

ST/E

The concept of a personal, runabout sort of car is further explored in this daring, dramatic new car from the design studios of stylist Virgil Exner

THE MOST NATURAL way to begin this description of our design study for a sports touring car is to attempt to set forth the philosophy which was the basis of our overall concept of the vehicle. To do this, some definition of the purposes of such a hypothetical car had to be established: our aim was to create a type of sports car which, for want of better words, might be called a high-speed touring machine (hence, ST/E, for Sports Touring/Exner—Ed.). Racing requirements were not to be considered. We wanted to design what we thought would be a proper package size, with rather flexible specifications, for an American GT.

The first requirement, then, was to provide a size which would be adequate for high-speed long distance touring or rallying in pleasure, comfort and convenience. All this had to be accomplished with more than a minimum of exciting performance on demand, and yet with ease and—last but not least—style. To attain these objectives, we felt we must establish a wheelbase of at least 105 in., with all remaining specifications proportional and somewhat larger than those of the typical European GT machine.

Inasmuch as this story primarily concerns a styling approach and study, we will not attempt to suggest any par-

ticular chassis components. We have, however, kept these very vital requirements foremost in mind, and with adequate allowances for the accommodation of a fairly wide variety of suspension systems and power trains. A number of stock American production units would fit within the limits of this package design.

Although, as mentioned earlier, this was first of all a styling study, some broad decisions regarding the mechanical aspects were necessary, to establish the purposes for which this car might be best suited. Unfortunately, we were not able to design our project around a rigid set of specifications and re-

quirements. Such limitations, if intelligent, are invariably a source of producing greater effort, and the problems encountered usually result in a more satisfactory final solution.

The design philosophy, or approach to the problem, is more difficult to define than is the purpose of the car, but I will try to describe our overall concept of this vehicle in terms which are automotive and down-to-earth.

Our first aim was to establish a very strong directional character, which in itself promotes unity and continuity. To do this simply, we felt that a true wedge shape, slanting forward from the rear wheel, would establish thrust and direction. The wedge must taper forward in an unwavering line and form in order to maintain strength and continuity; a pinched-in mid-section would have defeated the purpose of the wedge form. The heaviest mass of the body shape had to be located in the area surrounding the rear wheel for a

suitable look of stability and power.

In the final design, the slight downward forward thrust from the rear wheel is partially balanced by the "splash fin" treatment on the lower side of the body. This blade rises slightly toward the front to act as a counterbalance to the overall poise of the car. The fin also accents the wedge feeling and directional qualities, as does the proportionately long hood. The fast up-sweep of the under-pan and rear quarter are in turn balanced by the downward sloping rear top and deck lines.

This is obviously a very broad definition of the image we tried to create. Whether or not we succeeded can best be judged by the reader.

Now that the overall concept has been generally covered, we will next view the vehicle from various key angles and establish the reasoning behind our solution of some of the styling problems. Too often, I fear, the

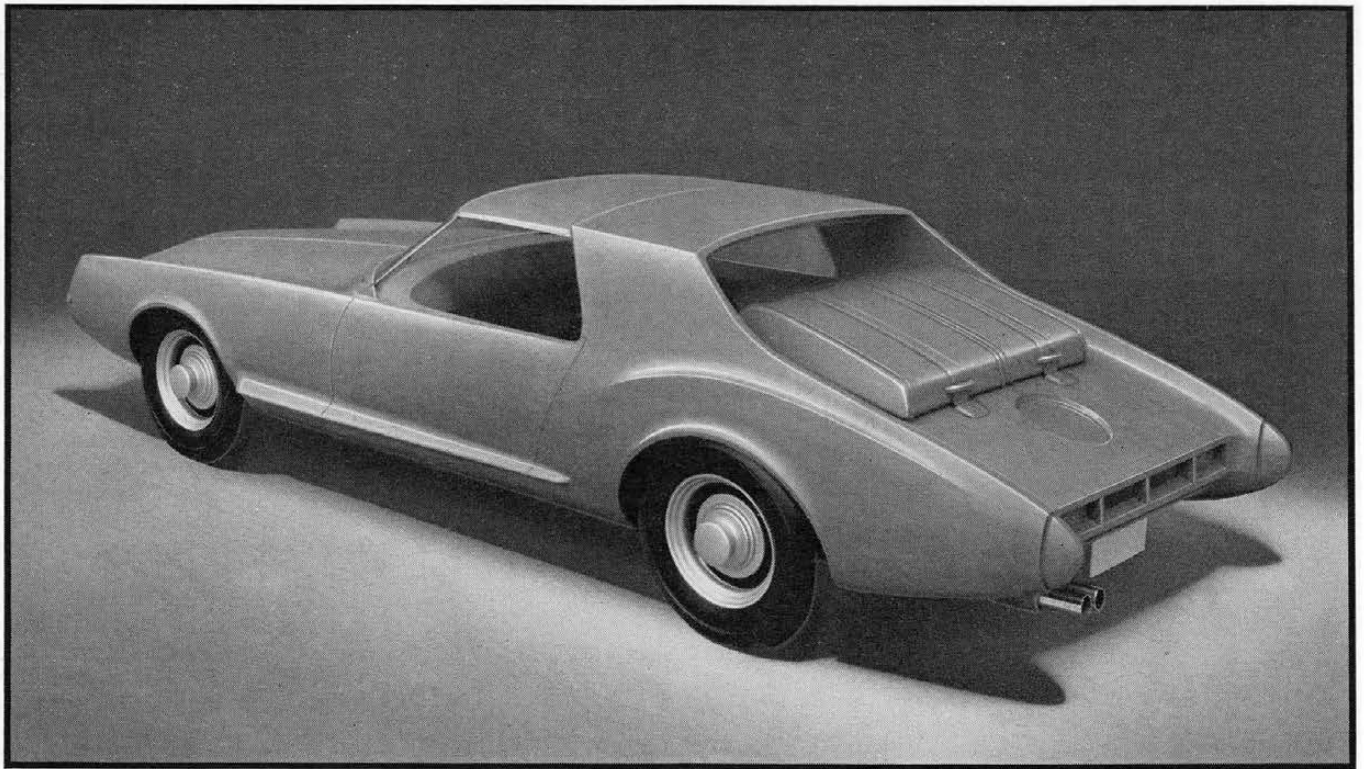
most importance is placed upon the decoration of the front end, a natural impulse as this is the "face" of the automobile. However, we preferred to give this area less attention.

In the front-end design shown, we decided on a sharply directional plan view and very well defined blade type front fenders. These are sharply accented at the top for emphasis. Moveable "eyelids" cover the dual headlight installations. As with almost any concealed headlight design, a somewhat unattractive hole results when the lights are in use; however, I feel that the clean daytime appearance makes this solution more than worthwhile. The air intake is a simple, horizontal slot with a minimum of ornamentation. The parking lights mounted below provide a strong accent and jacking pads are provided through openings underneath their cylindrical shapes. The entire surface beneath the air intake is made of lightweight bumper stock, treated with high-bake enamel in the body color. Only the contact areas on the lower front and sides of fenders are of heavy-gauge, chrome-plated bumper stock. A horizontal strip of bumper stock above the air intake completes the bumper picture.

The only important element of ornamentation at the front end is of a somewhat unorthodox nature, principally because of its dimensions. However, despite a relatively large size this piece will blend into the surrounding areas because of its position relative to the light source and because of its brushed chrome surface. Into this surface is inscribed the design of a highly stylized eagle motif. The design is cut into the surface of the plate with a deep, thick-and-thin-vee cut line, much in the manner of an oversized hand-engraving stroke on silver.

The center of the long hood has three groups of narrow louvers. These are functional air exhaust louvers. The straight-on and quartering front views of the car are quite strongly influenced by the raised dual "scuttle" effect under the windshield. In our opinion, this treatment helps greatly to integrate the windshield and top areas into the whole design, as well as to impart a sporting flavor.

Although the side-view aspects of the automobile have been partially described in the paragraphs on overall concept, detail areas of some importance remain to be discussed. Side ornamentation is held to a minimum. Here we rely almost entirely on the chrome radial-laced wire wheels for glamor. These are equipped with the racing-type knock-off hubs. The functional beauty of these wheels is only very slightly enhanced by a thin chrome line at the wheel opening and by the narrow chrome rub strip at the edge of the splash-fin.



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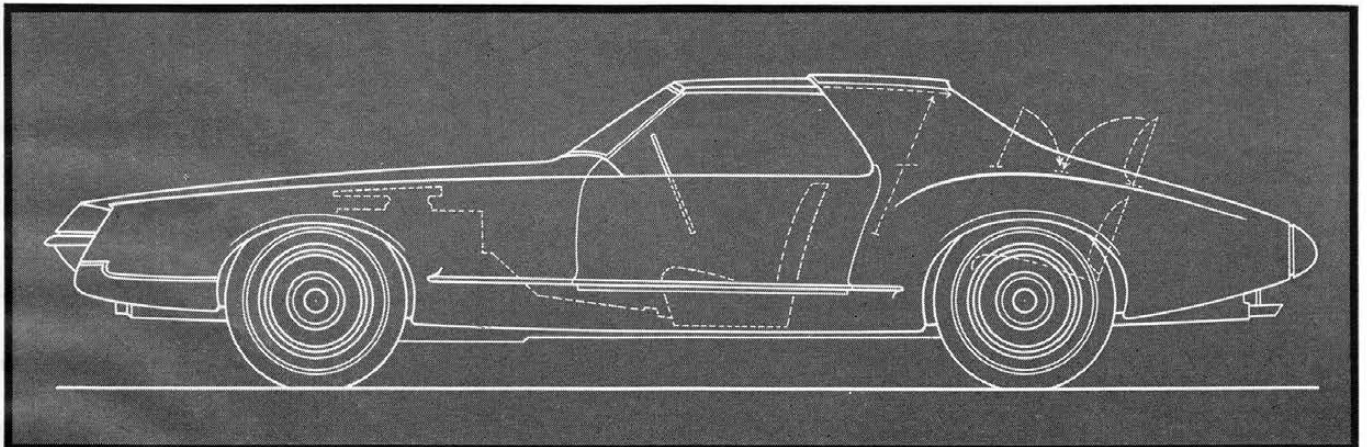
Two features which are of some interest, and which are most evident in the side views, are the pillarless windshield glass, and the retracting, sliding roof. The windshield treatment is accomplished by the use of $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. structural glass, properly supported by a reinforced structure at its base. The slanting vertical outer edges of the glass have no frame and are polished smooth. The door glasses in turn have frames and rubber edges which seal

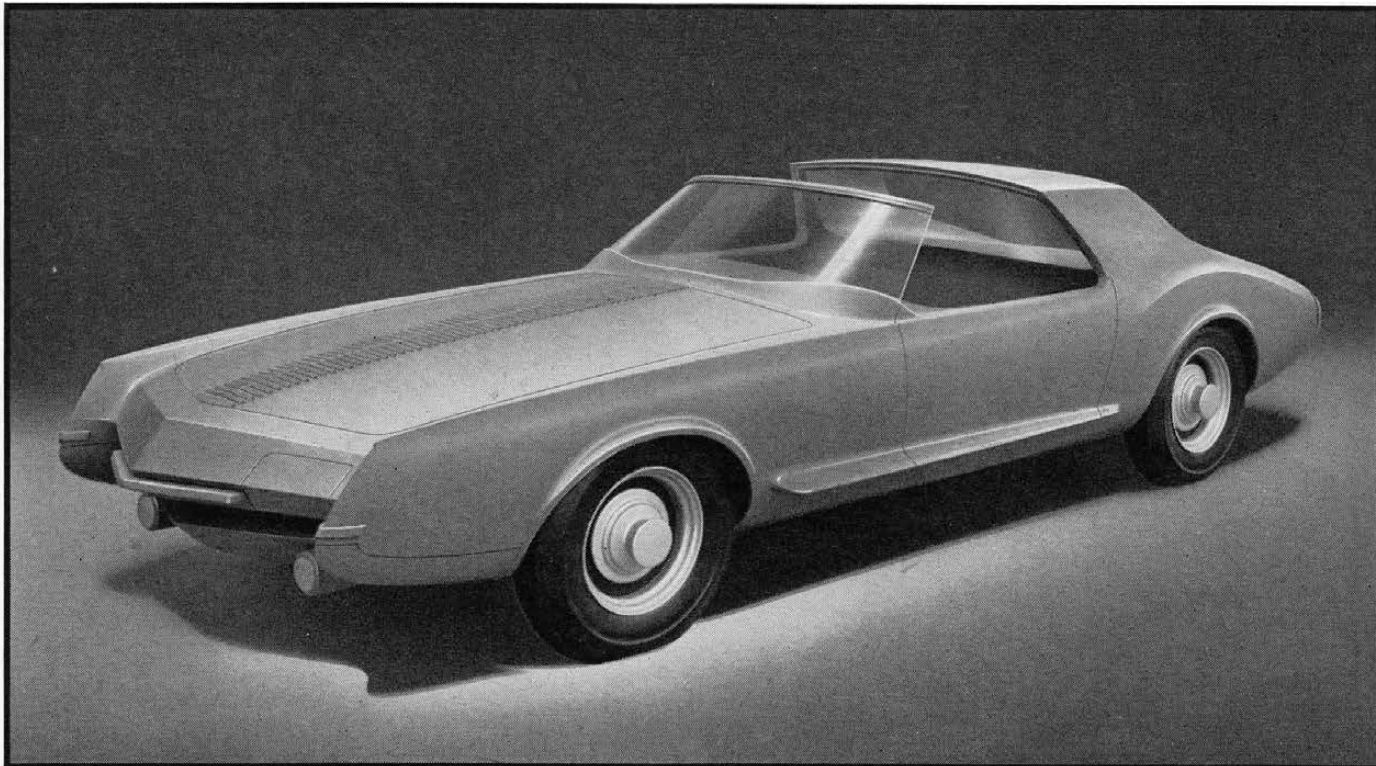
against the windshield when raised. We felt that such desirable features could be included, as this design is not meant for high production and low cost.

The retracting roof feature is optional. However, it can be included without difficulty, especially if manual operation is accepted, to obviate complicated installation and maintenance. Very simple locking and sliding track hardware will permit self-storage of the roof with a minimum of effort, especially as the area intended to slide rearward is relatively small. This feature should satisfy most open car enthusiasts, and yet afford the added safety feature of a sturdy roll-over structure. A flat roll-up glass installed laterally behind the seats completes the compartment enclosure. We have not

yet completed the interior design, but it will feature fully adjustable, over-size bucket seats. The instrument panel will be starkly simple, using only round instruments placed for best visibility without reflection into the windshield. A key feature of the panel will be a very large diameter tachometer placed rather high and to the left of the steering wheel rim.

The sculptured arch above the rear wheel serves two purposes in the design of the rear quarter area. First, it tends to accent the size and importance of the drive wheels. Second, it breaks up an area which would otherwise be quite uninteresting. Without this accent, the flush surface created by the absence of the conventional "shoulder" roll at belt height aft of the door looked some-





what weak and awkward. The introduction of the arched accent solved this problem. Rear plan-view lines and shapes are "warped in" considerably more than is customary in normal American car design. It was felt that the appearance of more width was not needed due to complementary height dimensions and other factors present.

This pulled-in effect, as viewed from the straight and quarter rear, is further accented by the long sharp lines sweeping back and down from the roof arch. Here again decoration is held at a minimum. Chrome is limited to the squared horizontal bars and vertical dividers, which are made of bumper stock. This bumper treatment creates four long horizontal slots, which house the tail and back-up lights. Other pro-

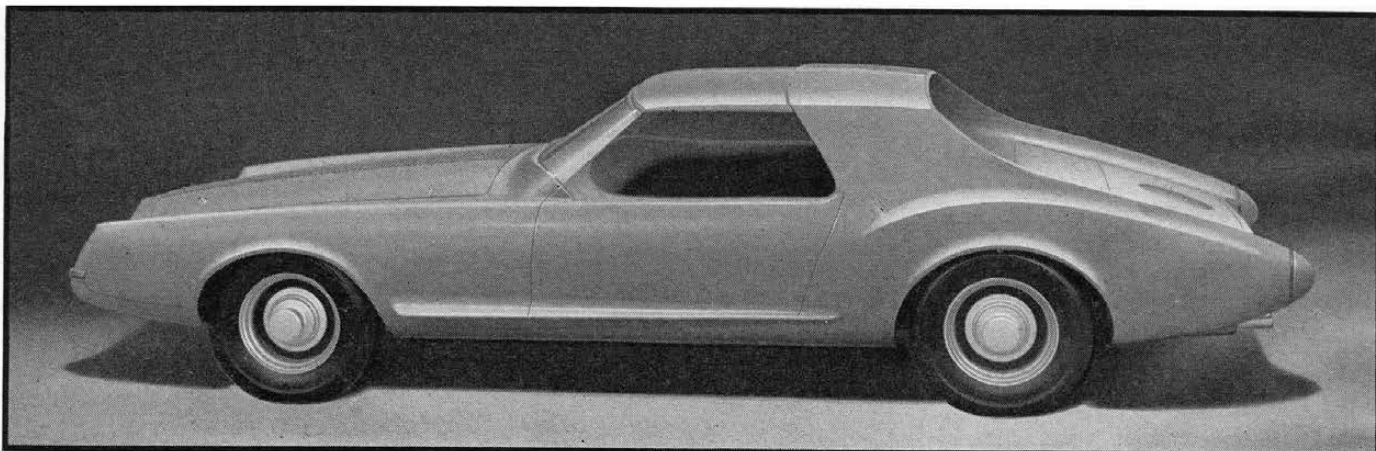
tection is afforded by chromed built-in guards at the extreme rear corners. These guards were first designed as squared off shapes in side view, but it was felt that a more rounded shape would create a much better contrasting accent.

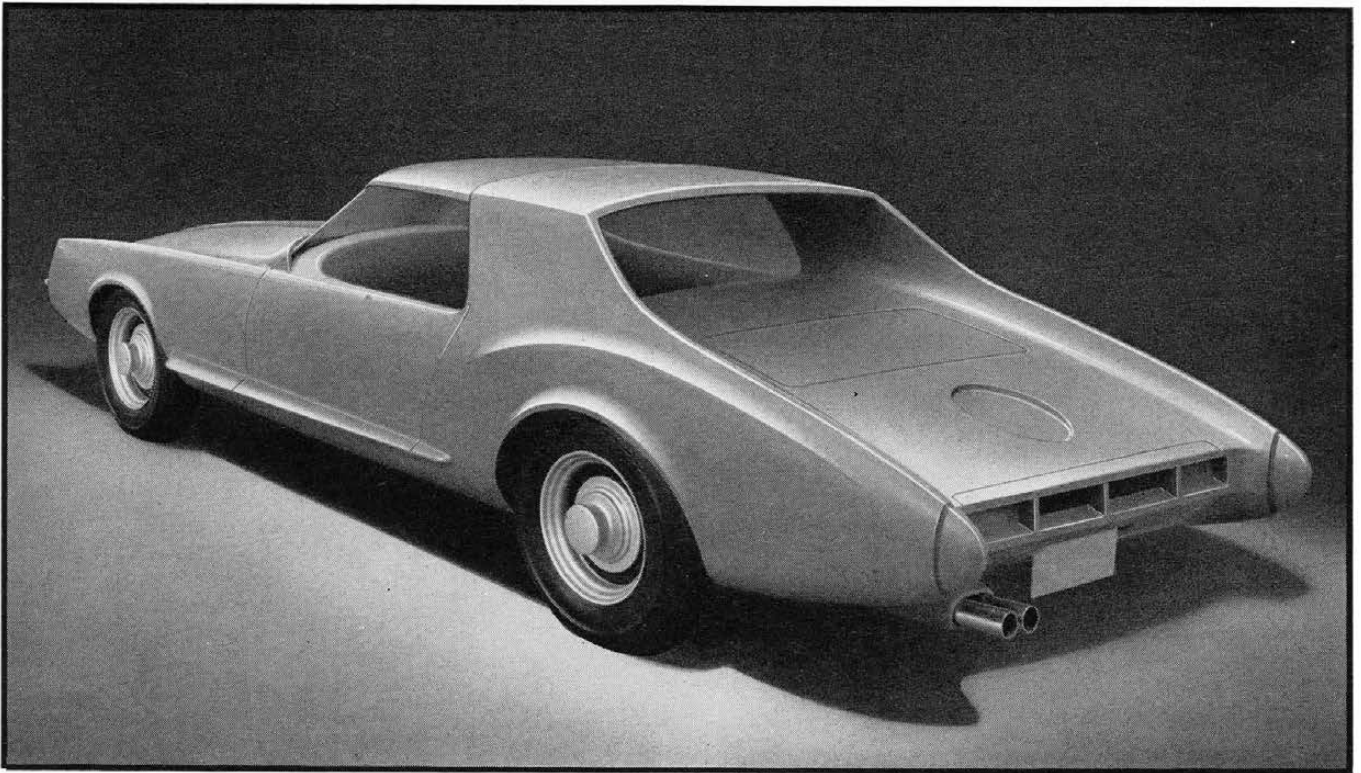
Other features of rear-end design include the built-in treatment of the dual tail pipes and a large depressed circular area on the rear of the deck surface. This circular spot determines the location of the gas filler access door, which will be of brushed chrome and ornamented by a very narrow trim bead around its perimeter. The center area of this door, too, will be engraved with the eagle motif. The entire under-pan surface to the right of the tail pipes will drop down on hinges to

form an access door for the spare tire.

The two rather unusual features which remain to be described are definitely of an optional nature. We feel that any evaluation of this car design should not be influenced by these added features, as the overall design was in no way altered to permit their inclusion.

The suggestion of a rumble seat in this automobile came about for a number of reasons. We felt that this design should have the stronger personal flavor of the 2-place car, rather than the compromised appearance always evident in very uncomfortable 2+2 layouts sometimes favored by European designers. This point of view, of course, may limit the scope of popularity of the design. However, we do not feel





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that the very rare usage of an inside rear seat for short jaunts warrants the damage done to the sports car image. Perhaps a rumble seat can answer this question. It can be made much more comfortable than the conventional inside rear seat, and with more than adequate leg room. It is quite likely to be happily used more often throughout the year than the close-coupled conventional rear seat. Illustrations show a split opening arrangement for easier entrance. The forward hatch folds back down to form a cowl over the legs. Step plates would be conveniently placed.

The second optional feature could be employed when the rumble seat was not in use, or, of course, if the rumble seat was not included in the design. It consists of additional special luggage facilities. The two cases shown (page 24) would be custom-shaped to harmonize with the deck surfaces. They would be covered with a waterproof leather-type fabric and would be secured in place by wide leather straps and hardware of complementary design. They would be of adequate size and capacity, yet leave space enough above them for rear vision. These

cases could be used in addition to or instead of the regular rear storage area.

It might be interesting to point out that some key areas were given an obvious "traditional" flavor. We feel that the sharp plan of the "nose," the extremely long hood with many louvers, the "scuttle" effect at the cowl and the wire wheels all serve to complement and ac-

cent an otherwise contemporary flavor.

In conclusion, we would like to identify the illustrations with a brief description. Several illustrations are very slightly retouched photos of the quarter-scale concept model in clay. As will be noted, there was no attempt to model small detail or ornamentation on this clay model. —Virgil Exner

