

Bicentennial Eldorado

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When Cadillac announced that 1976 would be the last year they would build the Eldorado convertible, everybody wanted one. How many last convertibles would there be? Would there be special versions? When would production stop? These were the questions on everybody's lips.

There have been many stories surrounding the 1976 Eldorado convertibles, often missed is the fact that during that year Cadillac built 14,000 convertibles which was limited only by the tooling life at the supplier of the convertible to mechanisms. The 1976 sales brochure actually described the Eldorado convertible as 'Last of the Breed'. This message to potential buyers had indeed caused an increase in sales. The matter now in hand for Cadillac management was how to bring the convertible story to a close.

In January 1976 William J. Knight, Director of Public Relations, was put in charge of the Last of the Convertibles committee. It was decided to join America's bicentennial celebrations and build 200 Bicentennial Eldorado convertibles. These would be the last.

The cars would be identical, Cotillion white bodies, white tops, white leather trim with Firethorn red carpet, seat piping and instrument panel. Each car would be numbered and carried a gold engraved plaque on the passenger side of the dash. Outside the white bodies would be highlighted with blue and red accent strips and white accented wheel disc centre trims.

The scene was set, the LAST cars would be sold through Cadillac's 1600 dealers, but who would get the LAST one? Wisely Cadillac announced that the very LAST car would be kept them company themselves, for historical purposes.

America wanted to know about Cadillac's convertible, this was the automotive event of the year. Newspapers, television and automotive writers all converged on Detroit and up to the elegantly tree lined Clark Avenue, Cadillac's home and engineering and manufacturing centre. Nostalgia was the order of the day. Never forget that America was there at the birth of the motor car and Cadillac was at the fore front of American automobiles in every respect. The excitement though had a thread of sadness in it.

The LAST car had to be built and on April 21st that LAST Eldorado's gleaming white body was delivered to Clark Avenue on one of the many Fisher-Fleetwood trucks that travelled between the Cadillac and Fleetwood plants every day. Passing through the various inspection processes that every Cadillac goes through, workers sensing the historical importance of this day's work, made a banner that stated 'Last of a magnificent breed'. Emotions ran high and one worker painted dolly that carried this prized LAST car body to its chassis, red, white and blue in honour of America's 200th birthday and this celebratory Bicentennial Fleetwood Eldorado convertible.

Unusually people, official and otherwise, took pictures of the car on its journey toward Final Assembly. Retired Cadillac craftsmen showed up at the plant and workers from the previous shift stayed on to witness the day's events. It was 10.12am when the LAST car came to the end of the line with Ed Kennard, Cadillac General Manager, Bud Brawner, Manufacturing Manager and Detroit Mayor Coleman Young sitting in the front seat and several Cadillac workers sitting in the rear. This was history and they were a part of it.

The remainder of the LAST 200 cars were sold, many commanding high prices and seen as an investment opportunity. Ed Kennard made it known at the time that they had enough parts to build another thousand cars, these parts would allow the last 200 cars to be kept running for as long as possible. This is ironic as many of these cars today, some thirty years later, have just a few miles on the clock. Despite a brief period of uncertainty as to the value of the Bicentennial Eldorados in the late 70s, the ones that come up for sale fetch several times the list price of them when new.

So, the LAST car. When the hullabaloo died down the car stood in the Customer Reception area at Cadillac's Clark Avenue, around 1979 it was shrink wrapped, crated and placed in storage.

In 1987, when Cadillac assembly ceased at the Clark Avenue plant, Cadillac employee enthusiasts won management support for the first Cadillac historical car and artefacts collection. The LAST Bicentennial Eldorado convertible was unpacked from its cocoon and put on display. The Museum, housed initially on the third floor of the manufacturing building at Clark Avenue, boasted this gleaming, then 15 year old – brand new 1976 Cadillac Eldorado convertible.

April 21st 2006 brings the 30th anniversary of the famed 1976 Bicentennial Eldorado convertibles and this web site serves to salute not only these magnificent automobiles, but also the people who designed, built and serviced them. The great people of Cadillac.

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