



The all new Subaru SVX

New Subaru SVX

TOKYO-From the moribund to the magnificent, Subaru has decided to shake off its dowdy, tintoy image and produce a world beating grand touring car as good as any in the world.

I recently had the good fortune to drive the 3.3-litre, 230 hp, all-wheel drive Subaru SVX head-to-head with its rivals on the road and at Subaru's new state-of-the-art test track in Japan.

Before looking at this vehicle, a little backtracking is in order to put into perspective just how major a step forward this is for this division of Fuji Heavy Industries.

Fuji Heavy Industries is a make up of six divisions thus the six stars in the car company's logo. The company is heavily into trucks and buses, cars not figuring into the equation until the mid-70s when Subaru unveiled a 360 cc egg-shaped runabout for the lower-taxed, bottom rung Japanese carbuyer.

And until three years ago, Subaru was mainly known for robust but un-lovely front-wheel drive and four-wheel drive sedans and station wagons aimed at those who prized utility before grace. When Subaru did try to attract attention with an eye-catching shape, the result was more of an eye sore.

That certainly was the case of the bizarre super wedge-shaped XT now discontinued and best forgotten.

Three years ago that changed with the Legacy sedan and wagon which combined four-wheel drive and lots of toys in a pleasant enough looking body with a very competitive price.

At this writing Subaru has sold all the Legacy cars they can bring in for the 1991 model year and have upped introduction of the 1992s by two months.

Thus Subaru now wants to be a serious player in Canada and you can only do that with a technotoy-loaded grand touring car, such as the Lexus SC 400, Acura Legend Coupe and the Infiniti J30 coupe due here next year.

Nissan, Toyota, and Honda have all been here 25 years and are well established, Subaru has only been here for 10 years, so they have a lot of catching up to do.

For both reasons, ergo the SVX, a design which has remained almost unchanged from the original Giugiaro drawing the company commissioned for this car.

Because it is a Subaru, one major component was bound to be controversial enough to either make you love the car or be totally put off by it.

In the case of the SVX it is the window within a window. The entire greenhouse is actually modelled on the canopy of an F-16 fighterjet. The main portion of all four sidewindows remains fixed while a small section slides up and down.

It may look strange but at 140 kmh on Subaru's test track in central Japan I was able to drive with all four windows down and there was virtually no wind noise. With three on board, we could talk in normal tones. This is something which I honestly feel readers will have to experience for themselves.

And because it is a Subaru, it comes with active torque split all-wheel drive taking powers from an all new 3.3-litre "Boxer" six cylinder, 24-valve, quad-cam engine. The transmission is a four-speed electronic automatic transaxle at the front while the rear has a viscous limited slip differential.

Of course the suspension is independent all-round relying on struts and coils and there is a four-channel ABS system fitted. Tires are big P225-50 section front and rear on highly styled 16-inch alloy wheels of the turbine, five-blade type.

On a tour of the SVX facility in Ohta, Japan, the gates were thrown open for the first time to Canadian auto writers and it took no less than two days to see all the new processes and new technology (much of it used for the first time) to build the SVX. Fuji wanted us to see everything but I think we all gulped when they test crashed a brand new SVX before our eyes to show us how stout the unibody frame was made.

The talk stopped and the moment of truth came as he drove the Canadian spec SVXs

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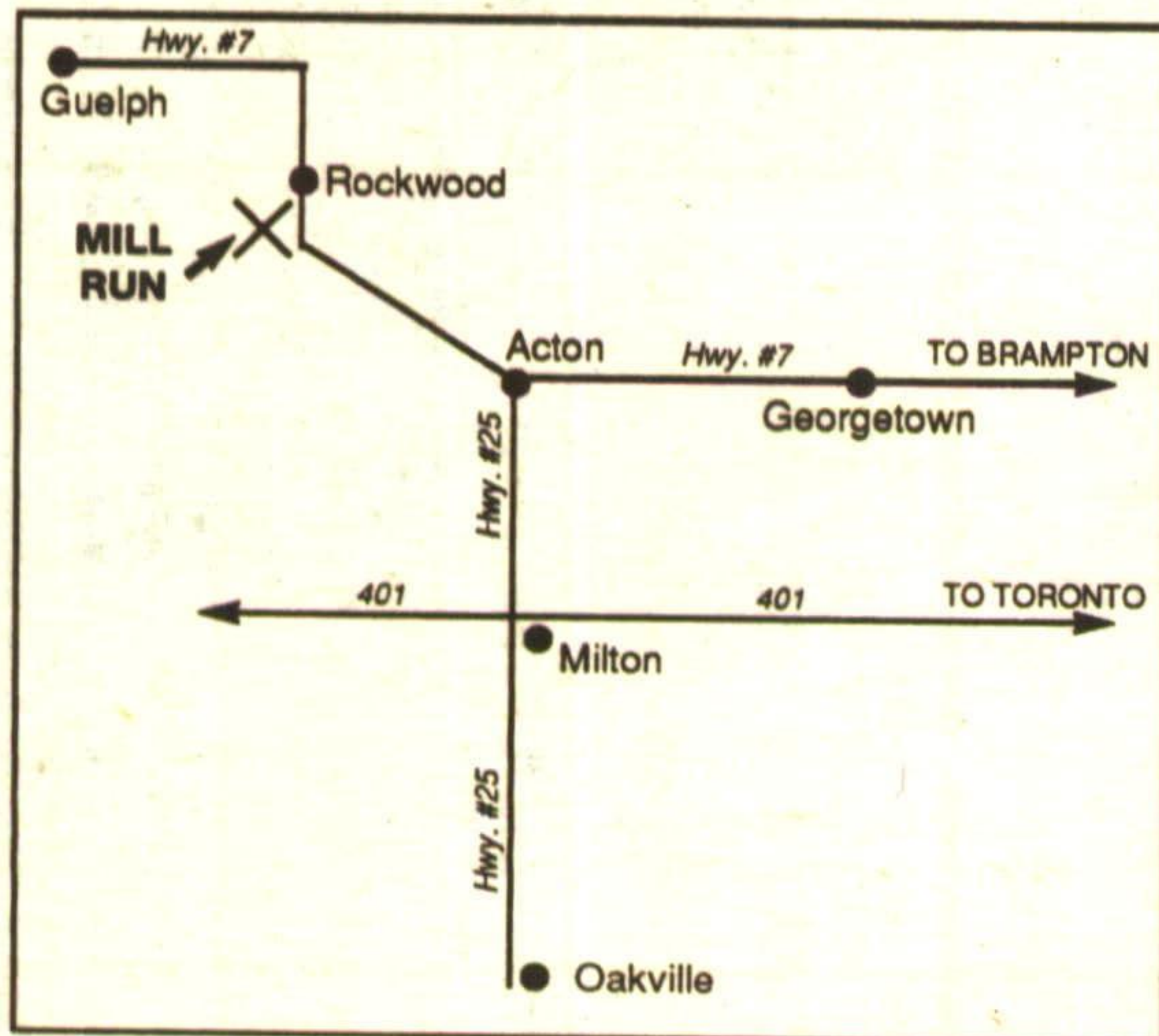
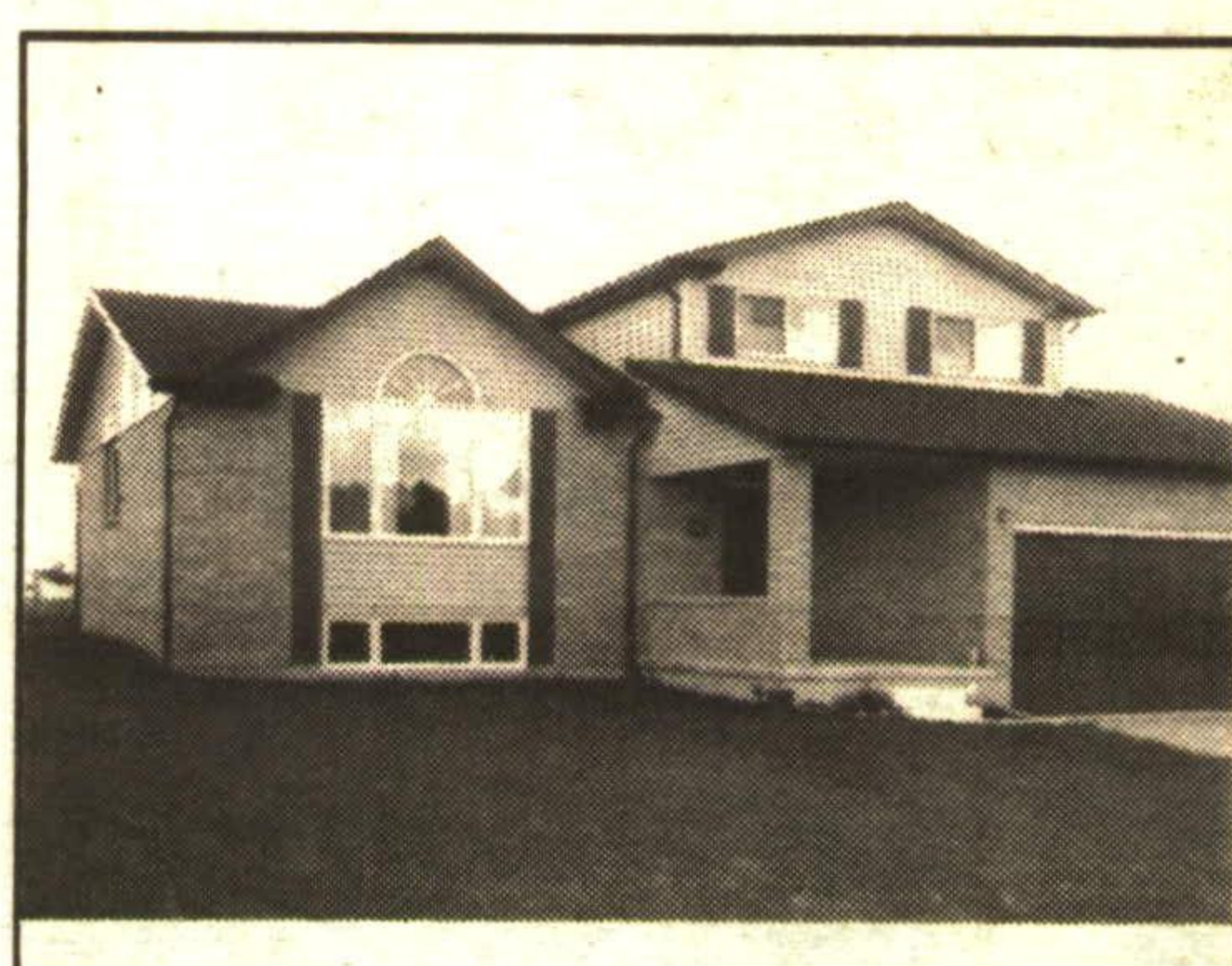
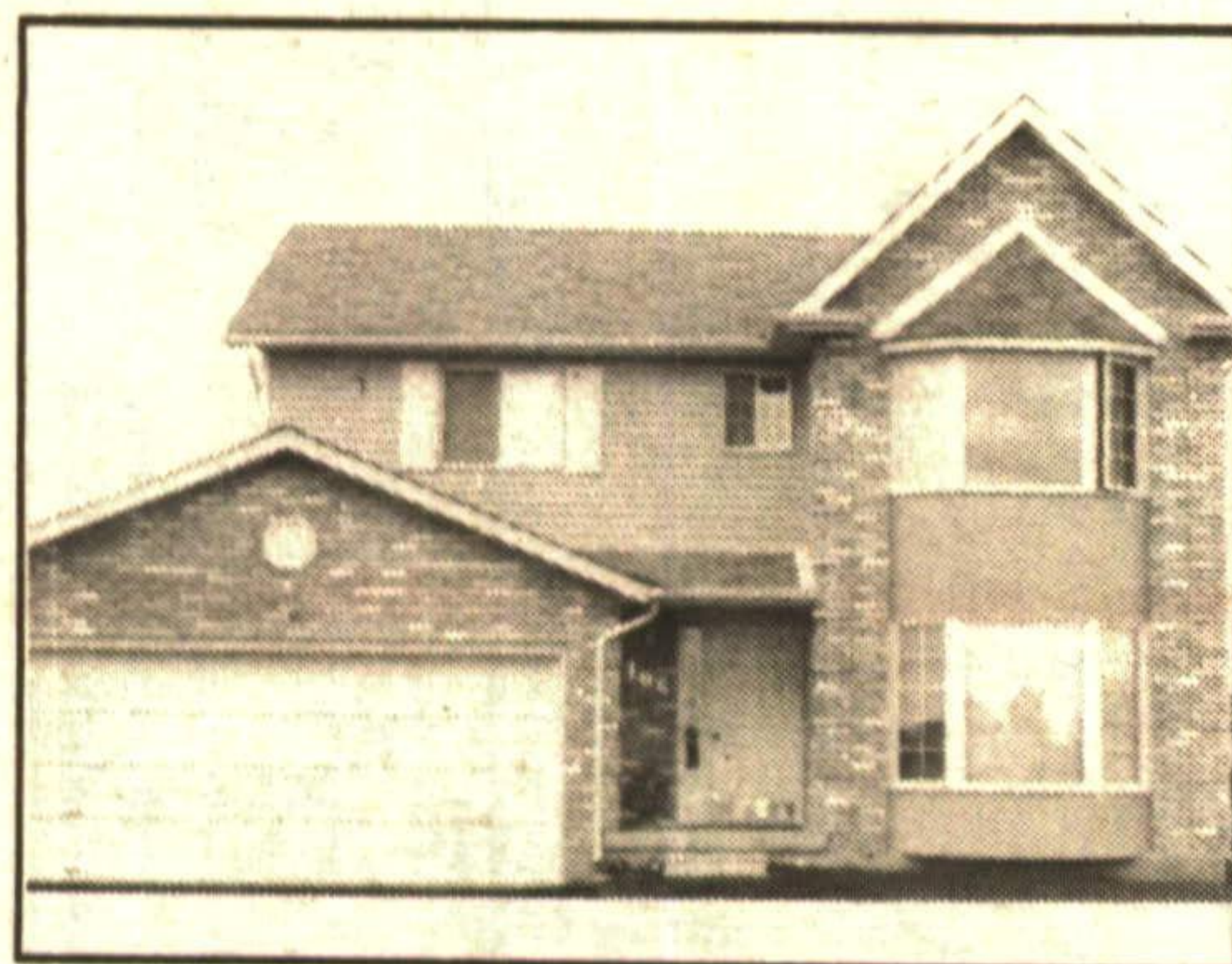
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