

NO FOOLS GOLD

Kicking off our celebration of a 100 years of Cadillac, Robert Daines looks at a truly radical car from a company that is unjustly considered to be a bastion of conservatism, the Cadillac Eldorado



Words: Rob Daines Photography: GM Archives



WE take front-wheel-drive automobiles for granted in today's modern marketplace, but back in America in the Sixties, such autos were a rarity, confined to some of 'them funny little foreign cars'. The prospect of an American car being driven by the front wheels, let alone the leader of the luxury market sector Cadillac would be enough to have made an auto exec snigger into his third lunchtime Martini.

Perhaps no other automobile manufacturer in the US has such a conservative image as Cadillac. Once the undisputed car of choice for Wall Street bankers and Presidents alike, the GM luxury liner encapsulated the very notion of an American luxury car, sleek, fully loaded and appealing to the middle and upper class God-fearing buyers who ate apple pie every night and stood rigidly to attention when the stars and stripes fluttered in the breeze at the baseball game.

Despite that reputation for building solid and staid automobiles, Cadillac had been an innovator since its inception. As far back as 1908 Cadillac had become the first American auto maker to win the Royal Automobile Club's prestigious Dewar Trophy, when three Cadillacs were stripped and rebuilt using different parts from each car. Cadillac impressed the Old Country again in 1912, winning the Dewar Trophy once more for its new electric starter, ignition and lighting. Cadillac celebrated the building of the millionth car to wear the famous crest in 1949 by introducing the industry-leading high-compression, lightweight overhead valve V8.

With such a proud history behind them the top brass were determined that if Cadillac were to live up to its boast as being 'The Standard of the World' further innovations would have to be forthcoming. The innovative project that would result in the 1967 front-wheel-drive Eldorado was conceived as far back as 1959. The first step in the project was a design exercise codenamed, in the best 1950s Cold War fashion, XP-727. This design underwent

ABOVE: THE MOTORING INDUSTRY WAS ROCKED ON ITS HEELS WHEN CADILLAC DEBUTED THE 1967 ELDORADO. NOT ONLY DID IT USE RADICAL FRONT-WHEEL DRIVE TECHNOLOGY, IT WAS ALSO DROP-DEAD GORGEOUS, AND INSTANTLY CLAIMED ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE AT THE TOP OF THE PERSONAL LUXURY CAR TREE. BEAUTIFUL, CONTEMPORARY AND POWERFUL, WITH HANDLING AND REFINEMENT TO MATCH – THE ELDORADO REDEFINED A GENRE ALMOST OVERNIGHT
BELOW: DURING A ROYAL VISIT TO THE FAR EAST IN 1976, WHAT WAS HER MAJESTY FERRIED AROUND IN? A TOYOTA CROWN? OF COURSE NOT! IT WAS A 1976 CADILLAC ELDORADO! BY ROYAL APPROVAL ...

