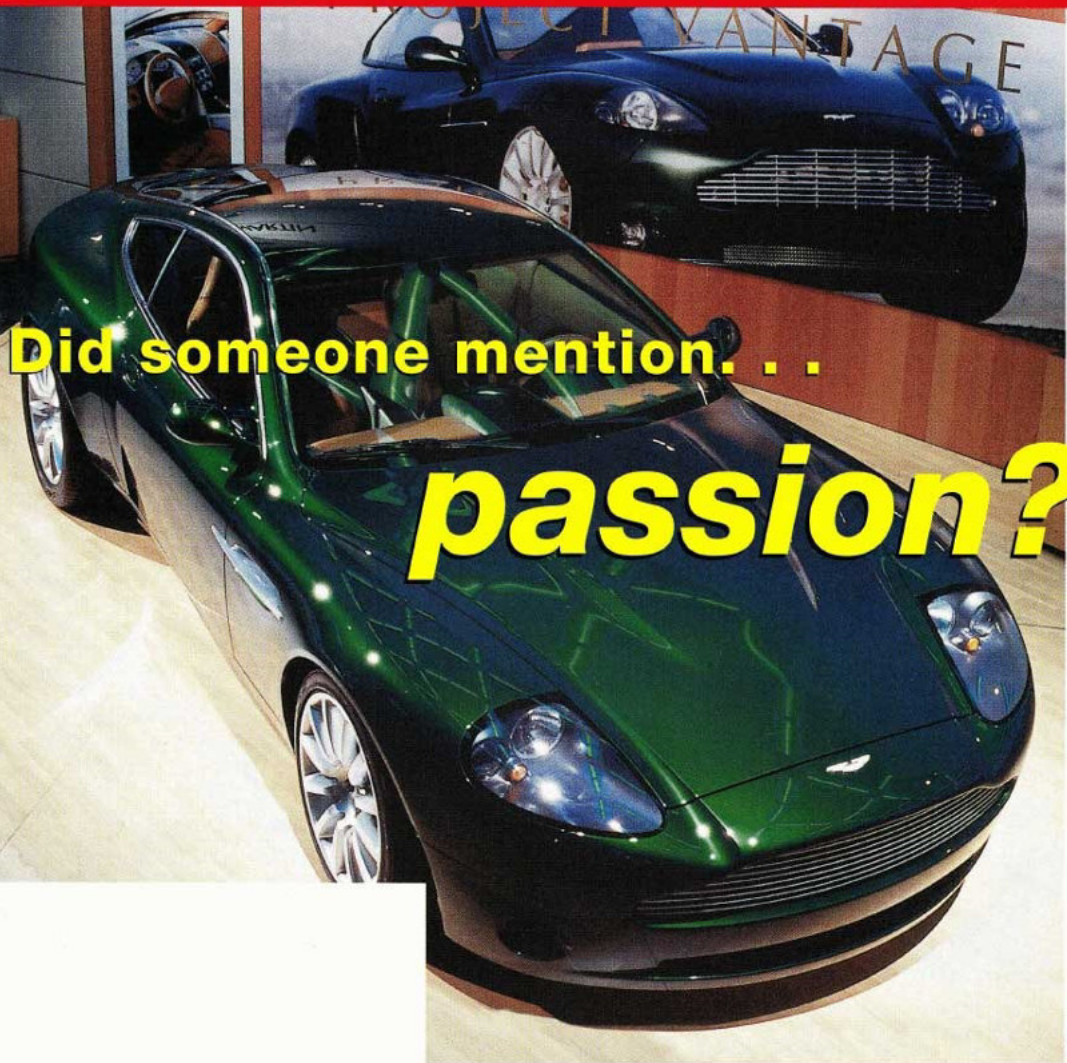


Driving Dodge's New Durango
Florida Fun: NASCAR, USRRC Get Speed

AutoWeek

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\$2.50 USA \$3.50 Canada

Did someone mention...
passion?



Headliner

Production lines

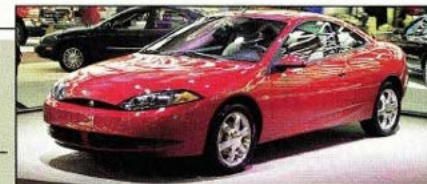
While concepts dazzle Detroit, real cars provide the meat

Learning concept cars provide the dressing and dessert at Detroit's North American International Auto Show, but without the significant production car introductions show-goers would be left wondering where in fact the beef was.

Beyond the prominent debuts of big-volume behemoths (Chevy Silverado) and nostalgic niche superstars (VW Beetle), the Detroit show featured some noteworthy introductions of bread-and-butter lines (Oldsmobile Alero and Pontiac Grand Am) and all-new coupes (Mercury Cougar and Toyota Solara).

The coupe segment shapes up to be an interesting dogfight. With expensive luxury coupes such as the Jaguar XK8, Volvo C70 and Mercedes CLK already on the road, attention turns to more affordable and sporty coupes. Manufacturers hope that empty nesters who like to drive will gravitate toward what they consider to be fun yet practical two-doors.

"The emerging [coupe] market is driven by demographic shifts which allow for more flexibility in household fleets," said Toyota's Dave Illingworth. Solara pricing won't be announced until nearer to the car's launch in August, but the coupe should be priced close to the Camry sedan on which it's based. The Solara is the most North American-influenced car yet from Toyota. Design was done in California, engineering in Michigan and Japan, and assembly will be in Canada. The base SE version offers a 136-hp 2.2-liter four-cylinder or a 200-hp 3.0-liter V6, with either a manual or automatic transmission. The SLE comes only with the V6/automatic package, but includes leather and a CD player among its standard equipment. Supplier sources said that Toyota plans a convertible to



Detroit production debuts included, top to bottom: the Mercury Cougar, Oldsmobile Alero, Pontiac Grand Am and Toyota Solara.



go along with the coupe, but Toyota officially said only that a convertible is under consideration.

More than 50 percent of Cougar buyers will be women, predicted Ford chairman Alex Trotman. We already told you about the 1999 Mercury Cougar (AW, Jan. 12), but it was shown in public for the first time. There are still no prices available on the New Edge-styled, Contour-based coupe going on sale this spring. There was no 1998 Cougar on the Ford stand, since the rear-drive version was dropped from the lineup along with its cousin, the Ford Thunderbird.

Oldsmobile officially unveiled its import-

fighting Alero (AW, Jan. 12), and said that in a couple of years Alero might be exported to further fight its foreign rivals. (It likely would be badged as a Chevy because the Olds Division does not export.) Olds expects Alero, which comes in coupe and sedan form, to become its top seller, at about 150,000 units a year. The car should hit showrooms late this summer.

Pontiac sells about 210,000 Grand Ams every year, so it's no wonder that the all-new version has familiar grille and tail treatments. Everything between is all new, and the result is a car that looks much more like a one-piece design than the old Grand Am. It's now more of a junior Grand Prix, with corrugated side cladding to distinguish it from sister Alero. Pontiac didn't announce prices, but general manager Roy Roberts said the Grand Am will cost \$134 less than a comparably equipped 1997 model. A 2.4-liter dohc four is standard, and the 170-horsepower 3.4-liter V6 from the latest GM minivans is optional. ■



GM's EV1, seen here in fuel-cell concept form, gets a stretch.

Bigger EV1. General Motors revealed a new family of alternative-fuel concept cars at the Detroit show (AW, Jan. 12), including a fuel-cell electric based on the EV1. GM said that it plans to have a fuel-cell vehicle

on the road by 2004.

Note the stretched body; it is 19 inches longer than the current EV1, which allowed General Motors designers to cram a second row of seats into the car. The rear beam axle was replaced with an independent rear suspension.

Porsche roundup. Porsche announced that pricing for the new 911 will start at \$65,030. It also said U.S. Boxster sales topped 7000, and that there is a three-

to 12-month wait for the car, depending on the dealer. Said Porsche Cars North America CEO Fred Schwab: "Three to 12 months is too long. We welcome the added volume coming from the Valmet plant [in Finland]."

Porsche also showed a Turbo-look variation on the new 911, with a biplane rear wing (as seen in recent spy photos) that Schwab said he hopes to bring here.

Camry crowned. The Toyota ▶