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Born in 1938 to give the stylist a tool for advanced research comparable to the laboratory and proving ground used by the scientist and engineer, the dream car has become a world famous symbol of the American public's ever growing fascination with the life it can expect in the future.

The dream car has always been far more than a gleaming automobile on a pedestal - it has brought tremendous benefits to every motorist.

It has made possible better looking, more advanced cars produced ahead of the time they might have appeared in normal evolution. Also, the dream car has given the motorist a positive voice in deciding the features he wants to see on his future cars. General Motors originated the concept of a "dream" or experimental car to test public reaction to design and engineering innovations.

In 1938, GM built the famous "Y-Job" [not showed publicly until 1940], which began a parade of dramatic GM experimental cars which have excited millions of people in America and abroad. Most recent members of the group are the GM-X, the Firebird IV and the Runabout, introduced at the New York's World fair.

The dream car stimulates the stylist to creative thinking because it allow him to build in three dimensions the futuristic ideas he conceives which are too advanced to be applied to the design of next year's model. This catches and brings to life for the motorist many ideas which might otherwise be lost.

Once built and exhibited, the dream car makes it possible to gauge public reaction to its new features, through customer research procedures. This evidence of acceptability

encourages a manufacturer to spend the money to put an idea into production far sooner than he might if he had doubts about its acceptance.

The 1938 "Y-Job" had a host of "firsts" including the first electrically operated convertible top, first power windows, the first extension of fenders into the front doors, and the first concealed running board. After being shown across the country and tested extensively, it was "retired" to a GM warehouse. In 1964, it was brought out for public display once more when it was selected as one of America's 20 styling "milepost" cars for an exhibit at the New York Automobile Show.

The Le Sabre and XP-300 were the next GM experimental cars built in 1951. LeSabre came to be one of the most famous of all the dream cars. It featured the first panoramic "wraparound" windshield.

In 1953, GM began giving dream cars maximum visibility by making them the automotive stars of a new traveling show called the Motorama [two earlier shows, in 1949 and 1950, had been labeled "Transportation Unlimited" - none were held in 1951 and 1952, while war raged in Korea]. Five cars were built and exhibited that year including the Chevrolet Corvette - an immediate hit which was later placed in production as America's first fiberglass sports car.

The Motorama grew bigger in 1954, and GM built for it 12 special cars including the Firebird I, first gas turbine auto ever built and tested in the United States. Two dream station wagons, the Chevrolet Nomad and Pontiac Safari, became production cars the following year.

In 1955, seven new dream cars and a dream truck, the GMC "l'Universelle" starred in the Motorama. One, the Cadillac Eldorado Brougham, has now gone into production [1957].

In 1956, five more dream cars were exhibited in the Motorama, plus the Firebird II gas turbine passenger car. With the Firebird II, GM styling presented a concept of a safety electronic highway of tomorrow which delighted Motorama visitors.

In 1959 two space age cars were shown, the Cadillac Cyclone and the Firebird III, star of the GM Motorama.

It would be impossible to guess the total number of people that have viewed the three dozen dream cars and experimental cars created thus far by General Motors. The Motorama alone drew more than seven and three quarter million people in its four years

of national tour [1953, 1954, 1955, 1956]. In addition, some of the cars are still being shown individually in local show and fairs both here and abroad. Others are now running on test tracks.

The myriad of styling and engineering features on current GM production cars has put yesterday's dream car into the hands of today's average motorist. And just as it has spearheaded progress in the past, the dream car will continue to search the future for automotive improvements symbolizing the limitless imagination of the stylists and engineers of the auto industry."

In the classic thirties, Fleetwood's peak production volume ranged from 400 to 500 bodies every month, an incredible number when one considers the hand-finishing that went into each one of them.

My research into the use of styling code by Fleetwood, Cadillac's main body supplier since the early Twenties, has revealed a plethora of codes used in the Golden Years from the mid-Twenties to the late Thirties. In fact there was a limited selection of basic styles. However, by offering relatively simple variations to the habitable portion of these standard bodies, new, individual styles were created to satisfy quickly the desires of the most discerning and demanding customers - and delivery times could be kept down to one or two months. On the other hand, individual bodies requiring a major derivation from a catalog style could delay delivery up to four months.

One of the first of the "extra-special customs" made by Fleetwood in 1929, before operations came to a halt at the old coach works in the town of Fleetwood, PA, was the very first and unique Cadillac "Madame X", so named by Harley Earl after a character in a play of the same name which he had seen at the old Fisher Theater, across the street from the GM Building in downtown Detroit. The character had been played by one Pauline Fredericks to whom Earl had gone to pay his respects after the show (the actress Ruth Chatterton played the role again in). This unique car turned out to be a "prototype" for what was to become, the following year, the very stylish and rare "Madame X" series of four-door cars built on the new, sixteen-cylinder chassis. The first ones were built in Pennsylvania but production was soon transferred to the new Fleetwood shops in Detroit, starting in the second quarter 1930 [to find out more about the "Madame X" models, [click here](#)].