

Sport-utility vehicles: a popular breed

FULL-SIZE, mid-size or mini-size, sport-utility vehicles combine the benefits of a roomy station wagon with the ruggedness of a truck.

So popular have these rough-and-tough wagons become that they account for 32 percent of all new-vehicle sales, with a full two-thirds of SUV buyers opting for four-door models.

Almost every major manufacturer, as well as many of the smaller companies, will have some form of off-road vehicle in their stands at this year's North American International Auto Show.

Most SUVs are equipped with high ground clearance and full- or part-time four-wheel drive. Many are also loaded with all the creature

comforts normally found in passenger cars. Air conditioning, cruise-control sophisticated stereo systems and plush seats are as commonplace as oversized tires and automatic locking hubs.

TWO NEW additions to the four-wheel-drive family are scheduled to appear at the 1991 auto show: the Mazda Navajo and Isuzu Rodeo.

The Navajo is built on the Ford Explorer platform and shares its 4.0-liter, 155-hp V6 engine. Of historical note, this is the first vehicle produced by a domestic manufacturer for a Japanese car company. Standard on Mazda's new SUV are rear-wheel anti-lock brakes, gas-pressurized front and

rear shocks and "shift-on-the-fly" four-wheel drive.

Isuzu's Rodeo joins the popular four-door, mid-size SUV market. Resembling the Nissan Pathfinder and Toyota 4Runner, the Rodeo is one of the lowest-priced SUVs in its class. It can be equipped with a four- or six-cylinder engine.

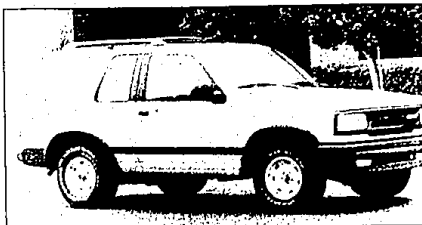
Oldsmobile is offering its first-ever SUV, the four-door Bravada, introduced at the 1990 show as a '91 model. The Bravada is the only General Motors mid-size SUV tripart (GMC's S-15 Jimmy and Chevrolet's S-10 Blazer being its siblings) equipped with full-time four-wheel drive. It is powered by a 4.3-liter, 160-hp V6 engine and a four-speed automatic transmission.

The full-size SUV market

continues to thrive, with Chevy's Blazer and Ford's Bronco leading the charge. Massive engines like GM's 230-hp, 7.4-liter V8, found in its Suburban line, are the industry's largest and are usually powertrains of choice.

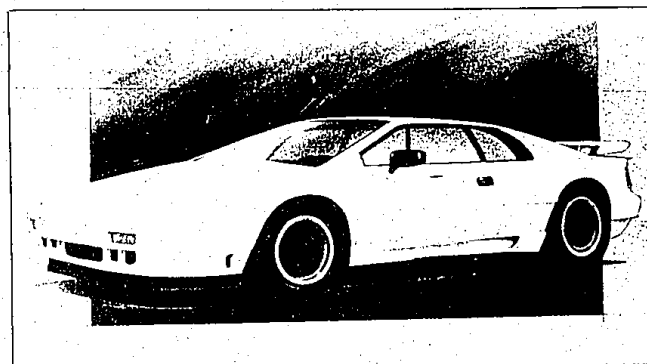
The Dodge Ramcharger, Jeep Grand Wagoneer and the luxurious Range Rover also compete in this market niche.

Interest in SUVs doesn't seem to be waning. Consumers enjoy driving their Jeep Wranglers and Suzuki Sideicks to work, the mall and on vacation. SUVs offer excellent traction in foul weather, plenty of storage space and a confidence-enhanced feeling for the driver.



Mazda's 1991 Navajo has the distinction of being the first vehicle produced by a domestic auto company (it is built on a Ford Explorer platform) for a Japanese car maker.

Wins bring race car replicas to showrooms



Only 20 of these limited edition Lotus Esprit Turbo SEs, a replica of the Lotus race car used on the SCCA Escort World Challenge Series, will be available for sale at select dealerships for a cool \$125,000.

TWENTY LIMITED edition Lotus Esprit Turbo SE race car replicas will be sold through select dealerships, according to company officials. Ten already are spoken for by enthusiastic customers.

The company decided to produce the high-profile replicas to celebrate its victories in four of the first seven races in the SCCA Escort World Challenge Series.

One of the remaining special-issue models may be making an appearance at the North American International Auto Show.

The replicas will incorporate most of the performance, handling and safety modifications found on Esprit race cars. A complete roll cage, racing wheels and tires, racing suspension and handling refinements, modified seating with six-point harnesses, "basics only" instrumentation, a driver's side airbag and monochromatic white exterior make up the package.

To visually distinguish the replicas from an "everyday" Esprit, special decals featuring the green and yellow Lotus race car graphics

The company decided to produce the high-profile replicas to celebrate its victories in four of the first seven races in the SCCA Escort World Challenge Series.

will be available. Owners have the option of applying the decals.

IN STREET trim, the Esprit Turbo SE is powered by a 264-hp, turbocharged, 16-valve, 2.2-liter, four-cylinder engine.

The mid-engine design helps the Esprit to perform competitively with some of the fastest "supercars" in the world. The car's zero-to-60 time is 4.7 seconds. Top speed is 165 mph. The race car replica is reported to be a tick faster.

Racing the Esprit was a natural, said Ron Foster, president and CEO of Lotus Cars USA Inc.

"Lotus has a rich racing heritage, perhaps more so than any other automotive marque. The Lotus Esprit Turbo SE is the closest thing to a race car that a customer can take off a showroom floor. Marketing the Esprit on the racetrack just made good business sense."

The Esprit World Challenge is a SCCA Pro Racing Series modeled after the European Group A races, which pit strictly regulated, high-performance sports cars against each other on world-class race courses.

Dating back to Lotus' first triumph at the 1956 LeMans 24-hours, the Hethel, England-based company has accumulated 78 Grand Prix wins.

Its return to racing in the United States this year marks the 25th anniversary of Jim Clark's driving a Lotus Type 38 to the company's lone Indianapolis 500 victory.

Retail price for the Esprit Turbo SE replica is about \$125,000.

Buick restores vintage Roadmaster nameplate

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since the 1987 Regal and the first Buicks with a standard V-8 engine since the 1985 Riviera.

Both the wagon and sedan have 5,000-pound towing capacities.

"ROADMASTER WAS a great name for premium Buicks from 1936 until model names were changed for 1959, in fact, I don't know why we left that name on the shelf so long," Mertz said.

"The new Roadmaster Estate Wagon, and the 1992 Roadmaster and Roadmaster Limited sedans, are perfect models to wear that proud name. For those who prefer full-frame vehicles with rear-wheel drive, these models perfectly define Buick's mission of providing contemporary cars that are

substantial, distinctive, powerful and mature—premium American motorcars."

Mertz and the return of Roadmaster reflects Buick's responsiveness to the marketplace. All other Buicks have front-wheel drive, which many customers prefer. Roadmaster is a response to a significant group of buyers who prefer either the ride and handling characteristics or the higher towing capability of rear drive, he said.

HIGHLIGHTS OF technical improvements throughout the lineup:

- The electronically controlled automatic transmission introduced as standard on the 1991 Park Avenue and Park Avenue

Ultra in mid-summer, is now also standard on Regatta and Riviera.

- Park Avenue and Park Avenue Ultra are eight inches longer than their predecessors with 3.9 cubic feet of additional trunk volume. They have flush-mounted glass and aerodynamic styling.

These new models offer an array of new features including dual automatic climate controls for the driver and passenger (standard in Ultra); "solar control" glass to reduce harmful sun rays; substantial reinforcement of the body structure to virtually eliminate vibration, and oil-life and oil-level monitors to alert the driver when to add and change oil. Towing capacity is 3,000 pounds, compared with 2,000 previously.

- Roadmaster Estate Wagon features an all-new aerodynamic shape and flush glass and door handles for improved efficiency.

The 5-liter, V-8 engine with electronic fuel injection delivers 170 hp. The projected EPA fuel economy rating is 16 mpg city and 25 highway. "Vista roof," a dark tinted glass panel positioned midway in the roof, provides an open-air look.

- LaSabre has structural improvements, a new brake-transmission interlock, a new optional anti-lock brake system and revised front struts for improved ride.

- The 2.5-liter Tech 4 engine, standard in the compact Skylark and mid-size Century, has a new dual resonator induction system to

reduce noise and engine vibration. The 3300 V-6 engine, optional in Skylark and Century, has reduced idle speed to make it even smoother and quieter.

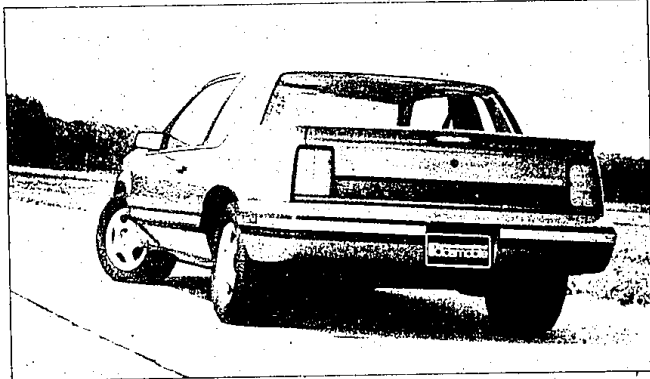
- Anti-lock brakes are standard on the new Roadmaster Estate Wagon, Park Avenue and Park Avenue Ultra, newly standard on Riviera and continue as standard on Regatta. ABS is a new option on the Skylark Gran Sport coupe and continues as optional on LaSabre, Regal Limited and Regal Gran Sport. It will be standard on the 1992 Roadmaster sedans.

- Supplemental inflatable restraints (air bags) for the driver are now standard on Park Avenue, Park Avenue Ultra and Roadmaster Estate Wagon and

continue as standard on Riviera and Regatta. They will be standard on the 1992 Roadmaster sedans.

- The Regal coupe gets an exterior freshening for 1991. The coupe and the 1991 Regal sedan include new 15- and 16-inch aluminum wheels, a new standard 55 front seat with storage, armrest for Custom models and new front bucket seats with center console, standard in Gran Sport. There is a new full-annular gauge cluster, standard in Limited and Gran Sport, plus richer woodgrain accents and upgraded door panel trim.

- The steel exterior body panels (except roofs of most Buicks) are galvanized on both sides for increased corrosion resistance.



The 1991 limited edition Oldsmobile Cutlass Calais Quad 442 includes an enhanced Quad 4 engine, a special transaxle, fuel system improvements and anti-lock brakes.

Olds plans special Calais

VISITORS TO the North American International Auto Show will be treated to a sneak preview of a limited edition of Oldsmobile Cutlass Calais Quad 442, which will take to the streets in March.

The new Quad 442, with a special W41 handling and performance package, includes an enhanced Quad 4 engine, a special transaxle with a close ratio 5th gear and a 3.94 final drive ratio, anti-lock brakes and fuel system enhancements.

This limited edition Cutlass Calais Quad 442 will offer the perfect balance of responsive power, crisp handling and the kind of fuel

economy that today's car buyers are demanding," said Larry Lyons, Oldsmobile's general engineering and planning manager.

"It also showcases the potential of the Quad 4 engine and is an indication of the innovative powertrain features made possible with this outstanding double overhead cam four-cylinder," added Lyons.

The name W41 is a derivation of a historic Oldsmobile name and one synonymous with power and innovation. In 1968, Oldsmobile released the W31 option for the F85 and Cutlass Supreme coupe to a world hungry for more powerful engines.

The option gave buyers just that: a potent 325-hp, 350 cubic inch V8 with the choice of a three-speed, or close or wide ratio four-speed transmissions, and the choice of a 3.91 or 4.33 rear axle.

Only 500 were built in 1968. While it continued as an option through the 1970 model year, it is today considered a valuable collector's car.

"In its day, the W31 was an outstanding example of Oldsmobile innovation," Lyons said. "And we continue that rich tradition of Oldsmobile innovation and powertrain excellence."

Mercedes 500E makes U.S. debut

AFICIONADOS OF German-engineered Autobahn cruisers will have the opportunity to gaze at the 1992 Mercedes-Benz 500E as it makes its first U.S. appearance at

the North American International Auto Show. Company officials say that the car will go on sale next September as a 1992 model. Owners of this newest issue from



The 1992 Mercedes-Benz 500E, not available until September, sports a 5.0 liter, 32-valve, V-8 engine for plenty of horsepower (322 hp) and torque.

Germany will be greeted with seemingly endless supplies of horsepower and torque generated by an aluminum block, 5.0-liter, 32-valve, 322-hp V-8 engine. This is the same engine that powers the company's top-of-the-line 500SL roadster. Also borrowed from Mercedes' sleek flagship are its 225 35ZR tires and 16-inch wheels.

four-wheel anti-lock brakes and four-speed automatic transmission. Performance specialists from Porsche had a hand in the 500E's four-wheel independent suspension and chassis tuning, and added shock absorber, spring and anti-roll bar upgrades. Zero to 60 acceleration is estimated at about six seconds, top speed should reach an impressive 155 mph.

All of this high-performance equipment is wrapped inside a four-door body lifted directly off the 300 series assembly line.

The interior boasts leather seats, automatic climate control, a 10-speaker stereo and two air bags. The estimated sticker price is \$65,000.

World Congress on tap

The 15th Automotive News World Congress, co-sponsored by Automotive News and the University of Michigan, Transportation Research Institute, will be held in conjunction with the North American International Auto Show.

Industry leaders from around the world are expected to attend the event, scheduled for Sunday, Wednesday, Jan. 13-16, at the Westin Hotel in Detroit.

Robert Lutz, Chrysler Motors president, will deliver the keynote address. Joseph Gorman, THW Inc. chairman, will address the Sunday

night opening session. During the four-day Congress, internationally acclaimed experts and executives from auto manufacturing and supplier businesses will present insights into the global automotive industry of the 1990s.

Sessions are planned for Monday and Tuesday. Also planned are an exclusive morning visit to the auto show and a gala dinner Tuesday evening.

The Automotive News World Congress concludes with a session on Wednesday morning.



Robert Lutz Chrysler president