

Not so long ago, dealers would soap showroom windows to heighten anticipation for the magic moment in fall when the new model cars and trucks were unveiled. Times have changed, and these days automakers are likely to launch their new products whenever they're ready, as in the case of the '98 Honda CR-V, which rolled into showrooms last February.

However, there are still several reasons to remain excited about the start of this new model year, which officially began Oct. 1.

Whether you're looking for something practical, sexy or luxurious, there are plenty of new products, such as the Toyota Sienna minivan and Oldsmobile's sleek Intrigue sedan, to choose from. Some flagship models, like the ever-popular Honda Accord, Chrysler's style-setting Concorde and Intrepid sedans and Cadillac's sporty Seville are among a long list of totally redesigned products debuting this fall. And dozens of other models have had makeovers, from subtle cosmetic changes to the addition of more features and improving performance, ride and handling. Even Ford's Taurus sedan, redesigned just two years ago, gets an extensive facelift.

The crossover trend continues, with nearly half of all buyers likely to opt for minivans, pickups or sport-utility vehicles. Look for Subaru's new Forester and Volvos V70 XC AWD, two more entries in the newly emerging car/truck hybrid segment. Typified by the Honda CR-V--which boasts a sport-ute body mounted on the same platform as a Civic sedan--these vehicles are rugged enough for all but the roughest boulder climbs, yet yield significantly better fuel economy and a less truck-like ride than their fatter cousins.

In addition to a dizzying array of new products, there's another trend for new car owners to cheer about. Having watched sticker prices rise significantly faster than the rate of inflation in recent years, the industry is finally heeding consumers' cries of "Enough!" Despite many improvements, the '98 Accord will cost about the same as last year's model. And Ford has announced that it has cut prices on many of its 1998 models. Industry experts predict fierce competition will benefit buyers who are likely to find even more lucrative incentives in the coming months, whether as rebates or cut-rate leases.

For today's savvy consumer, the operative word is value; not just a lower price tag. Consumers are demanding safety and performance features as standard equipment, even on entry-level products. The New Beetle, Volkswagen's anxiously-awaited replacement for its legendary Bug, will come with side-impact airbags, a feature once found in only the most expensive luxury cars.

Buyers can be reassured that steady improvements in quality over the past decade have led to an average of less than one defect per car after assembly, compared to three a decade ago. The latest, highly-revered J.D. Power and Associates Initial Quality Survey showed less than half of all new car buyers reported any problems during the first three months of ownership.

For all too many motorists, buying a car is a process with about as much appeal as a dental visit, a perception car companies now realize they must change. Given the tremendous gains in quality in recent years, customer service may be key to differentiating one brand from another.

Certainly, there has been a growing effort by many auto dealers to do away with high-pressure sales tactics and bait-and-switch advertising.

So, while fall may not bring the same level of anxious anticipation it once did, there's still a few surprises for buyers as the 1998 model year gets underway.

# 1998 AUTO REVIEW

## The New Model Year Is Something to Cheer About

By AAOW Editors:  
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### CHRYSLER

There's a lot riding down the assembly line these days at Chrysler's Bramalea, Ontario plant, production site for the completely redesigned Chrysler mid-sized 'LH'-cars. The Concorde and Dodge Intrepid sedans, with their stylish, "cab-forward" shapes, earned a reputation for cutting-edge design when introduced in 1992. But five years is a long time by auto-industry standards and Chrysler is ready to prove that those first cars weren't just a flash in the pan.

The '98 updates compete against the most popular cars in America, like the Toyota Camry, Ford Taurus and Honda Accord, so the pressure is on Chrysler to improve quality while keeping those LH cars looking fresh. Chrysler engineers made quality their top priority and initial road tests indicate the '98 sedans are quieter and more roadworthy, thanks to new V6 engines with 25 percent more power, reduced emissions and improved fuel economy.

Chrysler has temporarily mothballed its Eagle Vision, the third sister in the LH car trio, along with the luxurious Chrysler

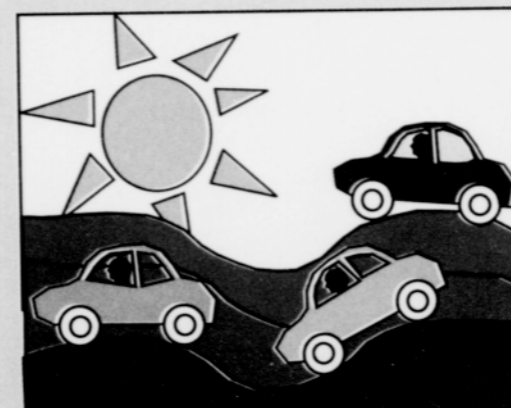
### GENERAL MOTORS

GM's Cadillac luxury division, the self-proclaimed standard of the world, is determined to prove it hasn't lost its touch with its completely new version of its high-performance Seville sedan. This redesigned '98 Seville, described as "a muscle car in an Armani suit," due largely to its Northstar V8 engine, is undisputably one of the most powerful luxury sedans on the road. The new Seville is three inches shorter than the older model, a strategic move by Cadillac to make the car more marketable overseas. Other key changes include improved ride and handling and a cleaner, more world-class appearance, particularly in the passenger compartment.

Oldsmobile turned 100 this year, a birthday some thought the ailing automaker wouldn't make. But Olds is out to prove itself as a nameplate with vitality with products like the all-new Intrigue, a stylish and sophisticated mid-sized sedan.

GMC goes upscale with its new Denali, the luxury version of the Yukon. It boasts curvaceous flaring fenders and hood, a grand oversized grille and one very big engine.

Who says macho isn't sexy?



## Best Bets Used Cars

The used car market isn't what it used to be, so tossing out the lemons to find the best buy requires a bit of work. The 1997-98 edition of the "Used Car Book," compiled by Jack Gillis, offers good tips. So, if you are looking for a car for a teenage driver, or like a particular model, but can't afford to buy it brand new, then take a look at this list.

### Subcompact

- Nissan Sentra, 1996-97
- Subaru Impreza, 1993, 1996-97

### Compact

- Audi 80/90, 1992
- Buick Skylark, 1996-97
- Chevrolet Corsica, 1993
- Dodge Shadow, 1993
- Geo Prizm, 1996
- Honda Prelude, 1992
- Oldsmobile Achieva, 1996-97
- Plymouth Sundance, 1993
- Pontiac Grand Am, 1996-97
- Toyota Corolla, 1995-97

### Intermediate

- Dodge Spirit, 1992-93
- Ford Taurus, 1994
- Honda Accord, 1992-93
- Mercury Sable, 1994-95
- Plymouth Acclaim, 1992-93
- Toyota Camry, 1993, 1995
- Volvo 700 series, 1991-92

### Large

- Audi A6, 1997
- Buick LeSabre, 1996-97
- Buick Riviera, 1993
- Cadillac DeVille, 1994-97
- Chrysler Fifth Avenue, 1989
- Dodge Diplomat, 1989
- Lexus ES300, 1993-96
- Lincoln Mark VIII, 1994
- Lincoln Town Car, 1993-94, 1996-97
- Oldsmobile 88, 1993-94, 1996-97
- Oldsmobile Toronado, 1991
- Plymouth Gran Fury, 1989
- Pontiac Bonneville, 1993-94, 1996-97
- Toyota Avalon, 1996-97

### Minivan

- Chrysler Town & Country, 1995
- Honda Odyssey, 1996
- Isuzu Oasis, 1996

### Sport-utility

- Ford Explorer, 1996-97

By Paul Eisenstein