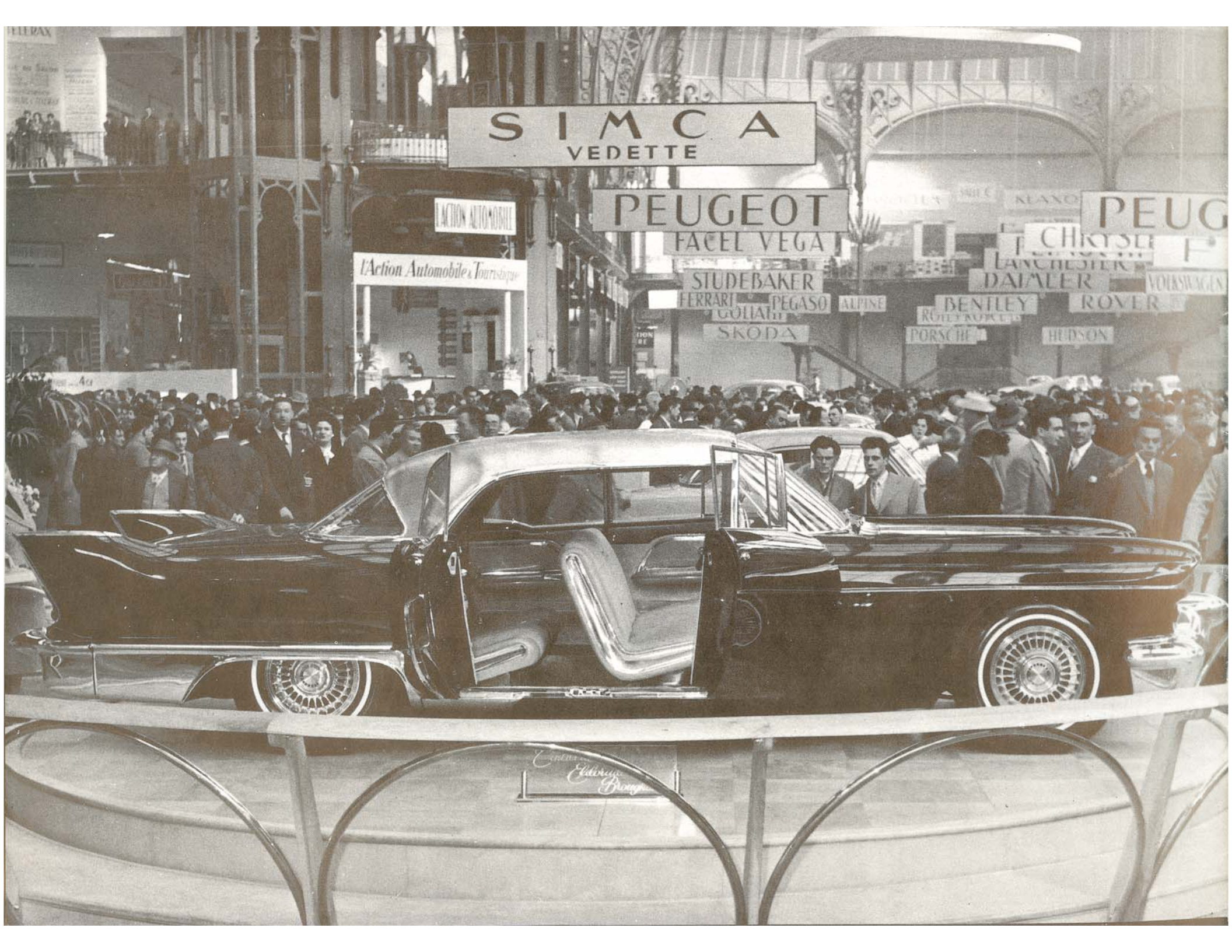


The Milestone Car



AUTUMN, 1974 • NUMBER NINE



SIMCA
VEDETTE

PEUGEOT

FACEL VEGA

STUDEBAKER

FERRARI

PEGASO

ALPINE

SKODA

PEUG

CHRYSLER

LANCHESTER

DAIMLER

VOLKSWAGEN

BENTLEY

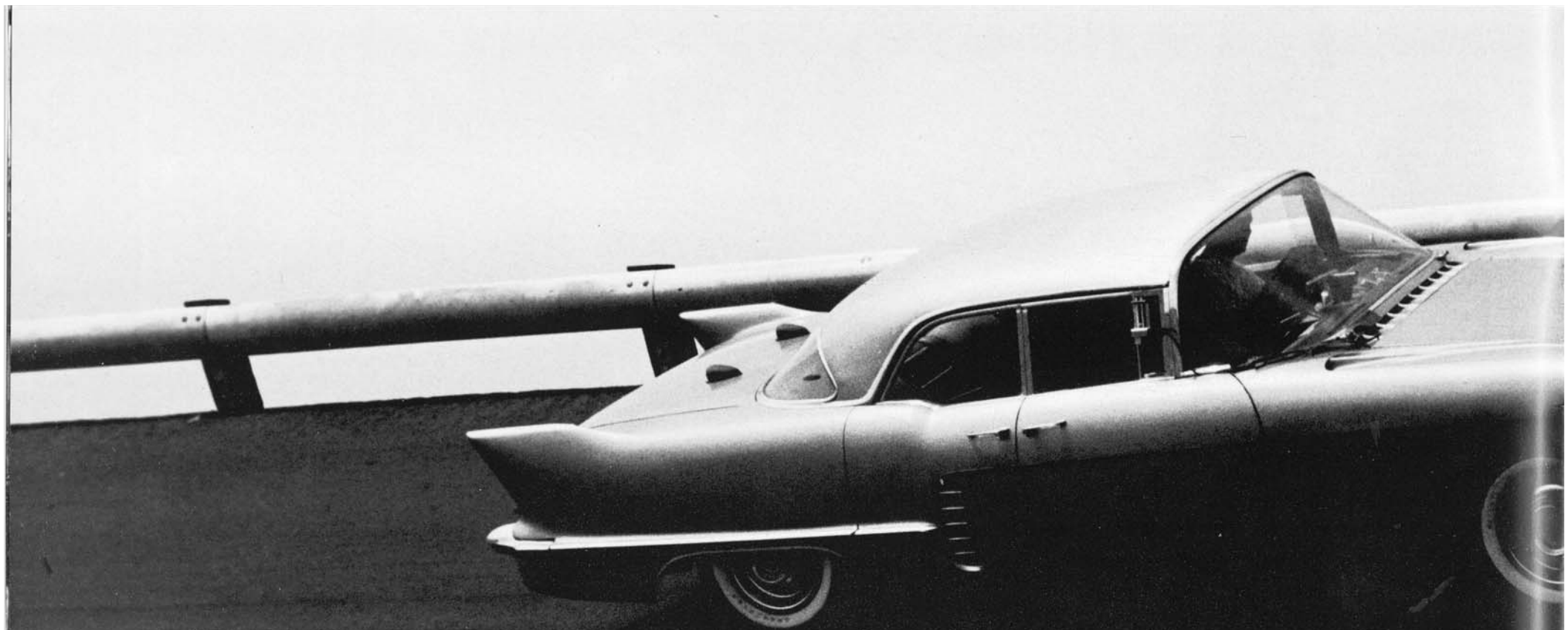
ROVER

PORSCHE

HUDSON

L'Action Automobile & Touristique

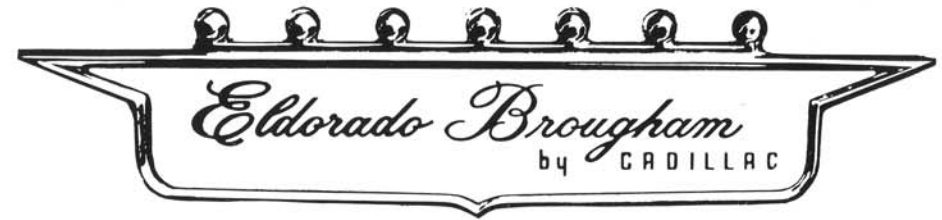
*Salon de l'Automobile
Boulevard des Capucines*



Toward the

Eldorado Brougham

by C. W. S.



classic or kitsch? Proponents of both sides, vis-a-vis the Cadillac Eldorado Brougham, are prominent and vociferous. One enthusiast quoted in Maurice D. Hendry's "Cadillac" called it "the most luxurious and complex automobile ever built in America," while admitting that as an owner he was glad he was an automotive engineer. To others the Brougham has been everything from the ne plus ultra of luxurious transportation to "a technological hodgepodge." To this organization, however, it rated easy citation as a Milestone car, and the writer hopes there will be little doubt where he stands at the end of this article. Whatever one's opinion the Brougham has to be deemed totally unique, a stand-out in postwar history.

Indirectly the Eldorado Brougham can trace its heritage all the way back to the late Thirties, when General Motors first began to experiment publicly with its "dream cars," led by the famous Buick Y-Job which predicted the shape of Buicks as late as 1948. The prediction was intentional, of course. Always with a GM dream car there would be the implication that someday people would see it, or a close derivation of it, out on the road. In this lay the enormous appeal of those automobiles as publicity tools.

Peak period for the GM dream cars—at least those seen by the public—occurred with the Motoramas (not so named until 1953), held around the country between 1949 and 1961. With New York as a base, eight Motoramas attracted 10.5 million people, the greatest single year occurring in 1956, when 2,348,241 attended the displays in New York, Boston, Miami, Los Angeles and San Francisco. The Motorama before that saw the first Eldorado Brougham show car make its debut.

Styling development of the car clearly is traceable to the 1953 Motorama. At this show, says Hendry, GM styling vice president Harley Earl noted that while "crowds had surged around the LeMans

(a two-seat convertible dream car), those who could 'back up their approval with a check' paid closer attention to a less showy car over in a corner. This was the Orleans, America's first truly pillarless four-door sedan. The majority of prospects said they wanted four doors, four seats and a metal roof." (The Orleans also featured center opening doors—later adopted for production not by Cadillac but by Lincoln—and a wrapped windshield, which was introduced on GM models the very next year).

Again at the 1954 Motorama, Harley Earl was carefully monitoring public reactions to the display vehicles. And again among the moneyed, the Cadillac Park Avenue with brushed aluminum roof and egg crate grille stole the thunder from the El Camino coupé and La Espada roadster. The '54 show was still making its rounds when Earl made his decision: he would return to Detroit and approach Cadillac general manager Don Ahrens with the idea of building a limited production derivation of the Park Avenue. Ahrens thought the idea worth considering.

Following this meeting, Cadillac engineers were invited to the styling studios for a sort of Geneva conference, at which Harley Earl elaborated on his idea—a *grand luxe* four-door town carriage of impeccable credentials selling for a premium price even for a Cadillac. But during this and a subsequent visit the engineers felt the project was absolutely cost prohibitive. Then came news of Ford's plans for the Continental Mark II.

Cadillac has maintained through the years that the decision to produce the Brougham was not influenced by the forthcoming introduction of the Continental, but many of those in a position to know say news of the Mark II actually swung GM thinking toward a production car. It is interesting to note that as late as February 1955, *Fortune* had commented that Cadillac, "which sells its Eldorado for around \$6,300, believes there is no market worth bothering about for a car over \$7,000." Just one month later, Cadillac announced it would actually build such a car in 1956, on a limited production basis, and a few months later announced that the car would cost \$8500. Its price, of course would climb to over \$13,000 before the first Eldorado Brougham was actually delivered.

History teaches that *Fortune* was quite out of date with its comment, because the decision to proceed had been made, and Cadillac styling chief Ed Glowacke given the go-ahead, very early in 1954. In August of that year a full size clay model was ready for inspection by top management—much lower and trimmer, with much less overhang front and rear than the production Cadillacs. After its approval work began on the first hand-built prototype.

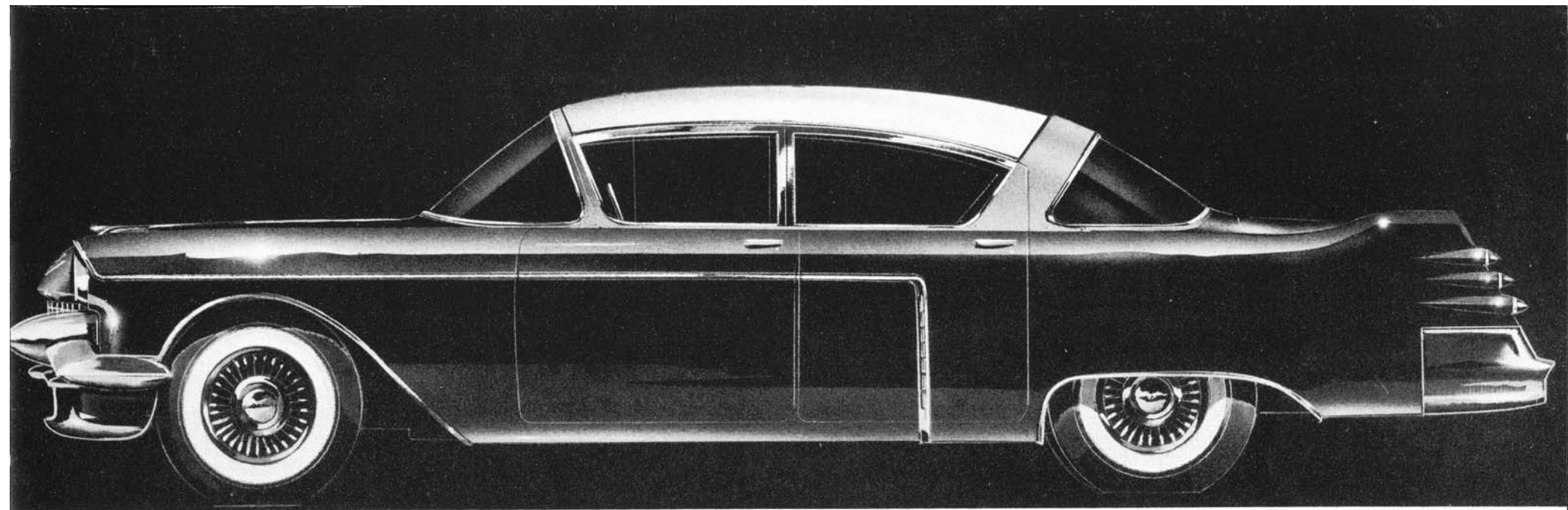
The 1955 Motorama was scheduled to open in New York on

January 19, 1955. It was toward this deadline that Cadillac craftsmen labored. On January 10th the car was painted chameleon green, and the final touches were still being applied as it was loaded into its van for the two day trip to New York. At two in the morning of opening day the car fell off its jacks, damaging the front fender and gouging the rear bumper. Only the likes of General Motors could prevail at a time like this. Earl mentioned some "pretty frantic" panel beating in the interim, but when the doors opened the Brougham was revolving sedately on its turntable as God and General Motors had willed it.

Said Harley Earl in summarizing the project, the Brougham "was created with the intent of capturing the appeal of those who demand the finest product, whether it be their home, clothing, jewelry or their car—our intentions are to provide our exclusive clientele with a compact, personalized automobile, easy to operate and employing our latest knowledge of style and engineering." GM passed out mini brochures on the Brougham, promising limited production during the coming year. "Only 54" in height and 210"

The Cadillac Orleans, below, from the 1953 General Motors Motorama, was the precursor to all the experimental and production Eldorado Broughams that followed. The next year saw many Orleans concepts evolve to the Park Avenue, on the facing page with both the rendering and actual car shown. Like the Brougham to come, the Park Avenue featured brushed aluminum roof and an elegant egg crate grille.







in length," they extolled, "it features low, sweeping lines . . . graceful contours of roof and hood, a unique pillarless door design . . . and great areas of vision. Among its interior innovations are specially designed lounge seats, a distinctive vanity case and a unique instrument panel. Its performance is highlighted by a special high-powered Cadillac engine . . . The fabulous Eldorado Brougham offers still further evidence of Cadillac's leadership in automotive styling . . . and promises continued progress in Cadillac's crusade to build greater quality into the American motor car."

The biggest surprise for competitors on the 1955 Motorama car was, no doubt, its dual headlight installation. Traffic laws in some states banned such arrangements, and few thought GM would attempt such drastic treatment. Apparently the laws were changed in time for 1957, when the first production Broughams appeared with the same installation, and senior Chrysler products offered it optionally.

But before production the Brougham would require much further development. After the Motorama, work began all over again. The whole process was repeated, and a "new" Brougham, actually the production prototype, was shown at the Forty-second Paris Automobile Show in December 1955. The model was continually modified from this point through introduction time, and used for almost all Brougham publicity, though it differs in many ways from the production model—the reader's attention is directed to photographs appearing herewith.

In January 1956 came New York and another Motorama, marking the first U.S. showing of the production prototype. As the Brougham was now slated for production it could no longer be called a dream car, but this role was filled on Cadillac's stand by the Eldorado Town Car, a Brougham with special treatment of its

The first Eldorado Brougham "Dream Car" for 1955, with unique and later-replaced taillights, is at left. The dual headlamp installation was considered very risky, but Cadillac had already set its standards people to work legalizing the set-up in all 48 states.

passenger section. Harking back to the classic era, the Town Car offered a black leather upholstered front compartment sans steel roof, with an enclosed rear section trimmed in beige broadcloth and gold hardware. It was four inches longer than the Brougham, its body of fiberglass and its top covered with black landau leather. Unfortunately, only one was built, and it no longer exists.

Between February and June of 1956, several test model Broughams were built and driven to the GM desert proving grounds in Arizona. On one of these trips, a standard 1956 Cadillac and a Brougham were travelling together, and the smaller dimensions and lower profile of the latter was all the more obvious. Somewhere in rural Oklahoma the drivers stopped for lunch and Clarence Morpheu, the Brougham driver, noticed that a crowd had gathered around the strange car almost five inches lower than its companion Cadillac. He went out to investigate and found to his horror that the local TV station was preparing to take pictures. He knew he'd lose his job if they succeeded, so wild pleading ensued and a hasty exit followed. The TV people were apparently persuaded, for the Brougham was not revealed ahead of time.

First public showing of the production Eldorado Brougham occurred at the New York Automobile Show on December 8, 1956. The car used body number three, which ended up in a California junkyard and was dismantled about a year ago; very little remains of it. Production Brougham number one was delivered in Detroit to the Fisher Body Division of General Motors on March 11, 1957, and on March 18th GM announced that Broughams were being shipped to dealers — with a staggering list price of \$13,074.

The proving grounds were not easy on the test cars. One morning the numerous test thermocouples and complex wiring caused a fire in one car which laid it up for several days. It was

A thinly disguised Eldorado Brougham test car arrives at GM's Desert Proving Grounds in Arizona in early 1956. All identifying marks were stripped, some chrome was painted and plain wheel covers were used. Below, the 1956 Eldorado Brougham Town Car, a one-off.

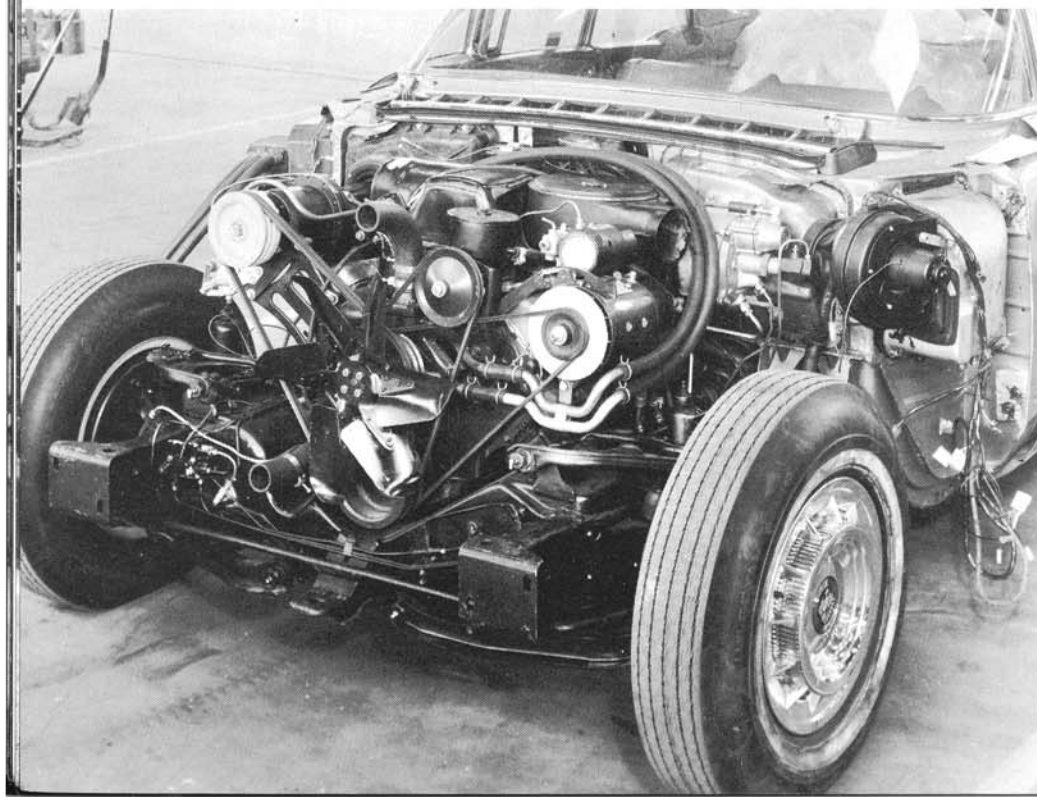




during this period that the Brougham began to fall behind in its development schedule, and engineers began wondering if all they had planned to go along with its radical and unique styling would be incorporated in time. Their plans make impressive reading: disc brakes, Hydra-Matic transaxle, independent rear suspension, fuel injection. The latter almost made it, but was dropped at the last minute. There were later delays in getting necessary sheet metal and body parts. And, on all too many occasions, engineers experienced a problem that would plague many Brougham owners: flat air suspension

This is the first in a series of articles detailing the styling, engineering and production history of the Cadillac Eldorado Brougham, the second part of which will appear in a future edition of The Milestone Car. Through the years, the Brougham has continued to lead a life of obscurity. Many enthusiasts have never even bothered to inspect one closely, usually because they were unaware of its high quality and many unusual features. The editors hope that this series of articles will help correct the deficiency.

Further to that end, the new Brougham Owners Association has begun to make an effort to bring the car some of the recognition it deserves. The BOA hopes to affiliate as a register of the Society in the near future, in order to provide the car more exposure and give other enthusiasts a chance to appreciate this complicated masterpiece of the Fifties. M.C.S. affiliation does not of course require that the register accept only Milestones, and owners of the Italian-built 1959-60 Eldorado Broughams will be interested to learn that the BOA will cater to their interests as well. Anyone who would like to learn more about the Brougham Owners Association should write the author at 4075 Northside Drive North West, Atlanta, Georgia 30342.



The photo at above left was used extensively in Brougham publicity, but the car was actually a late prototype. Turbine wheels, combination Autronic-Eye and rearview mirror on dash, and missing chrome strip under doors are marks of non-production. At immediate left is production model with fuel injection: note plenum chamber and unusual air cleaner. On the facing page, the final product, the Cadillac Eldorado Brougham for 1958, so identified by wheel covers.



1958 Eldorado Brougham

Credits

COVER PHOTO OF ELDORADO — Mr. & Mrs. Dale Woods, 2920 Daisy, Union City, California, Owners

TOWARD THE ELDORADO BROUGHAM: photos from pages 2 to 8, and inside front cover, courtesy of Cyrus W. Strickler III. Page 9 courtesy of Dick Langworth. The Brougham Owners Association may be contacted at 4075 Northside Drive North West, Atlanta, Georgia

30342. Dues are \$10.

ALVIS — FOR THE SHEER JOY OF DRIVING: photos on pages 10,14 above, 15 above, 16-17, 18 and 19 courtesy of Jim Bradley, Automotive History Collection, Detroit

Public Library. All other photos courtesy of Dave Culshaw.

THE STEVENS LOOK: A DESIGN EVOLUTION: all illustrations courtesy of Brooks Stevens.

David W. Culshaw owns one of Britain's largest private motoring libraries, and is co-author with Peter Horrobin of the new "Complete Catalogue of British Cars" (Morrow, 1974, 512 pages, \$15.95). Dave previously compiled "The Motor Guide to Makes and Models," published by that magazine in 1956. Dave serves as postwar registrar to the Alvis Owners Club and has owned many interesting examples of the marque including some prototypes. He hopes this article will serve as background to Alvis nominations, some of which are already pending.



Dave Culshaw's Alvis drophead coupé by Carbodies (left) and presently-owned Three Liter prototype.

Cyrus W. Strickler III is a Delta airline pilot residing in Atlanta, with his mint original Eldorado Brougham and many other pre- and postwar memorabilia including a Corvette or two. We had the pleasure of touring Cy's automotive works (his drive-in basement) last Spring, and were pretty impressed. Cy does all his work himself, and the quality is the best. His article in this issue only skims the surface of the most extensive research compilations on the Eldorado Brougham anywhere, and we are sure that the car is in good hands with Cy's Brougham Owners Association.



Cy Strickler's magnificent Eldorado Brougham, appropriately licensed of course.