

drive shed

CLASSIC AND ANTIQUE VEHICLES



1953 Cadillac Eldorado

Following the Second World War, Cadillac, like other established automakers, returned to production by offering reworked pre-war designs. But by 1948 it was able to introduce fresh, new post-war styling to most of its line.

With the '48s it also began exploring the idea of styling the rear of the car as well as the front. It did this with raised taillights inspired by the twin tail booms of the Lockheed P-38 fighter aircraft. Quickly dubbed tailfins, they become a Cadillac trademark and would soon be copied by the rest of the industry.

In 1949, when its styling changeover was complete, Cadillac brought out its new high-compression, short-stroke, overhead valve V-8 engine that was both lighter and more powerful than the side-valve V-8 it replaced.

To celebrate the beginning of its second half century, Cadillac began planning for an ultra luxurious image model. To cash in on the cachet of the open car, it came as a convertible, only.

This new luxury Cadillac, based on the Series 62, was called the Eldorado and was introduced part way through the 1953 model year. It was like a dream car, but one with a difference; it could be bought by the public.

The Eldorado carried all of Cadillac's styling cues such as tailfins, imitation vertical vents on the leading edges of the rear fenders, hooded headlamps, and a heavy egg crate grille. The front was dominated by huge bumper guards nicknamed "Dagmars," inspired by a buxom TV personality of the era.

For additional rakishness, the beltline slanted down from the lowered windshield to a point just behind the cut-down doors, before curving up and over to the

rear of the car.

But the real piece de resistance, as far as GM's chief stylist Harley Earl was concerned, was his beloved wraparound windshield.

He had conceived it for two GM concept cars, the 1951 Buick Le Sabre and XP-300, and was anxious to get it into production.

Earl regarded the "panoramic" windshield as one of his major styling contributions. It would, however, turn out to be a relatively short-term phenomenon, good more for show than practicality because of its tendency to distortion, and its knee-bruising characteristic.

But the windshield looked futuristic, and this plus the dropped beltline, gave the Eldorado a stance several inches lower than the standard Series 62 Cadillac.

Large gold-plated vees were mounted on the hood above the grille and on the trunk lid, but surprisingly the Eldorado name did not appear anywhere on the exterior of the 1953 car. It was on the instrument panel and the doorsills only.

The Eldorado's interior was luxuriously outfitted with leather and expensive fabric. It came with every conceivable appearance and convenience item, includ-

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Cadillac Eldorado 1953

By BILL VANCE

ing automatic transmission, power steering, windows and seats, signal seeking preselector radio, whitewall tires, chrome wire-spoke wheels, and leather seats.

There were four colours: Alpine White, Artisan Ochre, Azure Blue and Aztec Red. When the black or white fabric top was folded it was concealed by an almost flush metal tonneau cover.

The Eldorado had a 3,200 mm (126 in.) wheelbase, stretched 5,608 mm (220.8 in.) in over-all length, and weighed a hefty 2,177 kg (4,800 lb). Although large, the 62 was still Cadillac's smallest model. The Cadillac 60, for example, rode on a 3,302 mm (130 in.) wheelbase and was 5,710 mm (224.8 in.) long, and the Fleetwood 75 was a mind boggling 6,007 mm (236.5 in.) long, or just shy of 20 feet.

To haul all of this car around, Cadillac fitted a 5.4 litre, 210 horsepower V-8 engine. It breathed through a four-barrel carburetor and exhaled through a dual exhaust system with through-the-bumper outlets.

Power reached the rear wheels via a four-speed Hydra-Matic transmission, until the Hydra-Matic plant in Livonia, Mich., was destroyed by fire in August 1953. After a production delay of almost a month, modified Buick Dynaflo trans-

missions were fitted to Cadillacs until the Hydra-Matic plant could resume production.

The Eldorado was joined by two other flagship image cars from GM: the Buick Skylark and the Oldsmobile Fiesta, also convertibles. But neither would remain very long in the luxury field.

First year Eldorado sales were just 532 cars, due in part, no doubt, to a price \$2,000 above Cadillac's formerly most costly model, the Fleetwood 75 limousine. It was aimed at an exclusive audience, and limited sales or not, the Eldorado served its purpose: to marvellously enhance the image of Cadillac.

The Eldorado always came as a two-door to represent its position as a sportier Cadillac. It changed over to front-wheel drive in 1967 as a clone of the Oldsmobile Toronado, and to a more manageable size in 1979. The nameplate survived as a proud member of the Cadillac stable until 2002, a run of 50 years.

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