

Saturn

GM eager to showcase its new, sporty small-car line

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

ONE OF the biggest events at the North American International Auto Show has always been the introduction of new cars for the upcoming year.

This will be the first year for the new Saturn line, General Motors' newest line of small, sporty automobiles featuring world-class quality designed to compete directly with the Japanese imports.

With new design characteristics, a manufacturing processes that includes state-of-the-art assembly, a greater emphasis on a management/labor team approach and a new marketing strategy aimed straight at the heart of the import car market, GM execs hope Saturn makes a big impact.

Saturn spokesman Donald Haberek said despite this being Saturn's first year at the auto show, its display will be very restrained.

"There will probably be 10 or 11 vehicles (of four models) in a variety of colors, enough so people can get a good idea of what we're offering," he said.

Knowledgeable people will be on hand to answer questions. The basic plan for the surrounding display is to emphasize the people who build the car, the process and perhaps a little of history behind the new line.

"It will reflect the type of company and the type of people involved in the Saturn. It will be very professional," Haberek said.

"We want to focus on the car and the people rather than the flash and trash."

KAREN TIBUS, president of Saturn of Plymouth, said she hasn't seen a new product generate this much excitement in 18 years of automotive retailing.

"I have a customer who's getting a car Friday who says he is getting a lot of interest from co-workers," Tibus said. "He said he's getting more attention for buying a Saturn than he would if he were buying a Lamborghini."

Of the 23 cars she received through early December, Tibus said 21 could have sold the other two, but she wanted to keep several on hand for test drives.

Tibus said she also has 35 deposits for cars on order. "I don't think we'll have any problems selling 150 to 200 cars a month."

Tibus said current car production hasn't met with the demand and many buyers are left waiting, but customers have been understanding. It is far better that Saturn moves slowly and turns out high-quality cars than rushing imperfect ones to market.

"People would rather wait and get quality," she said. In fact, the wait for the car may be creating more interest and adding to the cars' appeal by making it more exclusive.

"People love it. They come in, test drive it, and buy it," Tibus said.

ALTHOUGH THE dealership isn't open on Saturday, Tibus said she recently stopped in the office to catch up on a little paperwork. "I wasn't here long, but there must have been at least 100 people who stopped by," Tibus said.

Tibus said several aspects of the new car line are readily apparent to the customers, most notably the car's spirit, its interior room and its serviceability.

"Somewhere along the line, people got the idea the Saturn's would be sluggish," Tibus said. "Now after they drive it, they're impressed with its pep."

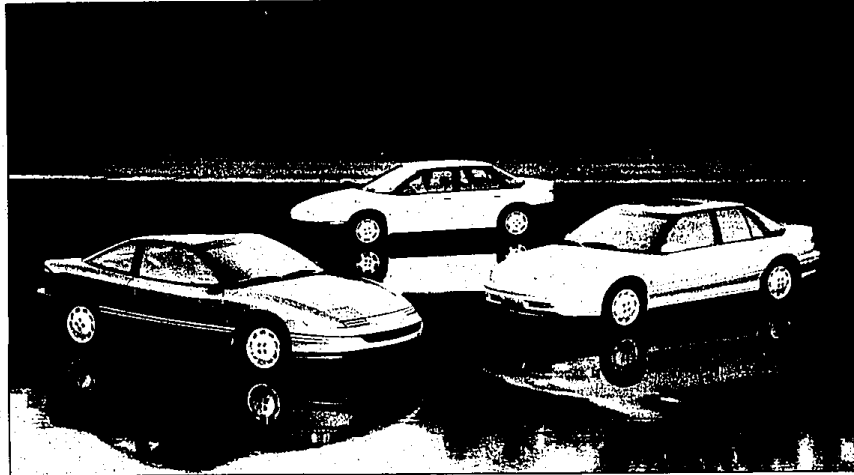
And although the car is being marketed as a small car, customers are also impressed with the car's roomy interior.

Several buyers, she said, have also pointed out the car's "service friendliness." Sparkplugs are easily replaced, oil and air filters are accessible, and fluid levels are easily measured because they are in clear containers.

Surprisingly, Tibus said, few customers have mentioned the new line's affordability.

SATURN'S INITIAL line consists of three basic cars: the SL/SL1 sedan, the basic four-door model, the SL2 sedan, the luxury four-door touring sedan, and the SL two-door sports coupe. Prices range from \$8,200 to \$13,500.

Saturn Corp.'s 4 million-square-foot manufacturing and assembly complex in Spring Hill, Tenn., is still turning out less than 100 cars per day, limiting those available for sale, according to published reports.



It has been a long time since one of the Big Three auto makers has introduced an entire new line of cars. But General Motors, after more than eight years of research, development and planning, is premiering its new Saturn SL1 (center), SL2 (right) and SC (left) at the North American International Auto Show.

Production is expected to increase significantly after the first of the year.

According to Donald Hudler, Saturn vice president for sales, service and marketing, the success of Saturn will depend largely on the partnership that's been established between General Motors, Saturn management, suppliers, workers and dealers.

Saturn dealers are playing a larger role in the manufacturing and marketing of automobiles. Dealers were involved in the development of dealership systems, the advertising and marketing strategy, and even in selecting other dealers, Hudler said.

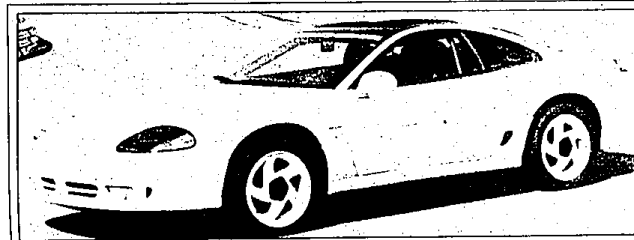
Four Saturn dealerships have been granted in the Detroit area, including Saturn of Plymouth, Saturn of Troy, Saturn of Warren and Saturn of Clarkston.

Haberek said Saturn franchisees

were chosen primarily because of their track records in customer service. "Essentially, these are people who are really interested in providing the ultimate in customer

satisfaction," Haberek said. Emphasis on customer service is part of the Saturn market-area approach, he said. Instead of having traditional full-service dealers,

Saturn dealers will have more autonomy in tailoring their sales and service facilities to handle the various ways car buyers select, purchase and service their cars.



Already drawing stares on the road, the new Dodge Stealth, designed to compete with the serious street machines of the world, is sure to be one of the biggest draws at the auto show.

Dodge Stealth pace car jumps gun

A LIMITED edition, 1991 Dodge Stealth will circle the brickyard at the Indianapolis Raceway Park in May as official pace car of the world's most famous 500-mile race. But the public will have the chance to view the pace car at the North American International Auto Show.

The pearl-ess yellow Stealth will be the first car to represent Dodge in the Indy spotlight since 1971, when a Dodge Challenger paced the field.

Except for fire and other safety equipment, very few modifications will be made to the Stealth. Because Indianapolis pace cars are traditionally open air, the Stealth's roof will be partially cut away to resemble, in the words of a Chrysler spokesman, a "quasi-convertible."

The 300 hp, 3.0-liter, 24-valve, twin turbocharged V6 engine that powers the top-of-the-line Stealth R/T Turbo will remain stock.

And with almost every technological wonder available, the R/T Turbo's standard all-wheel drive, speed-sensitive, four-wheel steering and four-wheel, anti-lock brakes will be ready for any type of weather or track conditions at the race.

IN STREET trim, the 2 + 2 sports car is filled to the brim with interior creature comforts. Air conditioning, cruise control, power windows and door locks, and a 100-watt, six-speaker AM/FM stereo cassette system are a few of the R/T Turbo's standard features. The only options for the R/T Turbo are a CD player and leather seats.

The rest of the line, no less exciting but lower in price than the

R/T Turbo, includes the base Stealth, Stealth ES and Stealth H/T. These models house a normally aspirated, 3.0-liter V6, ranging from the 164-hp version in the base, to the DOHC, 222-horsepower variant in the ES and H/T. A driver's side air bag is standard equipment. Prices for the Stealth run from \$16,000 to \$38,000.

The Stealth is the result of a collaborative effort between Chrysler and Mitsubishi. Chrysler's design office styled the Stealth, which traces its heritage back to the 1988 show-stopping Dodge Intrigue concept vehicle.

Mitsubishi's version is called the 3000TT. It emphasizes the same technological features as the Stealth.

A limited-edition Dodge Stealth pace car replica is expected to arrive on dealer floors this spring

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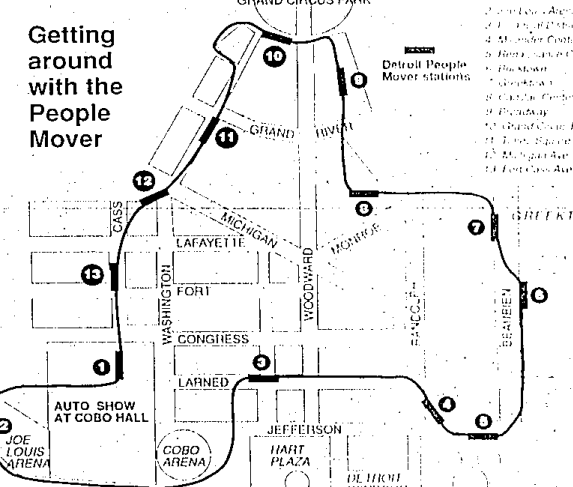
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