

TIRE TEST: HOW MUCH BITE FOR YOUR BUCK?

**TESTS: PORSCHE 911 TURBO, FORD ESCORT GT
BITTER SC, CORVETTE ROADSTER**

MOTOR TREND

\$2.25
IN CANADA
\$2.75



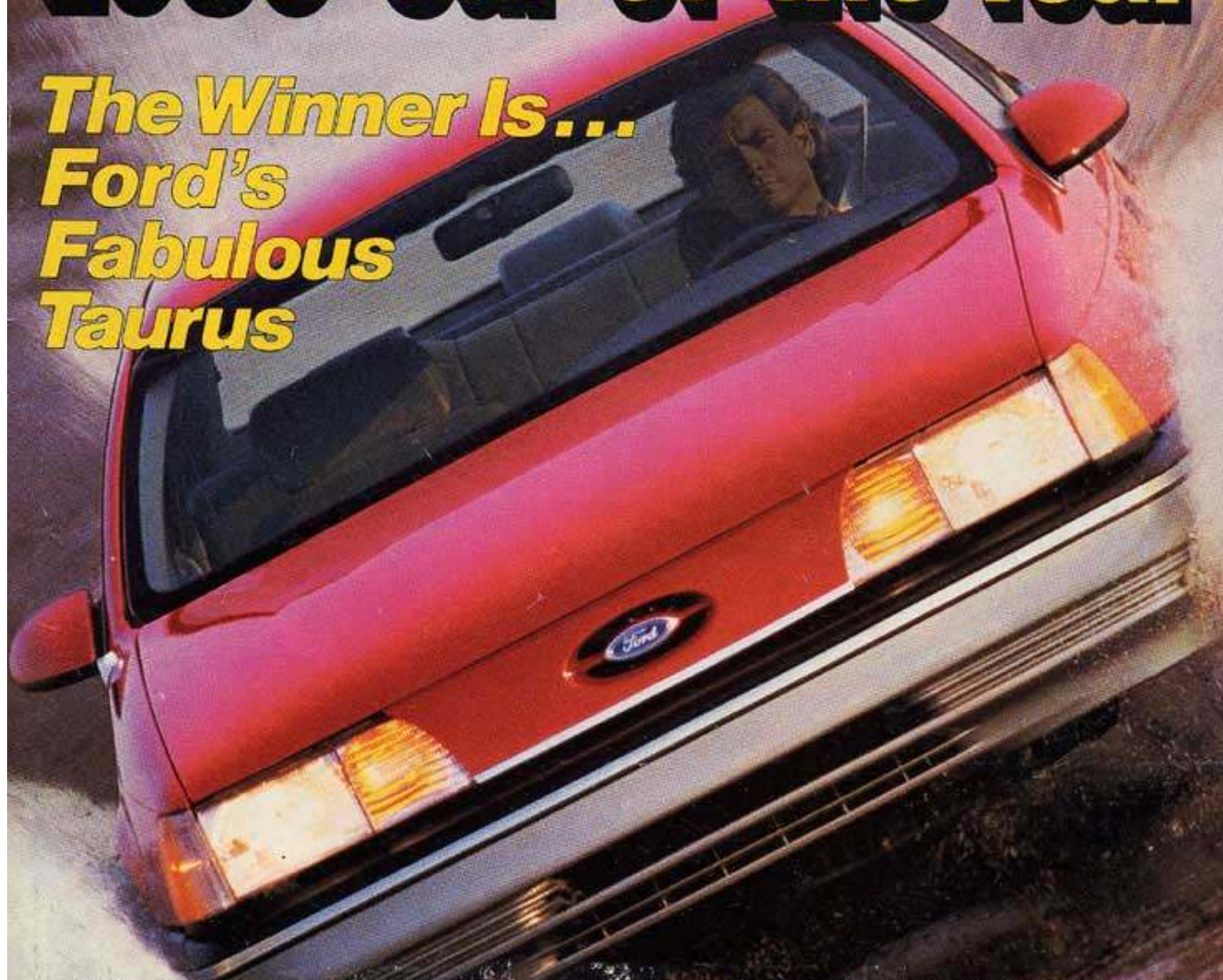
**VOLVO 480:
HOW SWEDE IT IS!**

THE WORLD'S AUTOMOTIVE AUTHORITY

FEBRUARY 1986

1986 Car of the Year

**The Winner Is...
Ford's
Fabulous
Taurus**



**NOMINEES: '86 IMPORT CAR OF THE YEAR
NISSAN 200SX: OWNERS TELL THE STORY**

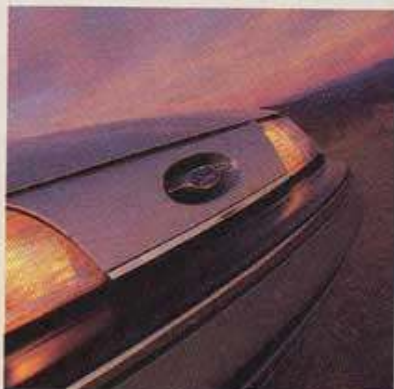


MOTOR TREND

THE WORLD'S AUTOMOTIVE AUTHORITY

FEBRUARY 1986

VOL. 38, NO. 2



23



111



46

CONTENTS

Cover Story:

- Motor Trend's 1986 Car of the Year**
Bully for Ford's Taurus!/John Hanson **23**

Road Tests:

- Porsche 911 Turbo**
The therapeutic value of wretched excess/Greg Brown **46**
Ford Escort GT
Much more than bright paint and tach/Don Fuller **54**

Driving Impression:

- Bitter SC Coupe**
Guaranteed to grab parking spot No. 1/Jack R. Nerad **79**

Features:

- Volvo 480 ES**
A dose of chic for the utilitarian set/Len Frank **60**
1986½ Corvette Convertible
Frighteningly seductive—top up or down /Gary Witzenburg **84**
The Contenders: MT's 1986 Import Car of the Year
Eight tantalizers ranging from A to Yugo /Jack R. Nerad **88**
Volkswagen 1986
The unveiling of Wolfsburg high tech/Mike Knepper **90**
1985 Tokyo Motor Show
Racing into the future with all wheels going/Yuichi Natori **95**
Owner Survey: 200SX/200SX Turbo
A pretty face that inspires loyalty/Bob Nagy **99**
Performance Tires
What do you really get for your dollar?/Ron Grable **104**
The Mitsus Meet at Fuji
Lizard wine, balalaikas, and a gearbox lunch/Don Fuller **117**

Long-Term Test:

- Audi 4000 Quattro**
Assailed by the furies of the parking lot/Greg Brown **110**

Retrospect:

- 1931 Daimler Double Six**
Was there ever a car with a longer hood?/Henry Rasmussen **111**

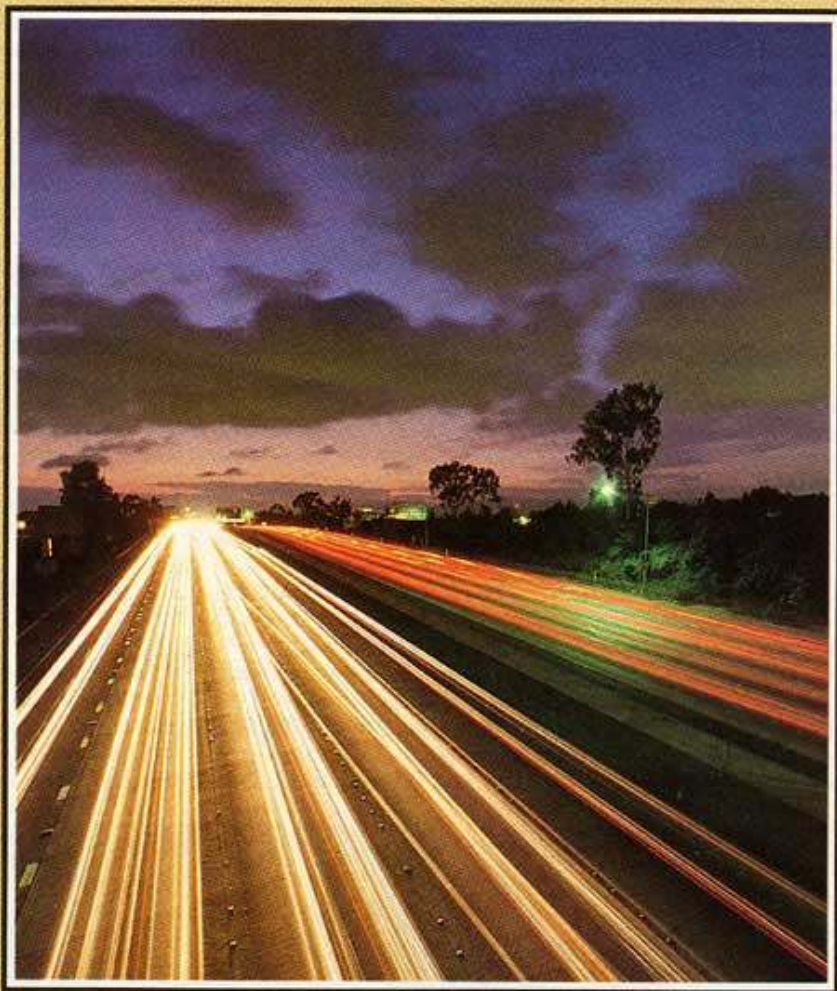
Departments:

- Letters** *Wildcat wows 'em* **6**
Trends *'86½ Pontiac Fiero*/Greg Brown **13**
Detroit Report *Restyled Bird; Sundance*/Jack R. Nerad **14**
International Report *Hot news from the East* **16**
Circumstances *A giant new step*/L.J.K. Setright **122**
Road Test Review **123**
Technologue *Electronic navigation*/Ron Grable **128**
Competition Report *Amateurs at Road Atlanta*/Bob Nagy **129**
Essay *So you want to be an auto writer?*/Jack R. Nerad **132**

Cover photography by Bob D'Olivo

MOTOR TREND (ISSN 0027-2094) is published monthly by Petersen Publishing Company, 8490 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90069. Second Class postage paid at Los Angeles, California, and additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: U.S., military, possessions one year \$16.94. Canada and other countries \$23.94 per year. Single copy \$2.25. U.S.; \$2.75, Canada. Subscription inquiries phone 213/854-3470. Copyright © 1986 by Petersen Publishing Company. All rights reserved. POSTMASTER: Please send address change to Motor Trend Magazine, P.O. Box 3290, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

MOTOR TREND FEBRUARY 1986 3



STEPHANE FOULON

MOTOR TREND'S **Car of the Year** 1986

It's going to be a Bull market for the Ford Taurus

by John Hanson

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETERSEN PHOTOGRAPHIC

Alright, first things first. The Taurus won. With our 1986 Car of the Year making such a big splash on the cover, it's hard to be coy about the results.

The fact that the Taurus ran away from this year's competition, with its stablemate Mercury Sable close behind, should be satisfying news to Ford, which laid a lot on the line to introduce a significantly different, mainstream family car.

Unquestionably, the Taurus is the most significant car introduced by Ford in decades. More important, Ford has somehow managed to step away from the stodgy Detroit establishment of sameness and design a

car of the future—then show the guts to grab rock-steady middle America by the throat and announce, "Hey, forget what you know about Detroit iron. This is how it's going to be from now on."

As significant as the Taurus may be for Ford, the Made-In-America auto industry, and the consumers of bread-and-butter family sedans, it is equally significant to note the quality of competition it had to dispose of on its way to Car of the Year honors.

Beyond the Taurus, this was the year of pleasant surprises, major astonishment, and few disappointments. It was also the year of twins, triplets, and a late

1986 Car of the Year

arrival. This year's roster included the virtually identical Taurus/Sable entries from Ford/Lincoln-Mercury; the Pete-and-Repeat Oldsmobile Delta 88/Buick LeSabre twins; the long-awaited Cadillac Eldorado/Buick Riviera/Oldsmobile Toronado high-line triplets from The General; and the Ford Aerostar, the last of the Big Three mini/midi-vans to make the cut in this popular utility vehicle market segment.

What made this year's competition so interesting was the overall quality of the contenders and how effectively they (as a group) destroyed our admittedly lukewarm preconceptions.

"This is a Toronado? This thing handles."

"The Delta's V-6 feels like a V-8. It actually pulls hard off the line."

"This sounds weird, but the Riviera is one of the better canyon runners I've driven in a long time. We're talking excellent steering and transient response. And what an interior."

Believe it or not, we love to be wrong. We are absolutely ecstatic when a car proves to be much better

"This sounds weird, but the Riviera is one of the better canyon runners I've driven in a long time"

than we thought. After a week of testing, we had our know-it-all noses thoroughly tweaked, and we loved every minute.

There were no changes in our testing procedure from last year. All eight vehicles gathered at Riverside International Raceway for a full battery of instrumented testing, including acceleration, braking, slalom, and skidpad. The rest of the week was spent driving specific public highway loops (prescribed routes) that included city bumper-to-bumper, freeway cruising, and mountainous twisties. During this week of living dangerously, testers scored each vehicle in six separate categories, including Styling and Design, Quality Control, Occupant Comfort and Convenience, Ride

and Drive, Chassis Dynamics, and Dollar Value. Each category included numerous subcategories. Chassis Dynamics, for example, included road feel, steering response, cornering power, tracking, transient stability and response, damping qualities, and braking stability. Each car was tested against vehicles in its respective class and market segment, not against other Car of the Year contestants. Rather than compare the Aerostar to the Cadillac Eldorado, for example, we compared it to the Dodge Caravan, Chevy Astro, and Toyota Van. Finally, we topped off the competition with the fuel mileage loop, added the scores, and arrived at the 1986 *Motor Trend* Car of the Year.

Cadillac Eldorado

As with any contest, there must be a last-place finisher. This year, it was Cadillac's totally redesigned Eldorado. Similar in many ways to the Buick Riviera and Olds Toronado, the Eldorado represents a bold step



Buick Riviera T-Type



Ford Aerostar XLT Wagon



Oldsmobile Toronado Brougham



Buick LeSabre Custom Coupe



Mercury Sable LS

1986 Car of the Year

forward for the Cadillac division. With considerably smaller exterior dimensions than last year's model, the '86 Eldo retains 99% of its passenger room. Its 4.1-liter V-8 is transverse mounted to accommodate its front-wheel-drive geometry. Suspension is fully independent with MacPherson struts up front and an isolated subframe with struts and a transverse fiberglass leaf spring (a la Corvette) in the rear. With electronic chassis control, 4-wheel disc brakes, rack-and-pinion steering, and a beefed-up touring suspension, the newest Eldorado has set its sights on the lucrative sport/luxury market.

Compared to past Cadillacs that have attempted to crack this predominantly European market segment, the new Eldo is a winner. Compared to its competition, specifically its GM cousins from Oldsmobile and Buick, it doesn't quite measure up.

The problem with the Eldorado stems from a basic GM credo to be everything to everybody. Choose a middle ground, don't be too daring, and don't offend your established

"The Taurus will do just about everything the Riv and Toro will do, but it has four doors and costs \$5000 less"

constituency. After all, vanilla is still America's favorite flavor. It's as if Cadillac realizes what it must do, has identified and analyzed its problems, but still can't bring itself to shed the past and get on with the business of rebuilding its reputation as America's most coveted prestige marque. The comments by our testers were predictable.

"A perfect car for the upscale rental fleets."

"Long-time Cadillac owners won't like it. European sports-touring owners won't bother to look at it. Where's the market?"

"I can't figure out who the target buyer is for this car, and I doubt if Cadillac can either."

"The combination of mismatched colors and cheap materials makes the Eldo's interior the least desirable of the three (Eldo, Toro, Riv)."

The final comment seems to ring truest. Even though the Eldorado is a nice car, it finishes a distant 3rd to the other two high-line sportsters from GM. In the balloting, it finished last in seven of the 10 overall categories, although it did manage a 6th in acceleration and a 7th in handling. Its acceleration was decent, but far from crisp, and could have used an extra 50 hp. Its braking was only average, its transient response sloppy, and its steering comparatively imprecise.

As hopeless as all this may sound, Cadillac's effort at responding to the writing on the wall is encouraging. It fully understands the importance of conquest sales from the European sports sedan class, and the priority that must be placed on developing a younger demographic clientele. The Eldorado misses the mark not because the target is unclear, but because Cadillac cannot decide at which



Cadillac Eldorado



Oldsmobile Delta 88 Royale



Ford Taurus LX

1986 Car of the Year

BUICK LESABRE CUSTOM COUPE



Major Competitors

Oldsmobile Delta 88.....	\$12,760	Chrysler Fifth Avenue.....	\$14,717
Chevrolet Caprice.....	\$11,110	Pontiac Parisienne.....	\$11,169
Mercury Grand Marquis.....	\$13,960		

Specifications

Vehicle mfr.....	General Motors Corp., Detroit, Mich.	Max. power.....	140 hp @ 4400 rpm
Base price.....	\$12,511	Max. torque.....	200 lb-ft @ 2000 rpm
Price as tested.....	\$15,201	Induction.....	EFI
Body type.....	2-dr. sedan	Transmission.....	4-sp. auto.
Drive system.....	Front engine, front drive	Final drive.....	2.64:1
Engine type.....	90° V-6, liquid cooled, cast iron block/heads	Suspension, f/r.....	Ind./ind.
Displacement.....	3785 cc (231 cu in.)	Steering.....	Rack and pinion
Valvetrain.....	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Brakes, f/r.....	Disc/drum
		Wheels.....	15 x 6.0 in., alloy
		Tires.....	P215/65R15
		Curb weight.....	1416 kg (3130 lb)
		Wheelbase.....	2814 mm (110.8 in.)
		Overall length.....	4978 mm (196.2 in.)

BUICK RIVIERA T-TYPE



Major Competitors

Cadillac Eldorado.....	\$21,888	Lincoln Mark VII.....	\$24,857
Oldsmobile Toronado.....	\$19,418	Merkur XR4Ti.....	\$16,981

Specifications

Vehicle mfr.....	General Motors Corp., Detroit, Mich.	Max. power.....	142 hp @ 4200 rpm
Base price.....	\$21,577	Max. torque.....	200 lb-ft @ 2000 rpm
Price as tested.....	\$23,387	Induction.....	EFI
Body type.....	2-dr. coupe	Transmission.....	4-sp. auto.
Drive system.....	Front engine, front drive	Final drive.....	2.84:1
Engine type.....	90° V-6, liquid cooled, cast iron block/heads	Suspension, f/r.....	Ind./ind.
Displacement.....	3785 cc (231 cu in.)	Steering.....	Rack and pinion
Valvetrain.....	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Brakes, f/r.....	Disc/disc
		Wheels.....	15 x 6.0 in., alloy
		Tires.....	P215/60R15 radials
		Curb weight.....	1501 kg (3309 lb)
		Wheelbase.....	2743 mm (108.0 in.)
		Overall length.....	4755 mm (187.2 in.)

FORD TAURUS LX



Major Competitors

Mercury Sable.....	\$12,574	Pontiac 6000.....	\$9729
Buick Century.....	\$10,228	Chevrolet Celebrity.....	\$9345
Chrysler LeBaron.....	\$9683	Oldsmobile Ciera.....	\$10,354

Specifications

Vehicle mfr.....	Ford Motor Co., Dearborn, Mich.	Max. power.....	140 hp @ 4000 rpm
Base price.....	\$13,351	Max. torque.....	160 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm
Price as tested.....	\$15,022	Induction.....	EFI
Body type.....	4-dr. sedan	Transmission.....	4-sp. auto.
Drive system.....	Front engine, front drive	Final drive.....	2.32:1
Engine type.....	60° V-6, water cooled, cast iron block/heads	Suspension, f/r.....	Ind./ind.
Displacement.....	2982 cc (182 cu in.)	Steering.....	Rack and pinion
Valvetrain.....	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Brakes, f/r.....	Disc/drum
		Wheels.....	14 x 5.5 in., alloy
		Tires.....	P195/70R14 radials
		Curb weight.....	1299 kg (2863 lb)
		Wheelbase.....	2693 mm (106.0 in.)
		Overall length.....	4786 mm (188.4 in.)

MERCURY SABLE LS



Major Competitors

Ford Taurus.....	\$13,351	Pontiac 6000.....	\$9729
Buick Century.....	\$10,228	Chevrolet Celebrity.....	\$9345
Chrysler LeBaron.....	\$9683	Oldsmobile Ciera.....	\$10,354

Specifications

Vehicle mfr.....	Ford Motor Co., Dearborn, Mich.	Max. power.....	140 hp @ 4000 rpm
Base price.....	\$12,574	Max. torque.....	160 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm
Price as tested.....	\$15,320	Induction.....	EFI
Body type.....	4-dr. sedan	Transmission.....	4-sp. auto.
Drive system.....	Front engine, front drive	Final drive.....	2.32:1
Engine type.....	60° V-6, water cooled, cast iron block/heads	Suspension, f/r.....	Ind./ind.
Displacement.....	2982 cc (182 cu in.)	Steering.....	Rack and pinion
Valvetrain.....	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Brakes, f/r.....	Disc/drum
		Wheels.....	14 x 5.5 in., alloy
		Tires.....	P195/70R14 radials
		Curb weight.....	1326 kg (2932 lb)
		Wheelbase.....	2743 mm (106.0 in.)
		Overall length.....	4848 mm (190.9 in.)

1986 Car of the Year

CADILLAC ELDORADO



Major Competitors

Buick Riviera	\$21,577	Lincoln Mark VII	\$24,857
Oldsmobile Toronado	\$19,418	Mercury XR4Ti	\$16,981

Specifications

Vehicle mfr.	General Motors Corp., Detroit, Mich.	Max. power	130 hp @ 4200 rpm
Base price	\$21,888	Max. torque	200 lb-ft @ 2200 rpm
Price as tested	\$27,830	Induction	EFI
Body type	2-dr. coupe	Transmission	4-sp. auto.
Drive system	Front engine, front drive	Final drive	2.97:1
Engine type	90° V-8, liquid cooled, aluminum block, cast iron heads	Suspension, f/r	Ind./ind.
Displacement	4097 cc (249 cu in.)	Steering	Rack and pinion
Valvetrain	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Brakes, f/r	Disc/disc
		Wheels	15 x 6.0 in., alloy
		Tires	P205/75R15
		Curb weight	1526 kg (3365 lb)
		Wheelbase	2743 mm (108.0 in.)
		Overall length	4780 mm (188.2 in.)

FORD AEROSTAR XLT WAGON



Major Competitors

Chevy Astro	\$9502	Toyota Van	\$9998
Dodge Caravan	\$9561	VW Vanagon	\$12,290

Specifications

Vehicle mfr.	Ford Motor Co., Dearborn, Mich.	Max. torque	160 lb-ft @ 3250 rpm
Base price	\$9398	Induction	EFI
Price as tested	\$14,564	Transmission	5-sp. man.
Body type	3-dr. wagon	Final drive	2.90:1
Drive system	Front engine, rear drive	Suspension, f/r	Ind./solid axle
Engine type	60° V-8, liquid cooled, cast iron block/heads	Steering	Rack and pinion
Displacement	3000 cc (183 cu in.)	Brakes, f/r	Disc/drum
Valvetrain	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Wheels	14 x 5.5 in., stamped steel
Max. power	142 hp @ 5000 rpm	Tires	P205/75R14 radials
		Curb weight	1638 kg (3620 lb)
		Wheelbase	3020 mm (118.9 in.)
		Overall length	4443 mm (174.9 in.)

OLDSMOBILE DELTA 88 ROYALE



Major Competitors

Buick LeSabre	\$12,511	Chrysler Fifth Ave.	\$14,717
Chevrolet Caprice	\$11,110	Pontiac Parisienne	\$11,169
Mercury Grand Marquis	\$13,960		

Specifications

Vehicle mfr.	General Motors Corp., Detroit, Mich.	Max. torque	200 lb-ft @ 2000 rpm
Base price	\$12,760	Induction	EFI
Price as tested	\$16,924	Transmission	4-sp. auto.
Body type	2-dr. sedan	Final drive	2.84:1
Drive system	Front engine, front drive	Suspension, f/r	Ind./ind.
Engine type	90° V-6, liquid cooled, cast iron block/heads	Steering	Rack and pinion
Displacement	3785 cc (231 cu in.)	Brakes, f/r	Disc/drum
Valvetrain	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Wheels	15 x 6.0 in., stamped steel
Max. power	150 hp @ 4400 rpm	Tires	P215/65R15 radials
		Curb weight	1424 kg (3141 lb)
		Wheelbase	2814 mm (110.8 in.)
		Overall length	4978 mm (196.0 in.)

OLDSMOBILE TORONADO



Major Competitors

Buick Riviera	\$21,577	Lincoln Mark VII	\$24,857
Cadillac Eldorado	\$21,888	Mercury XR4Ti	\$16,981

Specifications

Vehicle mfr.	General Motors Corp., Detroit, Mich.	Max. power	150 hp @ 4400 rpm
Base price	\$19,418	Max. torque	190 lb-ft @ 2000 rpm
Price as tested	\$22,188	Induction	EFI
Body type	2-dr. coupe	Transmission	4-sp. auto.
Drive system	Front engine, front drive	Final drive	2.97:1
Engine type	90° V-6, liquid cooled, cast iron block/heads	Suspension, f/r	Ind./ind.
Displacement	3785 cc (231 cu in.)	Steering	Rack and pinion
Valvetrain	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Brakes, f/r	Disc/disc
		Wheels	15 x 6.0 in., alloy
		Tires	P215/60R15
		Curb weight	1437 kg (3177 lb)
		Wheelbase	2743 mm (108.0 in.)
		Overall length	4772 mm (187.9 in.)

1986 Car of the Year

target to aim. For a car to be successful today, it must be precisely focused. The scatter-gun days are over.

Ford Aerostar

Finishing 7th on the grid in this year's competition is the radically slope-nosed Ford Aerostar, a lunar lander-like midsize van that comes by its name honestly. Ford is the last of the Big Three Detroit auto makers to introduce a downsized van, and if you're at all familiar with each manufacturer's approach to designing trucks, the Aerostar's strengths and weaknesses will come as no surprise. Comparatively, it is a big, brawny, cumbersome, finely finished van with a sterile interior, massive dashboard, and an overall feeling of heaviness. Powered by the optional 3.0-liter V-6, the front-engine/rear-drive Aerostar boasts 142 hp and 160 lb-ft of torque. Suspension is independent up front with a beam axle in the rear. Steering is power-assisted rack and pinion.

As a late arrival, Ford had chance to monitor the competition closely and offer an alternative. This is sound business practice, unless the competition's product is spot-on perfect for the market segment. The Dodge Caravan/Plymouth Voyager is just that, and the Aerostar suffers in comparison. A few of the more pointed comments:

"Very unresponsive handling with

loads of pitch and yaw. The waterbed of handling platforms."

"Walkthrough design is a nice touch. Seats were supportive and comfortable. Not the best rearward visibility."

"I get the feeling I'm in a full-size van. I doubt it will draw from the traditional wagon buyer."

"Glacial response characteristics."

"Excellent forward visibility. Great overall fit and finish."

"Instrumentation that tries to be both cute and high-tech and is neither."

"It should have been a front-driver, and it's noisier than it should be."

"A nice van, but Ford seems to be trying too hard to be different—especially in the styling."

Predictably, the Aerostar finished last in overall Handling, Acceleration,

"Buick's Sport suspension might be too harsh for the target buyer"

tion, and Ride and Drive, but finished 5th in Style and Design, Quality Control, and Comfort and Convenience categories. Easily the most trucklike of all the downsized vans—trading off finesse and nimble handling for a feeling of brute-strength durability—the Aerostar will appeal to the tradi-

tional Ford truck buyer who has come to expect and appreciate this approach. As for the conquest of wagon buyers, they're still standing in line for the Dodge Caravan.

Oldsmobile Delta 88 Buick LeSabre

Except for the Oldsmobile Delta 88's 10 extra horsepower (same engine, different induction system) and 11 extra pounds of curb weight, it is a dead-ringer clone of the Buick LeSabre. To speak of one is to speak of the other, and their 5th and 6th-place finishes (LeSabre 5th) reflect an overall sameness separated only by our personal tastes in interior design and a tick of the stopwatch in acceleration and handling.

The Delta/LeSabre entry is GM's way of quietly integrating current technology in a car that looks like it belongs in the mid-'70s. At first look, it's hard to believe under that middle-of-the-road fastback styling lurks a strong and responsive fuel-injected V-6 (150 hp for the Delta, 140 for the LeSabre), front-wheel drive, fully independent suspension, and rack-and-pinion steering. The optional Y56 sport suspension with upgraded spring rates, stabilizer bars, and tires added good handling to the LeSabre and Delta package of pleasant surprises.

Acceleration in Seconds



1986 Car of the Year

With the proliferation of car families (A-bodies, C-bodies, N-cars, and so on), we try hard to differentiate between specific division models of the same family. However, the LeSabre and Delta were so identical, tester comments were virtually interchangeable, a blur of redundancy that included:

"Boring, boring, boring middle-of-the-road interior/exterior styling that detracts from many of its innovative features."

"Bench seats are terribly unsupportive, effectively negating the vehicle's surprisingly good handling."

"Excellent tires mask an otherwise ho-hum suspension."

"Sport suspension might be too harsh for the target buyer, but a pleasant surprise [for me] in such a mainstream car."

"Good powerband and throttle response."

"The Japanese are doing this car better (Maxima, Accord, Cressida)."

"Thin plastic steering wheel, stratified instrumentation, chrome everywhere, '70s styling, and unsupportive bench seats. It's as if GM wants to slip in current technology without anyone noticing."

The LeSabre and Delta finished 1st and 2nd in acceleration, 2nd and 4th in fuel economy, 6th and 5th in handling. As an entry, they finished well above the Aerostar and Eldorado, and well below the Toronado/Riviera duo. Except for the grille and tail treatment, they are almost indistin-

guishable. And although their androgynous, mainstream interior/exterior styling was irritating, the total package offers garden variety 6-passenger family sedan buyers much more than they think they're getting.

Oldsmobile Toronado Buick Riviera

Continuing the saga of the Olds/Buick twins, our 3rd and 4th-place finishers were the Toronado and Riviera, exceptionally well thought-out flagships of their respective divisions.

Although Olds and Buick took greater pains in visual product differentiation with the Toro and Riv than with the Delta 88 and LeSabre, functional similarities stand out as their obvious strengths. Again running identical engines with dissimilar induction systems, the Toro's 3.8-liter sequentially fuel-injected system develops 150 hp, while the multi-port setup in the Riv offers 142. Both engines offer smooth, quick, responsive power delivery and a relatively broad powerband through identical 4-speed automatic transmissions. Rack-and-pinion steering on both cars is exceptional with excellent impact isolation and road feel. The fully independent sport suspensions on both cars feature 4-wheel disc brakes, upgraded springs, shocks, anti-roll bars, and tires, and a degree of fine tuning and overall sophistication that proved the

biggest surprise of the competition.

A luxury touring coupe should be fun to drive, and the Toronado and Riviera are precisely that. Responding immediately to steering input, with only the faintest hint of torque steer and minimal front-end plow (understeer), both cars seemed happiest when flung through S-curves under full power. In all three handling categories (slalom, lateral acceleration, and braking), the Toronado finished 1st, bettering the Riviera and the rest of the field empirically, while offering a better overall feel, with fewer tradeoffs than the Riv in real-world driving. We were pleasantly surprised with both cars' overall performance, although the consensus of opinion favored the Toronado. Aesthetically, it was a split decision. Comments on the Toronado:

"A car with potential that will go entirely unnoticed and unappreciated by the general public."

"It feels sporty, without the race-car ride."

"Brakes lived well under severe abuse."

"Exterior styling grows on you. Interior is wonderfully laid out: comfortable, functional, and luxurious."

"Exterior design not as clean as the Riviera."

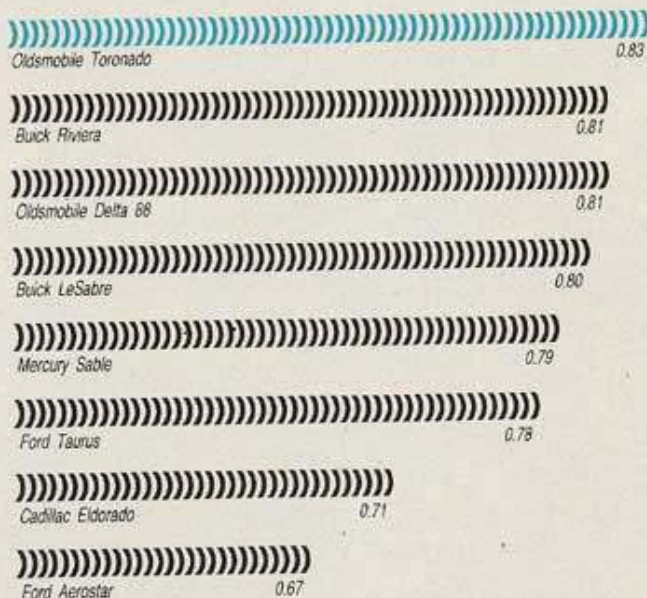
"Surprising rear seat room."

"Very legible digi-dash."

While on the Buick's side of the comments column:

"Looks better than the Toro, but doesn't handle as well."

Lateral Acceleration in Gs



Slalom in Seconds



1986 Car of the Year

"A good handling big car... hit with an ugly stick."

"If you're looking at this class of car, the biggest question you'll have to answer is 'Do you like the TV or the 48-button control module?'"

Although the final quote is a sarcastic comment on the Riviera's multi-function touch-sensitive cathode-ray tube control center, and the Toronado's equally imposing array of 48

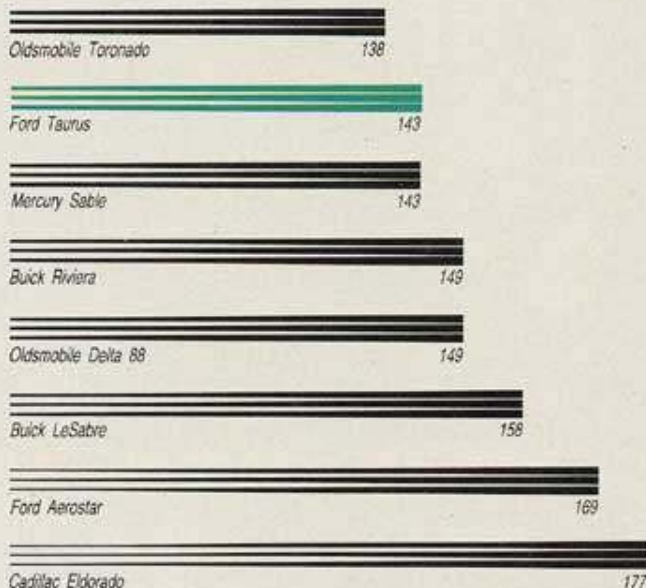
pushbuttons, it reflects our consensus that these two cars are "about as good as it gets" in Made-In-America luxury touring. Not to say that you couldn't do better buying a European vehicle, which is what anyone serious about this high-line class has had to do until now, but we're excited about the Riviera and Toronado. They're great cars for the money, even at \$20,000 a copy. And if it weren't for

the bull from Dearborn, this might have been the year of the Toro.

Mercury Sable

We mentioned earlier that the Taurus/Sable entry is Ford's most significant new car in decades. Although they must be considered virtually the same car, there were sufficient differences to warrant a 1-2

Braking in Feet (60-0 mph)



Fuel Economy in Miles per Gallon



Scoring

	Styling Design	Quality Control	Comfort & Convenience	Ride & Drive	Chassis Dynamics	Acceleration	Handling	Fuel Economy	Dollar Value	Grand Totals
Ford Taurus	1 676.5	1 636.2	2 590.6	1 639.9	1 671.0	5 686.9	3 779.2	3 733.6	1 724.0	1 6137.9
Mercury Sable	2 647.0	2 624.2	1 595.2	2 635.0	2 662.6	7 677.6	2 784.0	1 800.0	2 701.0	2 6126.5
Oldsmobile Toronado	4 567.8	4 570.6	3 586.4	3 623.6	4 644.9	3 756.3	1 800.0	5 700.8	4 611.0	3 5841.3
Buick Riviera	3 585.0	3 598.0	4 583.0	4 609.6	3 646.0	4 741.3	4 767.7	7 658.4	3 625.0	4 5794.0
Buick LeSabre	7 506.8	6 520.4	7 502.7	5 547.9	5 520.6	1 800.0	6 758.4	2 783.2	5 577.0	5 5518.9
Oldsmobile Delta 88	6 511.0	7 508.0	6 511.6	6 534.0	6 515.9	2 796.0	5 765.9	4 724.8	6 575.0	6 5442.1
Ford Aerostar	5 525.0	5 566.6	5 518.9	8 469.3	7 456.1	8 630.1	8 685.9	6 680.0	7 493.0	7 5024.9
Cadillac Eldorado	8 420.8	8 501.2	8 491.2	7 503.9	8 423.0	6 679.7	7 695.2	8 516.8	8 390.0	8 4621.7

finish, rather than awarding the trophy to both as an entry.

The Sable finished 2nd to the Taurus by a mere 11.4 points overall (6137.9 to 6126.5), garnering seven 2nds, two 1sts, and a 7th. Deliberately designed by product planners to have more visible flash, the Sable suffered when compared to the Taurus' no-nonsense design concept. Also, as identical as the two cars were mechanically, there was a surprising difference in their overall performance—subtle, but evident nonetheless. Comments included:

"Good overall balance, but a bit of shake and vibration from the body structure not evident in the Taurus."

"Very good handling, even with the less-than-high performance tire and wheel combination."

"C-pillar and rear glass is very well done."

"Needs more power."

"Fake wood interior looks dumb. Good overall interior fit and finish, but design leaves me cold."

"Some nice interior touches, but less functional than the Taurus."

"Sluggish acceleration. Not quite

as nimble as the Taurus, nor as structurally stiff. Noise isolation needs to be improved."

"Styling a little too avant garde."

The bottom line consensus is that the Sable is *almost* everything the Taurus is... but almost doesn't quite make it for the Car of the Year. Ford deserves a round of applause for its 1-2 finish in our annual sweepstakes. All that's left now is to crown the winner and kick off the party. For that, may we direct your attention to the winner's circle on the following page.

Technicalities

The Taurus/Sable stablemates share a common powertrain configuration codenamed Vulcan-AXOD. Though it isn't something off Starship Enterprise, it is an all-new powertrain. The engine (the Vulcan part) is a cast iron (block and heads) 3.0-liter 60° V-6, mated to an automatic 4-speed (the AX-OD part). It features a 9.25:1 "fast-burn" combustion chamber, central sparkplug location, two valves per cylinder, tuned aluminum induction system, and Bosch hardware for the multipoint port fuel injection. The 60° V-angle was chosen to minimize vibration without the need for additional balance shafts. This engine will also be offered as an option in the Aerostar van, allowing customers to upgrade the powertrain when the expected usage demands.

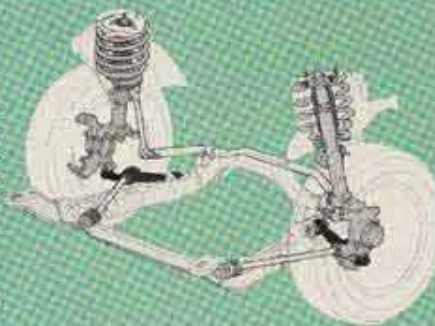
A lengthy Ford development project produced the AXOD transaxle, especially for the Taurus/Sable. Extensive consideration was given to underhood planning with the vehicle exterior shape dictated by Ford's aerodynamic philosophy. The transaxle lies next to the engine, which requires the drive be turned through 180°. This U-configuration increases the rigidity of the powertrain, reducing NVH (noise, vibration, and harshness), and is accomplished by using a silent chain rather than a gear train. Transmission ratio selection is delegated to the EEC-IV computer, when in full automatic, to optimize performance and fuel efficiency. It does so by selecting the optimum ratio and cycling the torque converter lockup clutch.

The '86 Riviera offers a GCC (graphic control center) that replaces some 91 conventional controls. Located dash-center, the 9-in. screen displays info for five major functions. On startup (actually before, since the system is powered up when you lift the door handle), the system first "walks" through its test sequence, and then displays a summary screen for selection of the five control areas: climate control, trip monitor, gauges, diagnostic, and radio.

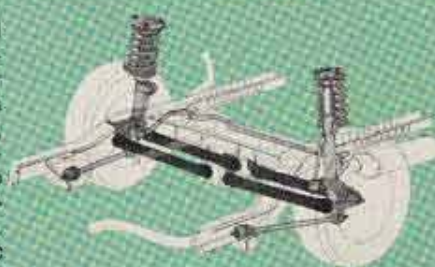
Select the main category radio, and volume, balance, station, seek (up or

down), and memory are all available by simply touching the appropriate spot on the screen, or proceeding to subsequent screens. Selecting a preset station also brings up the preset balance, volume, fade, tone, or equalizer.

The Trip function also has a three-page selection that makes available a



Sable/Taurus suspension is fully independent with gas shocks, anti-roll bars, and power brakes. Front features MacPherson struts while rear is classic Quadralink setup.



wide range of trip-related data and/or calculations, like mpg, time to destination, etc.

The Diagnostics function contains five menu-driven categories: electrical, powertrain, brakes, vehicle, and lamps. Bringing up a category determines status (fault indication is a flashing light), and if a fault is detected, it's possible to delve deeper by proceeding to the next menu level.

The Riviera's stablemate Toronado

doesn't offer the GCC option, but does come with an improved-for-'86 FE3 suspension tuning that upgrades handling. The upgrade includes increased front and rear spring rates, larger front anti-roll bar, and addition of a rear bar. The MacPherson struts are gas charged (for increased durability), and shock valving is tailored to the individual model for optimum wheel control with the higher spring and roll rates.

The Delta 88/LeSabre both share the new, fully independent suspension system for '86. In front, the lower control arm, steering, and engine all mount to a subframe, which in turn is six-point mounted to the chassis with a rubber isolation system. This achieves a more exact (stiffer) relationship between the steering and suspension for precise control and feel, without the penalty of harsh bushings and subsequent noise transfer. At the rear, the wheels are independently suspended on MacPherson struts and lower control arms, with variable rate springs, anti-roll bars, and shock valving that has been tuned to the specific car model.

The '86 Eldorado brings the only V-8 to our Car of the Year field. A 4.1-liter unit with digital fuel injection, it is rotated 90° from last year's configuration to a transverse location. To fit between the suspension, the engine had to be shortened considerably, requiring extensive redesign of the accessory drive and components in front of the motor.

At the rear of this new Eldo is a very Corvettesque transverse fiberglass leaf spring attached to lower control arms in a fully independent suspension. The electronic level control (standard equipment) maintains the car level under a variety of loading conditions. At the front, the '85 torsion bar suspension has given way to a MacPherson strut arrangement with particular bushing attention to achieve the "special" ride demanded by Caddy buyers. In deference to the times, however, a front anti-roll bar is fitted and, in the case of the Touring suspension option, even a rear bar.

—Ron Grable



The Winner

Ford is on one of those rolls that every gambler who ever picked up a poker chip dreams of. There's a lot more to a successful car than merely designing and building it, and Ford has plotted and planned, executed, and orchestrated a near flawless concert of diverse elements to hit the biggest jackpot it's had in years—the Taurus.

Design engineers knew from the beginning they had a winner. Marketing heads knew they had a problem. From the outset, the biggest question mark facing the Taurus was, as one of our testers noted, "Will it play in Peoria?" Will Middle America, for whom the Taurus was designed, accept the radical aerodynamic look and take one bold step into a quickly changing automotive future?

We think it will, and part of the reason for our optimism is that Ford wisely leaked the Taurus to the public's notice a full year ahead

