EDSEL DESIGN CONCEPTS

THE FUTURE THAT NEVER WAS

Hemmings

CLASSIC CAR

THE DEFINITIVE ALL-AMERICAN COLLECTOR-CAR MAGAZINE

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STRIKING COUPE
1973 GRAN TORINO

HUDSON HAULER
1937 PICKUP TRUCK

MERCURY WOODIES

THE HISTORY OF FoMoCo's WOOD-SIDED WAGONS

RESTORATION PROFILE
1928 GARDNER SPORT ROADSTER

PLUS
1939 GRAHAM
1964 RAMBLER
1976 CADILLAC

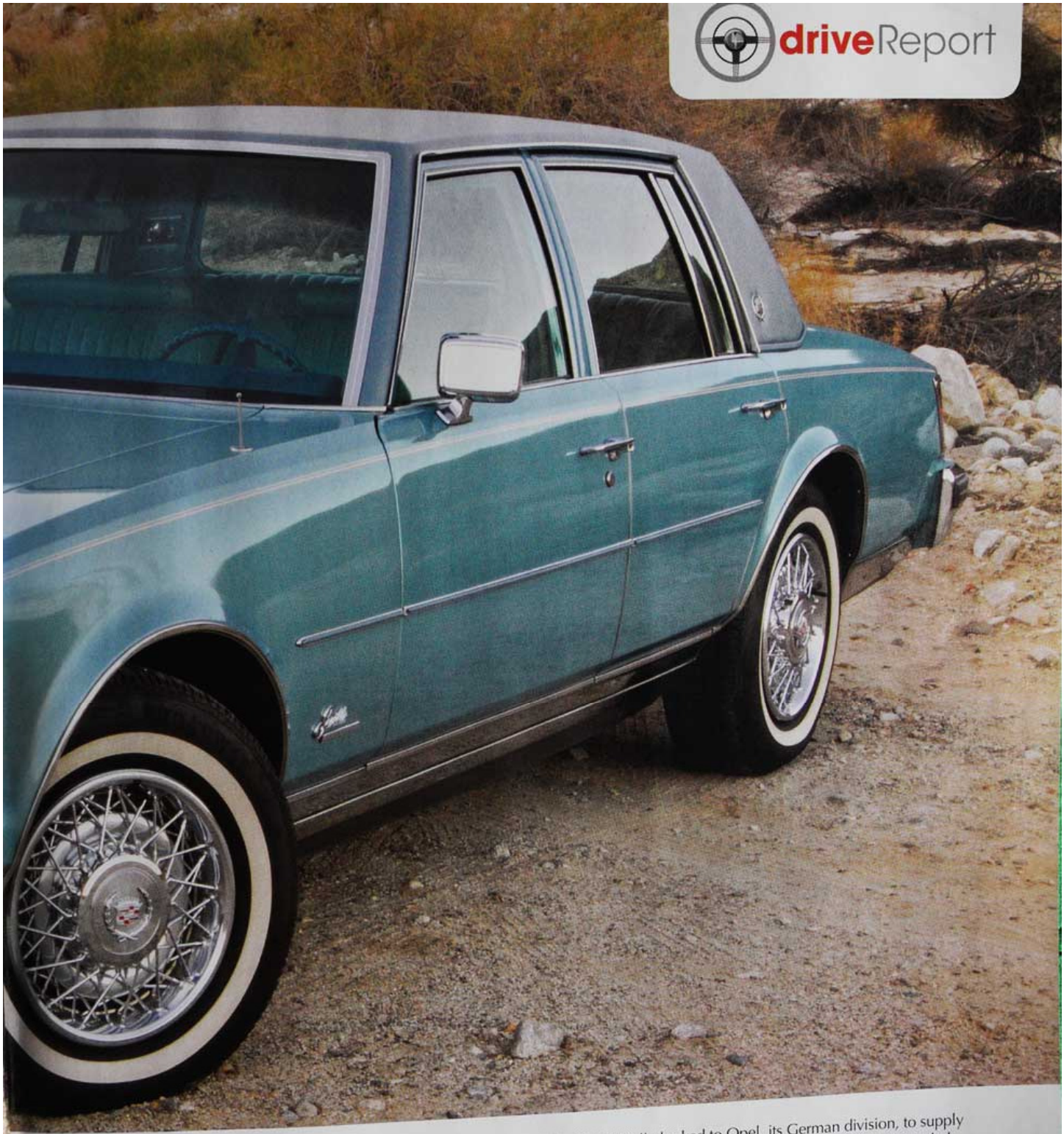
AMELIA ISLAND CONCOURS

Scaled-Down Luxury

Cadillac's new-for-1976 Seville was trimmed down and priced up, and it pointed the way toward the future of the American car

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KOCH

The kickoff for America's great automotive downsizing of the 1970s is usually credited to General Motors' B-bodies, which launched in the fall of 1976. The truth is that, beyond launchi line after line at the bottom of the range (refurbished X-body Nova H-body Vega/Monza, even the 11th-hour T-car Chevette launch), G downsizing campaign was spearheaded by the Cadillac Seville,



which arrived halfway through the 1975 model year.

No one running GM was clairvoyant about the 1973 gas crisis, and GM didn't work that fast. Detroit saw how Mercedes, BMW, Jaguar, Peugeot and others were nibbling away at Cadillac's luxury-car dominance in the States, particularly among younger and more affluent buyers. Each of these European marques' offerings were smaller than American full-size rides, yet sold for some surprising money.

GM elected to meet the European challenge head-on with its own international-sized competitor, the car that became known as the Seville. Work started in late 1970, with the design frozen in late 1973. GM initially looked to Opel, its German division, to supply unit-bodies for the new car, but economic feasibility demanded that a revised X-body, itself revised for 1975, be pressed into service. Revised? The Seville was so changed from a standard Nova that it received its own body code: "K." Three and a half inches were added to the wheelbase, all of it for increased rear passenger room—and the only chassis stamping to be shared with the X-car was the trunk floor. The only shared exterior body panel stamping was a portion of the roof.

Following a European excursion, Bill Mitchell told his stylists to make the clay rendering's semi-fastback roofline more like that

The Seville came standard with virtually everything Cadillac could enhance it with: electronic fuel injection, AM/FM stereo with power antenna, auto-dimming lights, remote mirror, automatic climate control, cruise, automatic suspension leveling and much more. Speedometer and fuel level are the only gauges.

of a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow. The "Sheer Look," they called it at the time—achieved by welding new sail panels onto the existing X-car roof stamping, which required a mandatory padded vinyl roof to cover. The Cadillac's formal roofline was unusual in those days—even GM's four-door sedans had semi-fastback rooflines—but the Seville set the trend. Not only did it allow greater rear headroom, but that formal style was in vogue at GM for more than a decade after the Seville launched.

The Seville nameplate was an 11th-hour name-change from La Salle, recalling the successful junior-Cadillac marque of 1927-'40. But while Cadillac wanted the success of the La Salle, it didn't want to suggest "junior"-level anything—certainly not at the prices they were to be asking.

The international-sized car, it turned out, had been available for more than a decade and a half; in America, we called them "compacts." The Seville's 204-inch overall length measures out exactly 17 feet. To put things in a modern context, a new range-topping Cadillac XTS weighs the same as, and is two inches shorter than, the "international-sized" Seville. The popular term in the press was "downsizing"—but that made things sound small and cheap, and that Detroit was keen on avoiding. Some tried to make it sound austere, and called it "right-sizing," but the international-size suggested a better-engineered ideal, offering all of the comfort, space and implied quality of a larger car with less of the fuel and, frankly, less dollar-a-gallon gas needed to run it. It just took time and events for Detroit to realize how to properly monetize it.

Body-on-chassis construction was better at isolating the passenger from the road, and the Seville was Cadillac's first unitized car, using computer-selected rubber isolators on the sub-frame for engine and suspension in order to maximize the driver's comfort. The Cadillac's suspension was stone-stock X-body components—independent in front, solid axle with leaf springs in back—save for the front and rear anti-roll bars and Cadillac's electric Automatic Level Control.

Cadillac-built V-8 engines were considered for the Seville, but were available only in 472- and 500-cubic-inch variants; with the Seville's smaller-is-better mandate, the division instead used all-iron, Oldsmobile-built, 350-cu.in. V-8s with one significant

The Seville's size may have been in line with international offerings, but the trim wire hubcaps and ancillary controls set in wood-appliqué bezels were more in the style of traditional American luxury.

alteration: Cadillac mandated a new Bendix-designed electronic fuel-injection unit atop a custom intake manifold, making the Seville the first V-8-powered American car designed with standard EFI. Sensors fed ambient air temperature, coolant temperature, manifold air pressure, engine speed and throttle position data to the ECU, which resided under the front passenger's seat. This, in turn, told the injectors how much fuel to use. A speed-density-type unit, a single four-throat throttle body and eight injectors provided the fuel. Atop the Olds-built 350 V-8, the electronic fuel injection delivered 10 more horsepower—180, versus 170 for a carbureted 1976-spec 350 Oldsmobile engine.

Why ditch the carburetor? Recall that emissions-choked V-8s of the 1970s frequently had starting, idle and stalling issues, none of which was a factor with fuel injection metering out the power—and the cost could be absorbed into the Cadillac's lofty sticker price. Also, fuel mileage increased. Oldsmobile's carbureted 350 was rated at 13 city/19 highway in a Cutlass whose weight equaled the Seville's weight; that same engine in an Omega, which shared a physical size with the Seville, was rated at 14 city/20 highway. The Seville was rated 15/21 by the EPA in 1976—not a significant jump over the carbureted Olds 350, but against Cadillac's own single-digit-mileage 500-cubic-inch powerplants, the gulf was enormous. EFI also allowed the Seville to run clean, and more than power or economy (or, as is the case here, both), passing the

The Seville's only engine in 1976 was the Oldsmobile 350-cu.in. V-8, fitted with electronic fuel injection. Rated at 180hp, the Seville was the first American car designed to have an EFI V-8 engine. Not only did it offer more power than a comparable carbureted engine, it had cleaner emissions and eliminated rough-idle issues.

owner's view

It was such a special, unique car when it was new, and it still is today. The design is timeless. In an unusual show of restraint during an era of excess, the clean, simple and elegant lines of the Seville stood out—and still do today. We initially thought it would be a daily driver, but it's far too nice; it's exercised regularly, but only used occasionally. You might pay a bit more, but we find that cars are best when they're original. If we had to change anything about this car, we'd wish for a little more room, better driver's-seat adjustability, better climate control ... and cupholders!

—SCOTT KING AND SANDY EDELSTEIN

emissions-sniffer test helped popularize electronic fuel injection in the 1980s.

Seville's introductory price was $12,479. Looking at base prices, it cost more than anything else in the lineup save for a Series 75 Fleetwood. And yet, Cadillac still sold 16,355 Sevilles in its truncated half-year of 1975, while a total of 43,772 Sevilles were produced for the extended 1976 model year. Total production of the first-generation Seville saw 215,659 units sold, with sales increased annually until 1979. Cadillac's hoped-for 60,000 sales per year came close once but never materialized, and while some import buyers switched, it did little to bring a younger crowd to the dealerships, and raised the eyebrows of the traditional Cadillac buyer, who wondered why they would pay more money for less car.

Our feature Cadillac is a 40,000-mile unrestored original 1976 Seville finished in Innsbruck Blue that is owned by Scott King and Sandy Edelstein of Palm Springs, California. The 50/50-split bench seats and lack of console (as you'd see on much of the European competition) really open up the small Cadillac's cabin. Headroom and shoulder room are acceptable, if not overly generous. The Seville has an easily-pegged 85MPH speedometer and a fuel gauge, along with an array of warning lamps. That's it. That's a lot of space with not a lot to see. The upside is that it feels well-organized, but it tells you nothing, keeping you at arm's length from what's going on in the engine room. There is luxury in being left alone.

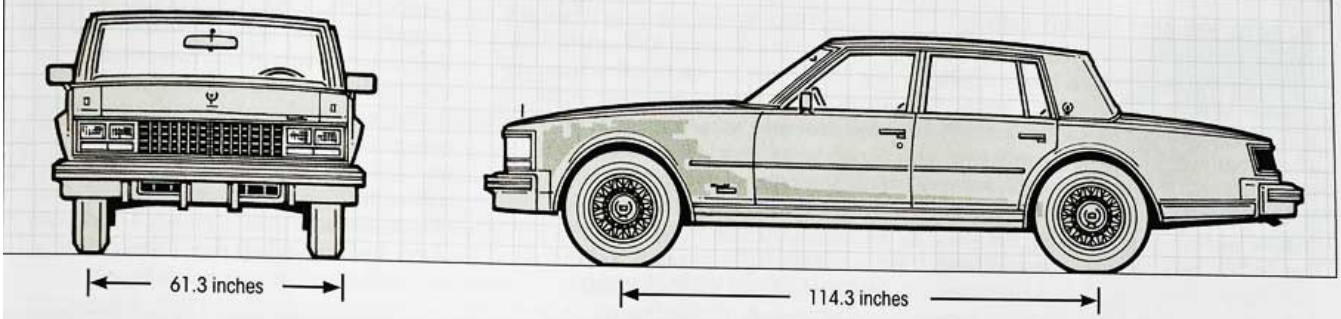
Just turn the key and the Seville idles smoothly, immediately. With EFI, there's no throttle-priming needed. What's more, idle is smoother than on many emissions-era automobiles: You can easily forget you turned the key if you get distracted.

Your opinion of the driving experience will depend very much on what you demand of a luxury car. The Seville's thickly padded three-spoke steering wheel, surprisingly thick in diameter and color-keyed to the rest of the interior, is indented around the back of the wheel to guide your fingers. It wants you to hold on, to take charge, and if you want to feel in command, then the Seville is where you want to be. If your idea of Cadillac cruising is splendid isolation, you'll be disappointed: The Seville's suspension is chatty, sending all manner of information up through the steering column and through the steering wheel. Tall whitewall tires erode any efforts to pretend you're hustling in a BMW or Mercedes, the solid rear axle thunks away under bigger bumps, and there's plenty of big-car-style lean, but you also feel what's going on beneath you.

The Seville is an all-American self-made success story, picking itself up by its bootstraps and, from humble roots, succeeding mightily in a world it wasn't meant to inhabit. What's more, the Seville turned America's traditional luxury-car paradigm on its head. Witness the Lincoln Versailles, based on the "precision-sized" Ford Granada/Mercury Monarch a scant 18 months later; recall the upscale Chrysler LeBaron for 1978. Seville spearheaded American carmakers' much-needed downsizing program, proving (again) that the public would embrace the less-is-more concept. When the concept went mainstream in the fall of 1976, with the new downsized GM B-bodies, America was ready. Whatever you want to call it—downsized, right-sized, precision-sized, international-sized—there's little question that the Cadillac Seville was right for its time and continues to hold up today.

1976 CADILLAC SEVILLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RUSSELL VON SAUERS, THE GRAPHIC AUTOMOBILE STUDIO ©2016 HEMMINGS CLASSIC CAR



SPECIFICATIONS

PRICE

BASE PRICE	$12,479

ENGINE

ENGINE TYPE	OHV V-8, iron block and cylinder heads, five main bearings
DISPLACEMENT	350 cubic inches (5,730cc)
BORE X STROKE	4.06 x 3.28 inches
COMPRESSION RATIO	8.0:1
HORSEPOWER @ RPM	180 @ 4,400
TORQUE	275-lb.ft. @ 2,000
VALVETRAIN	Hydraulic valve lifters
MAIN BEARINGS	Five
FUEL DELIVERY	Bendix electronic throttle-body fuel injection
LUBRICATION SYSTEM	Pressure
ELECTRICAL SYSTEM	12-volt
EXHAUST SYSTEM	Single exhaust

TRANSMISSION

TYPE	GM Turbo Hydra-Matic TH400 three-speed automatic	
RATIOS	1st	2.48:1
	2nd	1.48:1
	3rd	1.00:1
	Reverse	2.27:1

DIFFERENTIAL

TYPE	Corporate 10-bolt housing, limited-slip differential
RATIO	2.56:1

STEERING

TYPE	Recirculating ball, center link damper, power-assist
TURNS, LOCK-TO-LOCK	3.1
TURNING CIRCLE	40 feet

BRAKES

TYPE	Hydraulic, vacuum power activation
FRONT	11-inch discs
REAR	11-inch drums

CHASSIS & BODY

CONSTRUCTION	Steel unit-body with sub-frames
BODY STYLE	Four-door sedan
LAYOUT	Front engine, rear-wheel drive

SUSPENSION

FRONT	Independent, unequal-length A-arms; coil springs; telescoping shock absorbers; anti-roll bar
REAR	Semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescoping shock absorbers; anti-roll bar

WHEELS & TIRES

WHEELS	Stamped steel with wheel cover
FRONT/REAR	15x6
TIRES	White-stripe steel-belted radials
FRONT/REAR	GR78-15

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

WHEELBASE	114.3 inches
OVERALL LENGTH	204 inches
OVERALL WIDTH	71.8 inches
OVERALL HEIGHT	54.6 inches
FRONT TRACK	61.3 inches
REAR TRACK	59 inches
CURB WEIGHT	4,406 pounds

CAPACITIES

CRANKCASE	5 quarts
COOLING SYSTEM	18.9 quarts
FUEL TANK	21 gallons

CALCULATED DATA

BHP PER CU.IN.	0.51
WEIGHT PER HORSEPOWER	24.47 pounds
WEIGHT PER CU.IN.	12.59 pounds

PRODUCTION

1976 MODELS	43,772

PROS & CONS

+ Pioneering
+ Plenty of road feel
+ Smartly proportioned

- 200,000 were built
- Gauges could be more plentiful
- Is road feel what you want in a luxury car?

WHAT TO PAY

LOW
$6,000

AVERAGE
$11,000

HIGH
$16,000

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