadillac does not expect to make real money on the new Brougham...." Thus the battle for the automotive Gold Standard was on, and no one cared much about the expense.

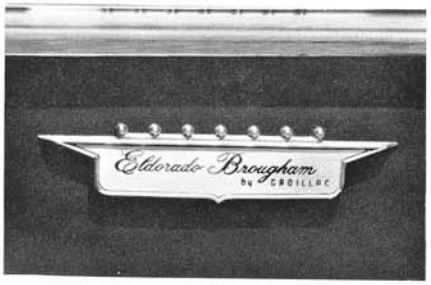
Coming up with a ready-made classic happens to be a very difficult assignment. You don't just *do* it. FoMoCo management handed the project to William Clay (Bill) Ford, then 26. Bill chose six men, all young, and set up a makeshift studio in the old Henry Ford Trade School. He'd been given 10 months and $1 million to come up with "the picture." His key men were stylist John Reinhart, who'd worked with Gordon Buehrig on the coffin-nosed Cord, and Harley Copp, chief engineer of Ford's Special Product Operation. Buehrig himself was later called in to do some of the body engineering.

In the Davis Committee's original recommendations, the Mark II's price was set at no more than $8000 retail and its design was to be "good for at least four years without major change." What the researchers couldn't spell out was what the Continental should look like. Bill Ford and John Reinhart worked very hard to make the car look traditional and classic, yet at the same time to incorporate what they called Modern Formal. By the end of 1952, Bill thought they had it. He called a special meeting of all major Ford men. "The picture" stood behind velvet curtains. When these parted, dead silence. Henry Ford II finally broke it with, "I wouldn't give you a dime for that."

The Trade School boys were, of course, crushed, but all of them went back to work the next day. After long discussion, they decided to keep the same basic outline but to refine the details. At the same time they bought some insurance by calling in four outside designers to submit independent concepts. Finally, in April, 1953, Bill Ford again called an executive meeting.

This time all five designs hung side by side in a bare room. Each viewer was ushered in one at a time so no one could wink, nod, or signal anyone else. Each in turn picked Reinhart's design.

From that point on, it became a matter of working out the details, although that makes it sound a lot easier than it was. Harley Copp had a few rough moments designing a frame low



enough to accomodate the 56-inch body height and yet strong enough to carry 5000-plus pounds. He solved both problems with square-tube crossmembers and by running the exhaust pipes inside the frame rails.

During the Mark II's early stages, the Trade School group hoped to include a convertible and perhaps a 4-door sedan in the line. They seriously considered the retractable hardtop that Ford later introduced on the 1957 Skyliner. They also experimented with fuel injection for the 368-cid Lincoln V-8, getting fantastic power increases with it. But production costs were mounting, and the Mark II's base price was already over $8000, so the retractable roof, the extra body styles, and fuel injection went by the board.

Ford Motor Co. set up a separate Continental Div., distinct and apart from Lincoln-Mercury Div. They built a special $25 million plant near Dearborn for the Mark II's production. As introduction drew near, rumors leaked that potential owners would be checked for social standing, and a number of pre-production orders came in accompanied by pages from the *Social Register*. TIME Magazine reported (incorrectly) that 2100 orders had been placed by the eve of introduction and that Argentine ex-dictator Juan Peron's was among them.

To break even, Continental Div. had to sell a minimum of 2500 Mark II's per year for a 4-year cycle. As it turned out, they sold 4660 in two years and then stopped building the Mark II body style altogether. This resulted in an estimated loss of approximately $1000 per unit.

When General Motors got wind of Ford's plan to dethrone Cadillac with the Mark II, they considered the threat serious enough to retaliate.

Throughout the 1950s, GM held what they called "Motoramas." These were elaborate shows staged in major cities each year. They featured the new season's production models plus a number of experimentals and show cars to test public reaction and add spice. More spice came by way of pretty girls, music, and usually a stage revue.

The Cadillac Eldorado Brougham had its ancestors in these Motorama shows. The design itself evolved from the 1953 Cadillac Orleans and the Cadillac Park Avenue of 1954. The Orleans was the industry's first genuine 4-door hardtop. and the Park Avenue followed with a brushed aluminum roof.

The Brougham was basically the brainchild of Harley Earl, GM's strong-minded vice presi-

ets Eldorado Brougham

Eldorado Brougham Chronology

May 1954: GM execs meet to discuss Eldorado Brougham project. Cadillac styling studio given go-ahead to do clays. So far Brougham planned only as 1-off show car to test public reaction.

Aug. 1954: Clay models completed, previewed by top management.

Nov. 1954: Cadillac Div. delivers special show car chassis and underbody to Styling.

Jan. 19, 1954: Brougham show car's first public display at GM Motorama, NYC. Reaction highly favorable.

Mar. 1955: GM Motorama, San Francisco, Cad announces plans for limited production of Eldorado Brougham during 1956, begins engineering and styling production prototype.

Dec. 1955: Production proto shown for 1st time at 42nd Paris Auto Show.

Jan. 19, 1956: GM Motorama, NYC, production proto first shown in U.S. Cadillac announces price at "about $8500," projects production at 1500 per year.

Feb. - Jun. 1956: Three test cars built and tested at GM's Desert Proving Grounds, Mesa, Ariz.

Jul. - Nov. 1956: Even more innovations planned and tested than reach production, e.g. fuel injection, Hydra-Matic transaxle, wet disc brakes, 4-wheel independent suspension.

Dec. 8, 1956: N.Y. Auto Show, first public display of production Eldorado Brougham.

Mar. 18, 1957: First shipment of Broughams goes to selected dealers. New list price: $13,074 f.o.b.

Jul. 1958: Eldorado Brougham production ceases, 704 built in all. Outside estimates put factory costs at $23,000 per car, a loss to Cadillac of nearly $10,000 each.

Continental Mark II Chronology

Early 1952: Ford Motor Co. decides to explore ways to revive classic Lincoln Continental, discontinued since 1948 (5322 "Mark I's" built between 1939-48). Reason for discussions: Dealers clamor for new prestige car.

Jun. 1952: Davis Committee draws up secret preliminary cost and price analyses, projects Mark II's tag at $8000 and break-even at 2500 cars a year.

Aug. 1952: Wm. Clay Ford, stylist John Reinhart, and engineer Harley Copp given charge of design, $1 million and 10 months to come up with "the picture."

Dec. 1952: Design group unveils first styling drawings to assembled FoMoCo execs. Execs thumbs it down.

Apr. 1953: Design group holds 2nd styling showing. Five alternatives given—4 outside and 1 company. Execs choose company design.

Late 1953: Ford engineers begin experiments to incorporate retractable hardtop and fuel injection in Mark II. Both tried but rejected as too costly.

Early 1954: Copp successfully demonstrates that cowbelly frame with square-tube crossmembers will hold Continental's weight, achieves hoped-for lowness.

Most of 1955: Prototypes tested, production facilities set up. Projected list price raised to $10,000. Continental Div. becomes formal, separate entity.

Oct. 21, 1955: Continental Mark II unveiled publicly for 1st time. *TIME* Magazine reports that 2100 orders have already come in.

Aug. 1957: Production of Mark II ceases. Total built: 4660.

(Top left) 1953 Cadillac Orleans show car was first 4-door hardtop, influenced Eldo, as did 1954 Park Avenue (top right). By '56, Cadillac planned but never built Eldo towncar. Derham, tho, made 2 Mark II converts.

Eldo Meets Mark II *continued*

What do you get for $13,074?

Following is a list of standard equipment on the 1957-58 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham.

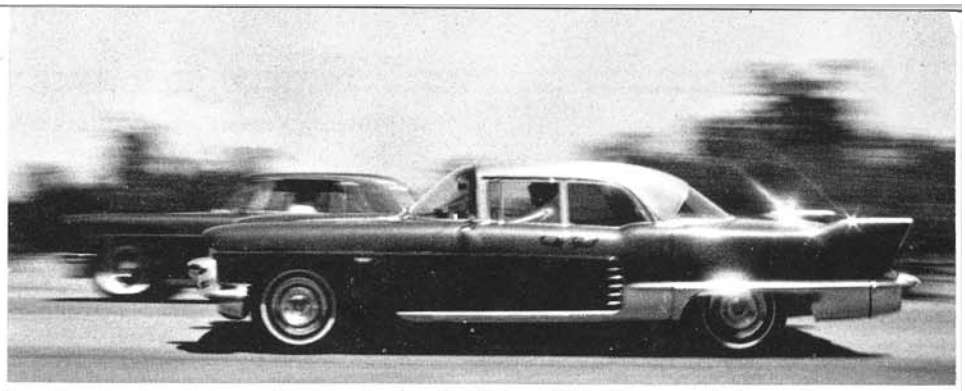
-Air conditioning.
-Individual front & rear heating systems with underseat blowers.
-6-way power front seat with twin "Favorite Position" memory settings.
-Power steering, brakes, windows (including ventipanes).
-Automatic power door locks.
-Electric trunk lid with dashboard control (raises and lowers lid electrically).
-Fully carpeted trunk.
-Air suspension with automatic load leveling. Rubber airbags take the place of conventional metal springs.
-Hydra-Matic automatic transmission.
-Automatic headlight dimmer.
-Lamps: quad headlights, fog, backup, all compartments.
-Glovebox vanity with 6 silver magnetized tumblers, fold-out shelf/mirror, cigarette case, tissue dispenser, lipstick and stick cologne.
-Electric clock with drum dial.
-Cigarette lighters, 2 front, 2 rear.
-Full instrumentation plus warning lights.
-All-transistor AM radio with automatic disappearing antenna, front & rear speakers.
-Automatic engine starting and restarting.
-Polarized sunvisors that become darker by tilting.
-Grey-tinted glass in all windows.
-Armrests front & rear. Rear armrest has storage bin with notepad, pencil, mirror, perfume atomizer, Arpege.
-Choice of 45 interior trim & color choices, lambskin or Karakul carpeting.
-Forged aluminum-center wheels.
-Premium wide-oval, narrow-whitewall tires.
-Brushed stainless steel roof.
-Rubber bumper inserts.
-Quadruple horns.

What do you get for $9517?

Following is a list of standard equipment on the 1956-57 Lincoln Continental Mark II.

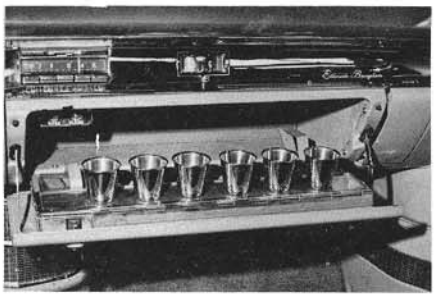
-Turbo-Drive automatic transmission.
-Power 4-way front seat.
-Power steering, brakes, windows.
-Dual heating system.
-Premium AM radio.
-Choice of leather, nylon broadcloth, or matelasse interiors plus deep-pile carpeting.
-Individual roof registers for optional air conditioning.
-Full instrumentation, including tachometer.
-Self-regulating electric clock that adjusts its rate automatically when hands are reset.
-Tinted glass in all windows.
-Rear armrest.
-Turbo-finned wheel covers.
-Premium whitewall tires.
-Fully carpeted trunk.
-Twin exhausts.
-Engine dress-up kit.

Brougham's doors automatically lock in 14-inch posts when shut. Car has no central body pillars.

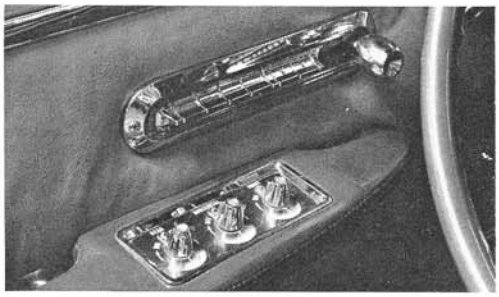


Brougham carries much more brightwork than Mark II, and Eldo shop manual devotes 6 pages to refurbishing stainless steel roof, which scratches easily. Both cars move out quickly, in great silence.

Not visible here: Eldo's sunvisors are polarized plastic, become darker the steeper their angle.



Tumblers stand atop compartment inside glovebox door. Beneath are cosmetics, cigs, tissues.

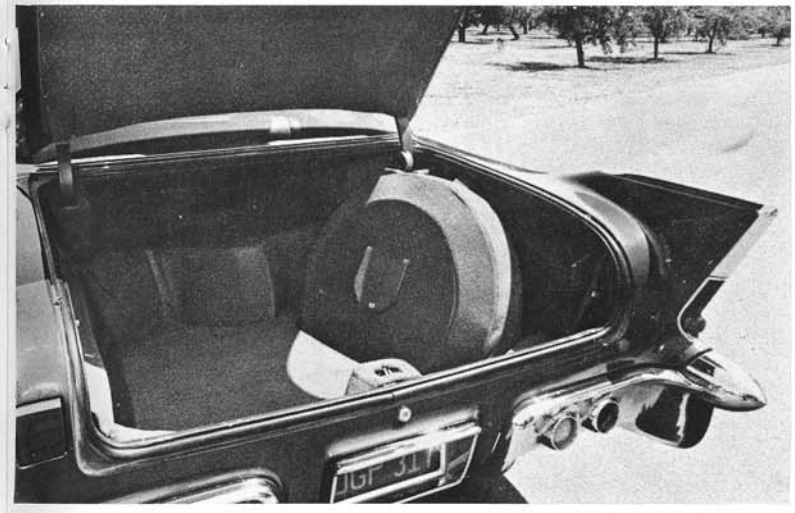


Door controls include 6-way "memory" power seat, buttons for door locks, electric windows.

Conti's dash is much simpler than Eldo's, in fact seems spartan, yet includes all gauges and tach.

Mark II has 4 roof registers for air conditioning. Passengers tend to complain of cold heads.

Fair leg room in rear seat makes this strictly a 4-seat coupe. Door pillars have chromed plates.



Brougham's trunklid raises and lowers with electric motor, is activated by button in glovebox or key. If battery goes dead, no access to trunk.

Mark II's trunk is blocked by spare, which also cuts severely into space. Perhaps if tire cantilevered backwards like Zephyr's, it'd be handier.

SPECIFICATIONS

1956 Lincoln Continental Mark II coupe

Price when new . . . . . $9517 f.o.b. Dearborn (1956).
Current valuation . . . . . Xlnt. $4540; gd. $2940.*

ENGINE
Type . . . . . Ohv V-8, water-cooled, cast-iron block.
Bore & stroke . . . . . 4.00 x 3.66 in.
Displacement . . . . . 368 cu. in.
Max. bhp @ rpm . . . . . 285 @ 4000 (In 1957, 300 @ 4800).
Max. torque @ rpm . . . . . 402 @ 3000 (In 1957, 415 @ 3000).
Compression ratio . . . . . 9.0:1 (In 1957, 10.0:1).
Induction system . . . . . Carter 4-bbl. carburetor.
Exhaust system . . . . . Cast-iron manifolds, twin exhausts, 2 mufflers, 2 resonators.
Electrical system . . . . . 12-volt battery/coil.

CLUTCH
Type . . . . . None.

TRANSMISSION
Type . . . . . Turbo-Drive 3-speed automatic, torque converter with planetary gearsets.
Ratios: 1st . . . . . 2.40:1.
2nd . . . . . 1.47:1.
3rd . . . . . 1.00:1.
Reverse . . . . . 2.00:1.

DIFFERENTIAL
Type . . . . . Hypoid, spiral bevel gears.
Ratio . . . . . 3.07:1.
Drive axles . . . . . Semi-floating.

STEERING
Type . . . . . Linkage power steering (Saginaw).
Ratio . . . . . 22.1:1.
Turns lock to lock . . . . . 4.
Turn circle . . . . . 45.3 ft.

BRAKES
Type . . . . . 4-wheel drums, hydraulic, power assist, internal expanding.
Drum diameter . . . . . 12.0 in.
Total swept area . . . . . 207.7 sq. in.

CHASSIS & BODY
Frame . . . . . Square-tube steel, double dropped.
Body . . . . . All steel, 2-dr., 5-pass. coupe.
Front suspension . . . . . Independent, unequal A-arms, coil springs, ball-joint spindles, tubular hydraulic shocks, link stabilizer bar.
Rear suspension . . . . . Solid axle, longitudinal semi-elliptic springs. tubular hydraulic shocks.
Tires . . . . . 8.00 x 15 tubeless whitewalls, 4-ply.
Wheels . . . . . Pressed steel bolt-ons.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES
Wheelbase . . . . . 126.0 in.
Front & rear tread . . . . . 58.6/60.0 in.
Overall length . . . . . 218.4 in.
Overall height . . . . . 56.25 in.
Overall width . . . . . 77.5 in.
Ground clearance . . . . . 6.0 in.
Curb weight . . . . . 4825 lb.

CAPACITIES
Crankcase . . . . . 5 qt.
Cooling system . . . . . 25.5 qt.
Gas tank . . . . . 25 gal.

*Courtesy **Antique Automobile Appraisal.**

SPECIFICATIONS

1958 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham 4-dr. hardtop sedan

Price when new . . . . . $13,074 f.o.b. Detroit (1958).

Current valuation . . . . . Xlnt. $3900; gd. $2290.*

ENGINE
Type . . . . . Ohv V-8, water-cooled, cast-iron block.
Bore & stroke . . . . . 4.00 x 3.63 in.
Displacement . . . . . 365 cu. in.
Max. bhp @ rpm . . . . . 335 @ 4800.
Max. torque @ rpm . . . . . 405 @ 3400.
Compression ratio . . . . . 10.25:1.
Induction system . . . . . 3 Rochester 2-bbl. carbs, electric fuel pump suspended inside tank.
Exhaust system . . . . . Cast-iron manifolds, twin exhausts, 2 mufflers, 2 resonators.
Electrical systen . . . . . 12-volt battery/coil.

CLUTCH
Type . . . . . None.

TRANSMISSION
Type . . . . . Hydra-Matic 4-speed automatic, torque converter with planetary gearsets.
Ratios: 1st . . . . . 3.97:1.
2nd . . . . . 2.55:1.
3rd . . . . . 1.55:1.
4th . . . . . 1.00:1.
Reverse . . . . . 3.74:1.

DIFFERENTIAL
Type . . . . . Hypoid, spiral-bevel gears.
Ratio . . . . . 3.36:1.
Drive axles . . . . . Semi-floating.

STEERING
Type . . . . . Linkage power steering (Saginaw).
Ratio . . . . . 19.5:1.
Turns lock to lock . . . . . 4.25.
Turn circle . . . . . 53.0 ft.

BRAKES
Type . . . . . 4-wheel drums, hydraulic, power assist, internal expanding.
Drum diameter . . . . . 12 in.
Total swept area . . . . . 210.3 sq. in.

CHASSIS & BODY
Frame . . . . . Central X-member.
Body . . . . . All steel, 4-dr., 5-pass. hardtop sedan.
Front suspension . . . . . Unequal A-arms, self-leveling airbags, tubular hydraulic shocks.
Rear suspension . . . . . Lower trailing control links, upper single control yoke, self-leveling airbags, tubular hydraulic shocks.
Tires . . . . . 8.40 x 15, 4-ply, narrow-rib whitewalls.
Wheels . . . . . Cast-aluminum centers, steel rims, bolt-ons.

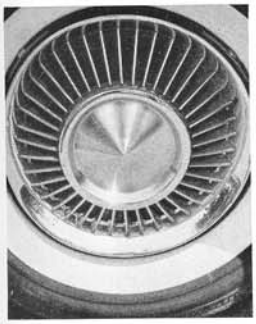
WEIGHTS & MEASURES
Wheelbase . . . . . 126.0 in.
Front & rear tread . . . . . 61.0 in.
Overall length . . . . . 216.3 in.
Overall height . . . . . 55.5 in.
Overall width . . . . . 78.5 in.
Ground clearance . . . . . 5.3 to 6.3 in.
Curb weight . . . . . 5420 lb.

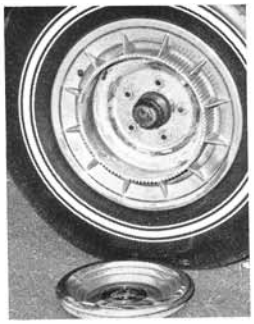
CAPACITIES
Crankcase . . . . . 6 qt.
Cooling system . . . . . 22.6 qt.
Gas tank . . . . . 20 gal.

PERFORMANCE (speedometer and stopwatch)
0-30 mph . . . . . 4.9 sec.
0-45 mph . . . . . 7.3 sec.
0-60 mph . . . . . 12.9 sec.
Standing ¼ mile . . . . . 20.0 sec. & 76.0 mph.
Top speed (est.) . . . . . 110-115 mph.

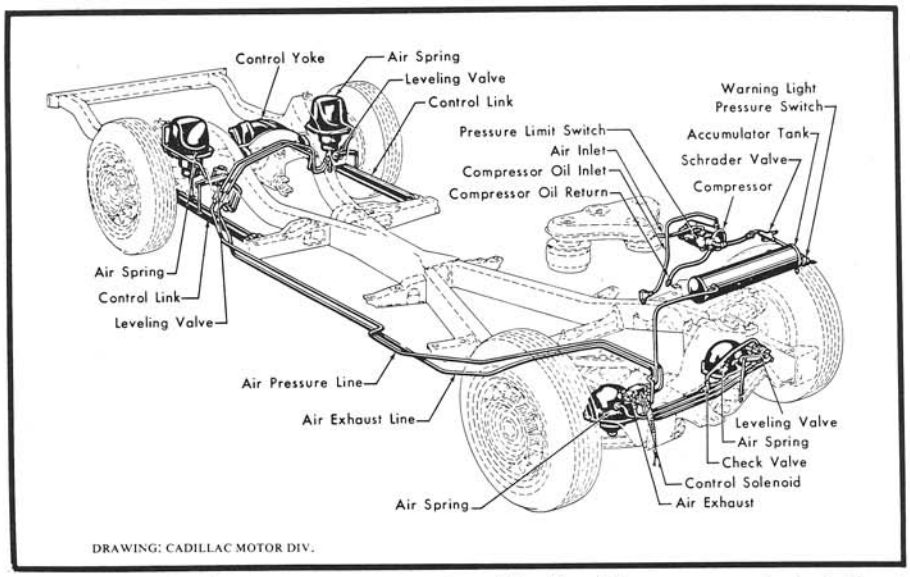
FUEL CONSUMPTION
All around average . . . . . 12.07 mpg.

*Courtesy **Antique Automobile Appraisal.**

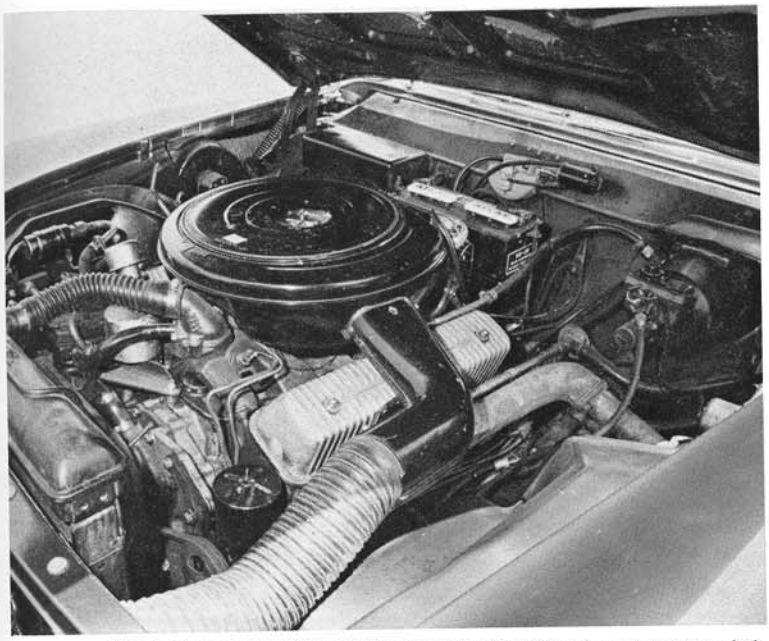




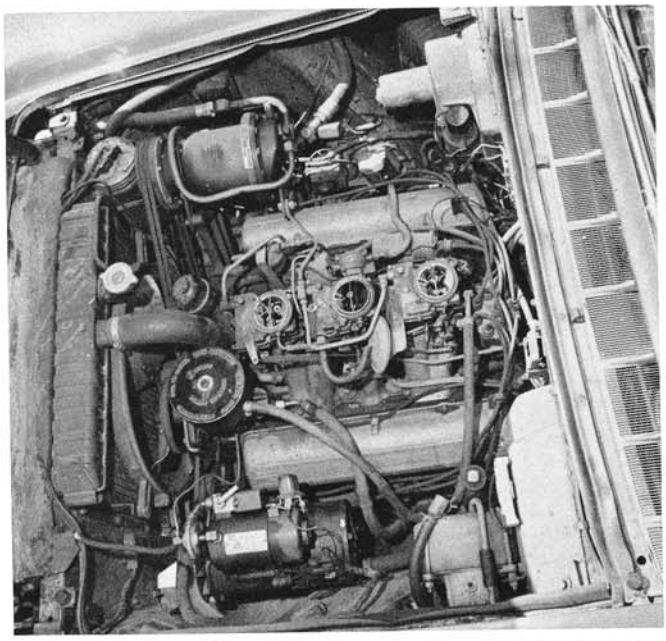
Mark II wheel cover (left) has 40 vanes, cost $26 new, now costs several times that. Eldorado wheel has cast aluminum center, steel rim.



Eldorado Brougham's suspension system consists of 4 rubber airbags, one at each wheel. Electric motor runs compressor to keep accumulator at 100-120 psi. System includes 3 leveling valves that hold constant axle clearance. We felt Brougham's ride, handling didn't match system's complexity.



Mark II uses stock 368-cid Lincoln V-8 with selected parts to assure balance, long life. Die-cast rocker covers are part of engine dress-up kit.



1957 Eldo had two 4-barrels but changed to three 2s in '58. Otherwise, Cad V-8 was stock. Eldo and Mark II were both slated for fuel injection.

Eldo Meets Mark II *continued*

dent of styling. In early 1954, Earl approached Cadillac general manager Don Ahrens with plans for the Brougham and talked about limited production. According to Dan Adams, now Cadillac's assistant chief engineer, Cad engineers went twice to GM Styling to inspect models of the proposed Brougham. Both times they decided that the cost would be prohibitive. But Management, seeing a Mark II coming down the road, over-ruled Engineering and gave a tentative go-ahead.

The Brougham's philosophy—the original thinking behind it—was entirely unlike the Mark II's. Cadillac show cars began as testbeds for scores of major and minor innovations: mechanical, technical, manufacturing, and styling. A surprising number found their way into production. The Brougham's pillar-less 4-door hardtop body, the air suspension, forged aluminum wheels, "memory" power seat, and dozens of other gadgets came directly from Motorama showsters and experimentals.

John Mooar, a Brougham owner in Pasadena, Calif., sat down one day and counted the electric motors, relays, switches, solenoids, and light bulbs in his 1957 Eldo. The total exceeded 163. This gives some idea of how complicated the car is. Mooar, who's owned his Brougham for five years and loves it dearly, says, "As far as practicality goes, it's a nightmare." Don Pabst, president of the Cadillac agency in Santa Clara, Calif., and owner of the Brougham used for this driveReport, says that only a dealer can keep one in proper working order.

Like the creators of the Mark II, Cadillac's engineers planned even more for the Brougham than it eventually got. They, too, toyed with fuel injection, but at the last minute stuck two 4-barrel carbs on the standard Cad V-8 instead (changed to three 2-barrels for 1958). They considered mounting the Hydra-Matic in the rear a la early Tempest, necessitating 4-wheel independent suspension. They played with wet disc brakes (running in oil) plus several less dramatic things, but none of these saw light. As it was, the Brougham turned out dramatic enough without them (*see list of standard equipment*).

Cadillac management did hope to introduce the Brougham earlier than they did. Continental had more than a year's jump. The first Brougham production model was shown on Dec. 8, 1956, but salable cars weren't in dealers' hands until March. Yet the delay did help GM in one way: It showed them they'd miscalculated. By the time the Brougham bowed, GM could see

continued on page 54

Eldo Meets Mark II

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the Mark II wasn't selling nearly so well as expected. At $3500 more, Cadillac saw the Eldo wouldn't either. Thus they could save some embarrassment by not pushing the Brougham too hard, and as it developed, it received a lot less publicity than the Mark II.

That was one of the blows to the Eldorado's success, but there were more. Among them: 1) The name Eldorado had been diluted by earlier Eldorados, including the 1957 Eldorado Biarritz convertible and the Eldorado Seville 2-door hardtop, each selling for a paltry $6648. 2) Cadillac's stylists had given much of the Brougham's flavor to the mainline of 1957 Cads. So the Brougham's appearance had less impact than it might have, and the car looked less distinctive on the street.

As it turned out, 704 Broughams were sold in all, 400 in 1957 and 304 in 1958. The only significant change between these was carburetion—two 4s to three 2s. Like the watered-down Mark III Continental of 1958, the Brougham name was carried over into 1959 and 1960, but these later series were hardly in the same league. They used the standard chassis and drivetrain and were fitted with bodies built in Italy. This was done mostly to reduce tooling and labor costs. In 1959, 99 Eldorado Broughams were produced, in 1960 101, but these definitely didn't show the quality and workmanship of the 1957-8 Fleetwood bodies.

In driving these two cars, we especially looked forward to the "cloud-soft" ride of the air-suspended Brougham. The ads and sales literature led us to hope for some exquisitely smooth, silent treat that combined flatiron cornering with a pillowy ride over a plowed field. But it wasn't quite like that.

Most Broughams have been converted to standard coil springs, a job that costs between $300 and $500. After much phoning and searching, we found a Brougham that still had the airbags and very low mileage (33,660), which we figured would make the car as much like new as possible. But we have to admit a certain disappointment—the ride felt no different from a conventionally suspended new Ford or Chevrolet, and the Brougham's cornering and general road feel seemed quite a bit worse. The body rolls generously, and while we didn't corner fast, we were disappointed even at low speeds.

Aside from the myriad technical innovations carried through in the Brougham, its most noteworthy feature still remains the air suspension. This consists of four rubber airdomes that take the place of metal springs, one per wheel. A small air compressor, powered by its own electric motor, feeds air to the domes via an accumulator tank whose pressure is kept at 100-120 psi. The system also includes three levelers, one up front and two in back, to keep body height even no matter what the load and also to maintain constant axle clearance. These levelers make for an eerie sensation when you sit down in the driver's seat. Suddenly the car begins to moan quietly and to gently lift you up half an inch or so.

Air suspension wasn't new with the Brougham—patents date back to 1847, when it was used on wagons. By 1958, air suspension was available optionally on all GM cars, some Fords, and as boosters on Chrysler Corp. offerings. Units at that time were made by Goodyear, Firestone, and General Tire. Greyhound buses and some GMC and Kenworth trucks still ride on air.

The main problem with air springs is that the domes eventually either blow out or develop slow leaks. When one blows, the car falls directly on its axles ("down dead," as one Brougham owner puts it). The obvious remedy is to replace the blown airdome—it can't be patched or vulcanized. But airdomes are no longer available through GM or the manufacturer, so unless you find one in a dealer's stock or a used one in a junkyard, you're forced to go to metal springs.

If the airdome merely leaks, it means that within a few hours or a couple of days, the system loses enough pressure so the car falls down dead again. Switching on the compressor re-establishes the air supply, but it's awkward to hop into a car whose body is resting on the street and sit there until it resurrects itself. At any rate, air suspension proved one of the Brougham's weakest points—one of several, the "several" being that the reliability of any mechanism decreases in a mathematical inverse to its complexity. And the Brougham was (and is) a highly complex machine.

By way of contrast, the Continental Mark II wasn't nearly so gadget-laden. The emphasis was on quality and what Bill Ford judged to be good taste. The 1956 Mark II we drove belonged to Bob Pittman of Saratoga, Calif., a manufacturer's representative in transportation products. His car had seen over 168,000 miles, yet it felt as tight as any new one—no rattles, no noises, everything solid and in working order. Pittman bought his Continental in 1962 at 73,000 miles and still drives it nearly every day. He's had the engine overhauled twice, wrecked and repaired the front end once, and though we couldn't tell it, he felt the interior needed reupholstering.

The contrast between these two particular cars was interesting because the Brougham was nearly new while the Mark II would have to be judged "old" by any normal standard. Yet neither of these *is* a normal car. During assembly, parts were especially chosen for near-perfect tolerances. Cadillac coded these parts "CD," and Continental Div. had a similar designation. Assembly time for the Brougham was 13 days whereas the Mark II was built with four times the labor content as a regular 1956 Lincoln and eight times as much as a Ford. The Mark II engine was basically Lincoln but was put through six hours of dyno testing before installation. Continentals were shipped to dealers in special fleece-lined plastic-with-canvas envelopes.

These two cars possibly mark the finest flowering of semi-mass-produced American automobiles. Major automakers will likely never try anything like them again, and the independents who've tried cars like these (the revived Duesenberg and now Stutz) apparently face even greater odds than did GM and Ford.

The current front-drive Eldorado lists for $6903, while the confusingly designated new Mark III carries a base price of $7281. But nowadays it's just inflation—it's no longer a battle for the Gold Standard. □

The editors thank car owners Bob Pittman, Saratoga, Calif. (Mark II) and Don Pabst, Pres., St. Claire Cadillac, Santa Clara, Calif.; Cyrus W. Strickler, III, Atlanta, Ga., and John Mooar, Pasadena, Calif., for technical assistance; the Lincoln Continental Owners Club, Post Office Box 549, Nogales, Ariz. 85621; Lincoln-Mercury Div. of Ford Motor Co.; and Cadillac Div. of General Motors.