

Thursday, May 25, 2000

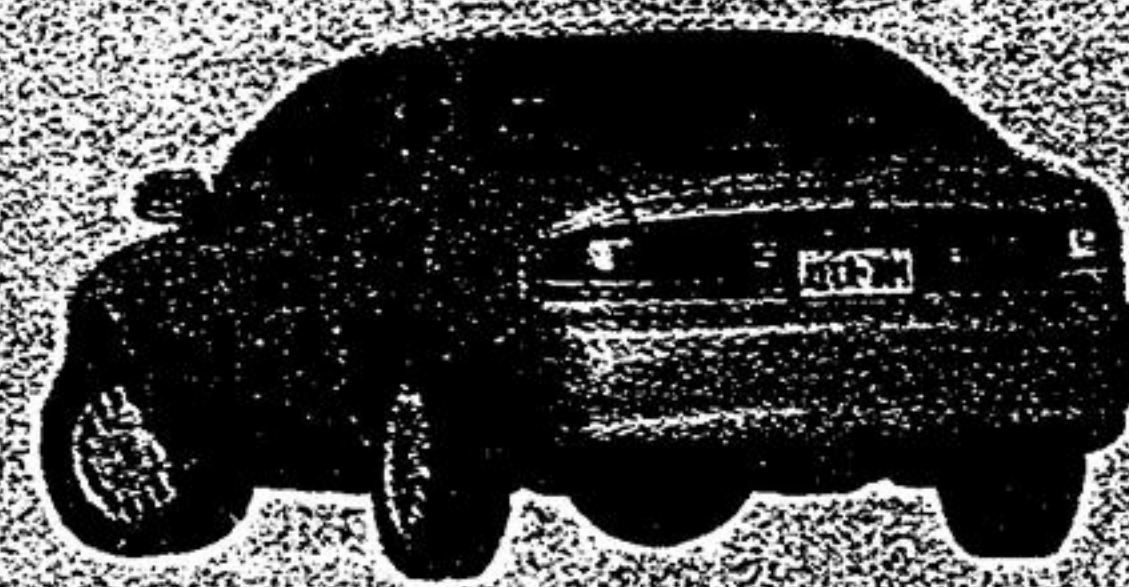
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2001 BMW 330Ci
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BUICK CENTURY
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2000 Buick Century Limited

The Buick Century.

Ah, how's that for a name that denotes solid conservatism and staid respectability. But then again, what else would you expect from a classic nameplate like Buick?

The Buick Bunny? The Buick Whoopee?

No. Even the former Skylark name seemed somehow a little too whimsical for the Buick brand.

Century. It sounds strong. Sort of permanent. It's the kind of brand name you'd expect to find lingering long after other automotive flights of fancy have come and gone.

The Buick Century was first introduced in 1936, temporarily shelved during WWII and then retired in 1958 after a brief resurgence. A mid-size model resurrected the Century moniker in 1973 and, after a decade or so, the car was changed from rear drive to front-wheel drive.

In 1997, GM dropped the station wagon, introduced a revised 4-door Century to be built on its new "W" platform and moved production to Oshawa, Ontario.

Throughout all the changes and yearly upgrades, the Buick Century evolved at a steady but conservative pace, with the emphasis on "classic beauty" rather than flashy, trendy styles.

father's Oldsmobile?"

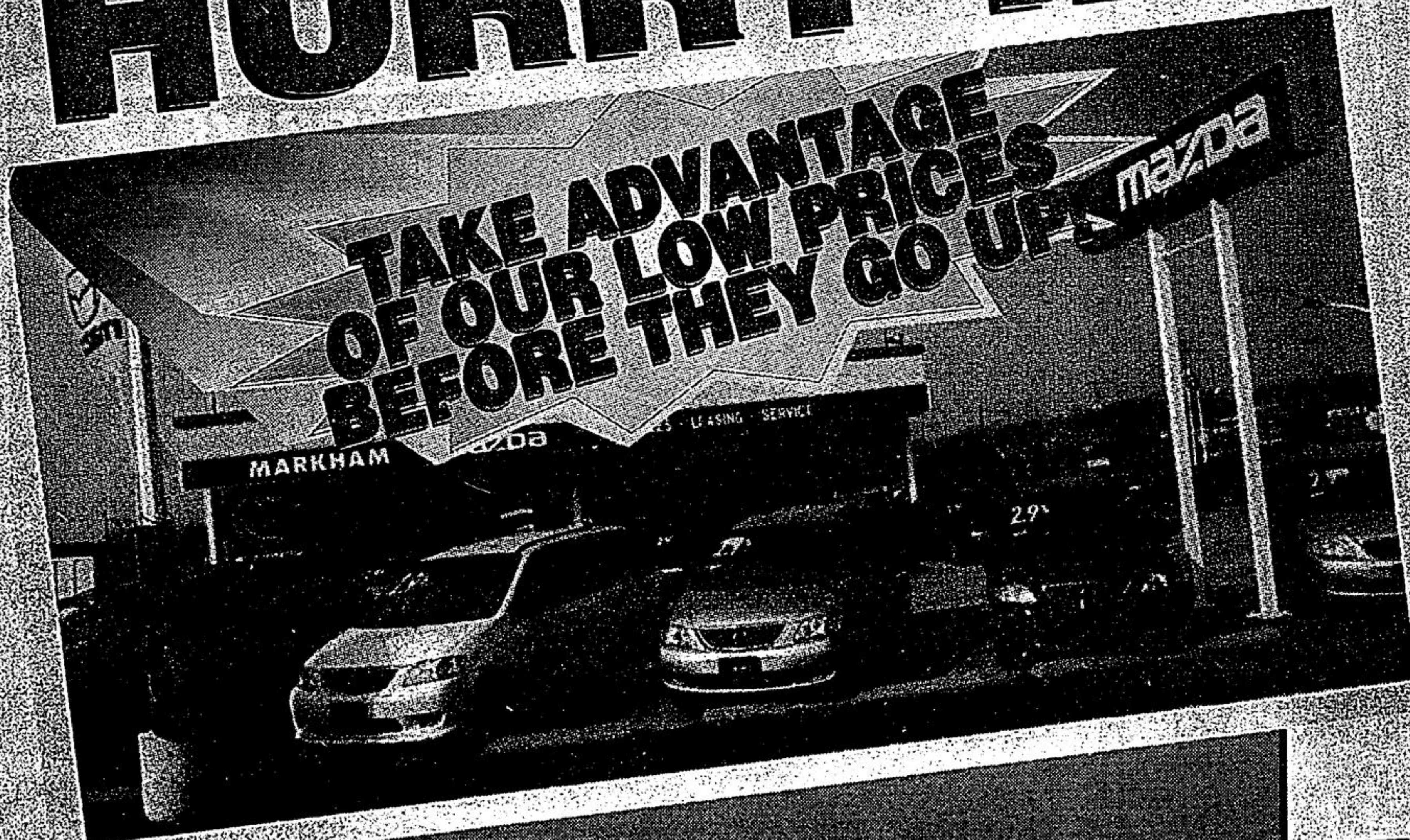
Well, in many ways, this is still, definitely your father's Buick.

Soft seats, soft sprung, soft ride.

The suspension sucks up bumps like the float boats of the past as you sway down the highway. The ride is as smooth as

See Granddad's head, page 12

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It's a style that's always appealed to older, conservative customers who lean strongly toward domestic cars.

The Buick Century comes available in two trim levels: Custom and Limited.

My Limited tester came with the Century 2000 Special Edition package complete with 15" alloy wheels and Century 2000 badging inside and out. The millennial logo is even embroidered on the floor mats and front headrests. The package also adds a split folding rear seat, an option that really should be standard equipment on any modern sedan.

My kids instantly categorized the car, using one of the few words they've picked up from their Dutch heritage, and dubbed the Century an "Opa" car.

"Opa" means "Grandfather," so you get the picture. Of course, once kids get rolling, they think they're standup comedians, so with a silver exterior and gray leather inside, there were other jokes about matching colors to graying customers and about whether you had to live for a century to qualify for ownership.

Roomy

"Even the leather is wrinkly," my son piped up. Enough already, I thought. Or maybe I was just getting uncomfortable with how good the Buick Century felt to this gray-haired automotive writer.

The Century is roomy enough for five. The interior design is clean and functional. Buick has taken a minimalist approach to fake woodgrain, surrounding only the door-mounted window switches. The sweeping slab-like dashboard is laid out with a simple three-gauge display, square no-nonsense buttons on the radio and HVAC and with possibly the world's ugliest pullout headlamp switch mounted to the left of the steering wheel.

The optional steering wheel on my Limited tester featured built-in audio control buttons. Bravo. I don't know whether I suffer from a short attention span or have simply caught "remote control disease" from my TV set but I definitely change radio stations more often than I alter my cruise control settings.

Map slots in all four doors and map pockets in the front seat backs compensate for minimal storage in a smallish glove box and console. The console also hides the second, weirdest, foldout cupholder system that I have ever seen. Buick must have a nutcase locked in a cupholder design lab somewhere because first prize still goes to the weird contraption inside big brother LeSabre.

Eccentricities aside, the Buick Century is roomy and comfortable in an old-fashioned way. Remember those commercials that sang "this is not your



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