

# Wheels

Markham Economist & Sun

## The New 2001 Chrysler Sebring



Chrysler has interestingly picked Europe to debut the 2001 Sebring that looks for all the world like a pocket 300M.

The Sebring is the follow-on model to the Stratus/Cirrus twins that were introduced in the 1995 model year.

The reason for the European launch of the Sebring may be found in the rationale behind the car. Chrysler states part of the design objective was to create "an all-new Sebring with a strong Chrysler identity." That, Chrysler said, is because the "sophisticated image and detailing of Sebring is influenced by the latest European coupes and sedans. For instance, the long, arching roofline suggests an almost coupe-like profile, while crisp and precise set lines reinforce the architectural qualities of the roof, body and arches."

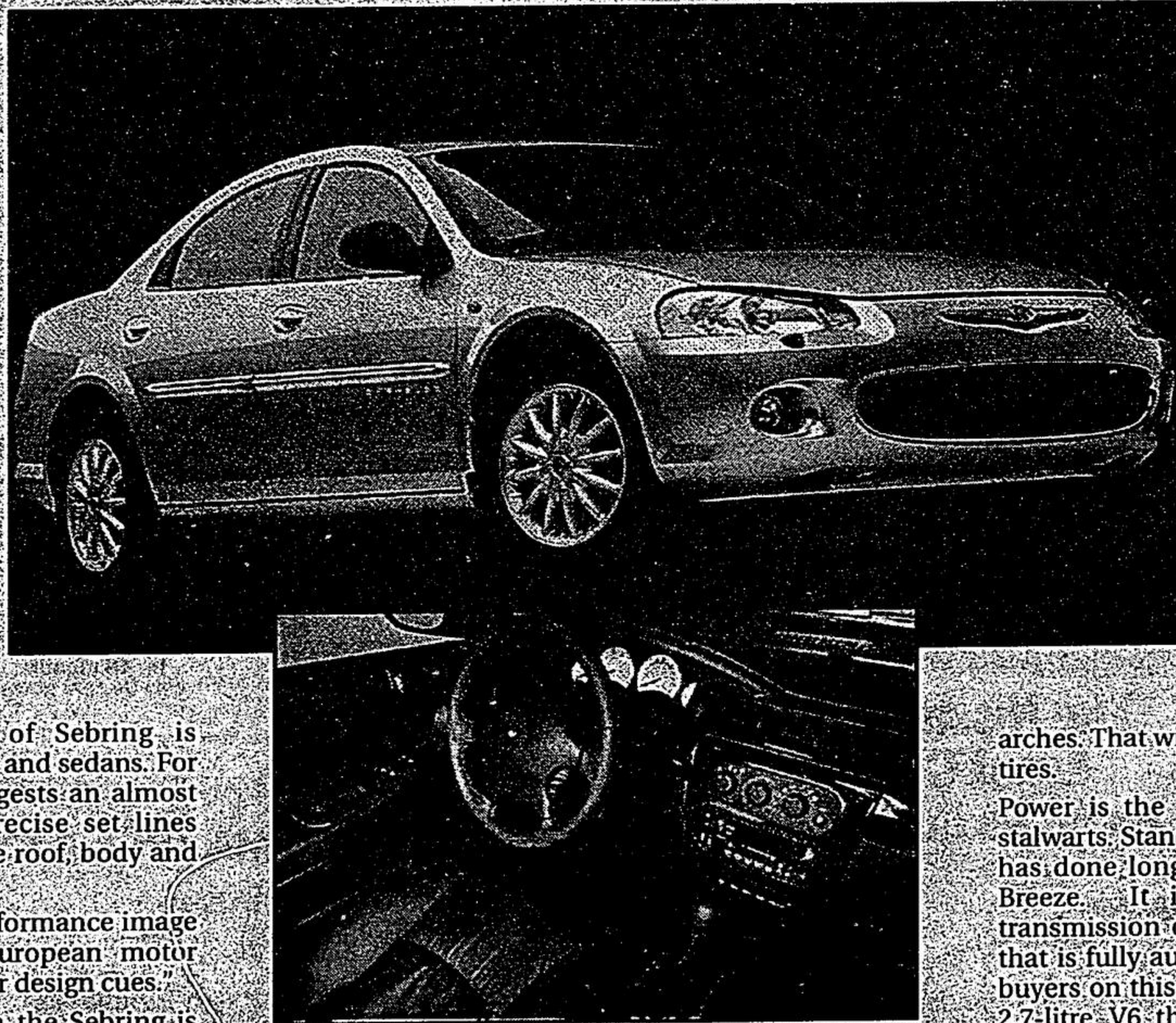
In addition, Chrysler noted that "the performance image of Sebring is enhanced by combining European motor racing influences with recognized Chrysler design cues."

The above is worth remembering when the Sebring is shown here in Canada in about three months time. Not exactly a runaway best seller on this side of the Atlantic, Chrysler is going after the "D-segment" buyer in Europe and they are known for being intensely loyal to home-grown products. In Germany, for instance, 70 per cent of the D-segment (BMW, Opel and Mercedes) is made in that country. In France the figure is 50 per cent.

Competition is seen as Alfa Romeo 156, Peugeot 406, Volvo S70, even the Rover 75, Opel Omega and Peugeot 607.

In fact in 1999 across Europe, more than half the sales in the D-segment were Euromakes from which Chrysler notes it, "is traditionally difficult to gain conquest sales."

The glimmer on the horizon is a perceived trend for



buyers to look outside brand loyalty or what are called "growing brands" in Europe.

To get on the growing brands bandwagon, Chrysler above all is going to have to be seen as a quality maker. That means not just quality looking, which it is, but made with the calibre of materials that are reflected in the fit and finish. In other words the entire package is going to have to be notably better than the competition to entice D-segment buyers to switch.

To do this Sebring will concentrate on the "Americanness" of the Chrysler brand. It will focus on:

- A sophisticated and expressive American design,
- Comfortable, stress-free performance.

- A spacious, open living environment
- Warm and friendly technology and features
- Exclusivity and high value

The interior is very much Chrysler LX. That means pulled leather seating, simulwood insets and black number on white face main instruments. The new shape means much less wind noise compared to the car it replaces.

Chrysler has also gone to foam injection between body pieces and even minimum openings for wiring and linkages to quell road noise. Perhaps the only downside to Chrysler Cabin Forward design is that it creates a very large passenger area. When this is empty, and if the noise baffling is not up to par, being in the back seat used to be like sitting inside a drum. I applaud the decision to go to full shielding inside the wheel arches. That will lower road noise especially from the rear tires.

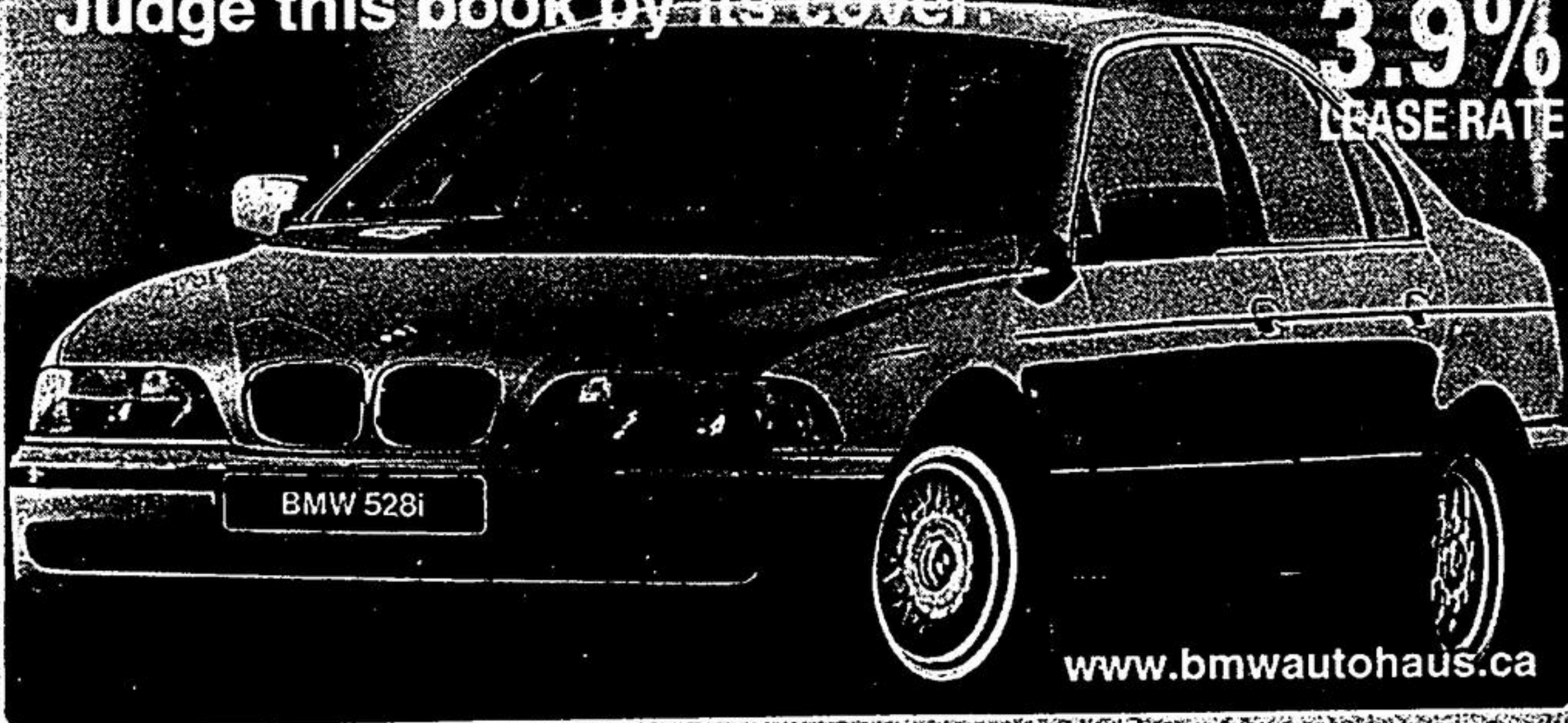
Power is the good news and it will come from two stalwarts. Standard engine is the 2.0-litre twin cam which has done long service in the Neon and the Plymouth Breeze. It is available with a five-speed manual transmission or optionally with the Chrysler AutoStick that is fully automatic or can be shifted manually. Most buyers on this side of the pond will probably opt for the 2.7-litre V6 that comes standard with the AutoStick. Chrysler did not announce a diesel engine for Europe and we will not see one in North America.

Standard tires will be 15-inch on the base car and 16-inch on the upmarket LX. The LX models in Europe will be fitted as standard with ABS and pitch and yaw controls. Electronic brake distribution ensures optimum front/rear brake balance.

Chrysler already has the 300M on sale in Europe and it is going to follow up the Sebring with the newest version of the Dodge Caravan. The Viper, which wins races by trouncing the Porsches, has certainly raised the appreciation of Chrysler.

Now it's going to be interesting to see if Chryco can capitalize on its growing persona in the European market.

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