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THE
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NEWSPAPERS

AUTOMOTIVE

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1997 • PAGE 1 SECTION

Catera brings entry buyers to Cadillac



BY ANNE FILACASSA
Avanti NewsFeatures
Let's go back a little bit. Back to when there was a shortage of gasoline and the need for smaller cars that got great mileage drove the market. And Cadillac entered the fray with Cimmaron. It sold, but not well, and well, probably the last

one around is in the Cadillac museum.

Although the 1997 Cadillac Catera can't be compared to the other thing, it is like the Cimmaron in that it's such a departure for Cadillac. Don't get me wrong. There are Cadillac appointments throughout the Catera. There's the Cadillac badging. There's even the optional comfy leather heated seats (both front and rear). It just doesn't feel like a Cadillac. The kind of Cadillac I'm used to, anyway. You know, the engine that can kick you-know-what, the ride that's just so superb you'd think you're riding on a cloud, the response and handling that's just oh-so-Cadillac.

The Catera is a joint effort by Cadillac and Germany's Adam Opel AG. The Catera is even built by Opel in Rueselsheim, Germany, and shipped over here. And maybe that's why it just doesn't feel like a Cadillac. The Opel was built for Europeans. The Catera was supposed to be built for us. What the Catera is, however, is an affordable Cadillac. As Cadillac's entry-level 5-passenger 4-door sedan, it can be had for under \$30,000. And that's where I had to wake up. This was not the STS in miniature. Or the DeVille, even. The Catera is a way for you to get into a Cadillac and not spend more than \$37,000. It's a way to bring a whole new generation of customers into Cadillac showrooms — you know, the baby boomers entering their 40s — the ones who drive entry-luxury and ill move up to the DeVille or STS next time.

Great marketing strategy, if you ask me. The itty-bitty duck commercials make me smile every time I see them. Competition for the Catera isn't lame. It



Powered by a 200-horsepower 3.0-liter dual overhead cam V6 mated to a 4-speed automatic transmission, the Catera performs well. Acceleration is constant and passing power is adequate. The car is rear-wheel drive and equipped with 4-wheel disc brakes, standard anti-lock brakes and the tried-and-true traction control that keeps you sure and steady in inclement weather.

includes the Mercedes-Benz C280, BMW 328i and Lexus ES300. It's the first time a domestic automaker will compete in the fast-growing entry-luxury market segment. The safety equipment is all there and includes dual airbags, dual steel beams in each of the four doors, reinforced body pillars, a rigid roof and cross-car beam. Side airbags will become standard equipment this spring as well. The Catera has a cozy interior. Opt for the leather seats. In front, there are adjustable buckets. In the rear, there is a three-section bench seat that folds down. If you need to carry some skis, fold the middle armrest. Need a bit more, fold them all own.

The real surprise comes when you open the trunk. With the seats all up, trunk space is a whopping 14.6 cubic feet. A feature I really liked was the low, lift-over floor. No need to lift more than you have to get your heavier cargo in. Instrumentation and controls are not a problem to read or understand. There are analog gauges galore, including speedometer, tach, coolant temp gauge, voltage gauge and fuel gauge with low-fuel warning. It's all white-on-black, which is really pleasing on the eyes.

See CATERA, 1-2



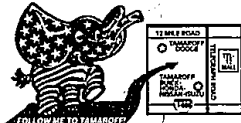
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