

The  Editor's
AUTO-GRAPHS

**MOTOR TREND AWARD
TO THE 1966 TORONADO**

by Donald MacDonald, *Editor*

THE EDITORS of MOTOR TREND feel pleasure and pride in presenting the 1966 Car of the Year award to Oldsmobile Division of General Motors for its Toronado. We say pride as well as pleasure, because never in the 14-year history of this award has the choice been so obvious and unanimous. The Toronado is symbolic of a resurgence of imaginative engineering and tasteful styling in the U.S. auto industry.

Oldsmobile is a newcomer to the ranks of award winners. Perhaps if MOTOR TREND had been in existence before World War II, Oldsmobile would have a collection of trophies. The Division in those days was always the first to adopt advancements, such as chrome plating and automatic transmission. Some of us remember it as the "experimental division" of General Motors, and we suspect that the Toronado is just part of an effort to recapture this pioneer image.

We further suspect that in an organization the size of General Motors, the role of the pioneer isn't always encouraged. A laminate of management, by the nature of the system, has a hand in key decisions, and as someone aptly put it, many a horse designed by committee has emerged as a camel. Conversely, the rein so cautiously held by GM management has prevented some of the multi-million-dollar mistakes made by competition.

The Toronado project dates back to 1958 and unlike the Corvair of Ed Cole, XP-784 (as it was called in the early days) was clearly a team effort. A study of the car's history brings forth the names of stylists and engineers heretofore relatively unknown outside of their immediate professional circles, but no single name predominates. Thus we don't have that creative situation so common in the industry, as illustrated by Raymond Loewy's Studebaker, George Walker's Ford, or Virgil Exner's fins. Instead, we have Oldsmobile's Toronado. The committee in this case has improved upon the horse.

In giving credit where it's due, we should bring an enigmatic man named Jack P. Wolfram back briefly from his well-deserved retirement. Only a handful of his associates knew him well, and the many who didn't dubbed him with the antonym "Smiling Jack." Yet since Wolfram was VP and general manager through much of the Toronado development, the vision of this engineer-turned-salesman must be measured by the size of the purse he turned over to Harold N. Metzel, then chief engineer and now successor in the top spot. To our knowledge, Metzel lacked for nothing that

money could buy throughout the long years of bringing project XP-784 to market. He has, on the other hand, mentioned several occasions when a bit of encouragement from his unsmiling boss was momentarily the only bright spot in the whole program.

Others involved should be mentioned: Andy Watt's advanced design group nursed the Toronado from paper to the hardware stage; Jim Lewis conceived the ingenious separation of the transmission and Howard Kehrl perfected the mechanism; Bob Dorshimer, knowing that he had a sole source in Fisher, still managed to make it hard to tell that the "E" shell is used elsewhere; and Don Perkins rode herd on tempers and timetables. Most important, first Metzel and then John Beltz, who became chief engineer, provided the crucial coordination with the money tree.

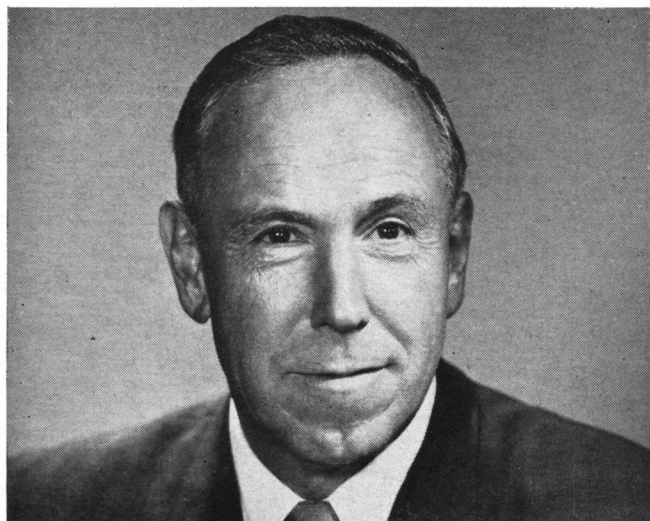
Meanwhile, at GM's hydra-headed styling complex, the Olds excursion from the ordinary created excitement from the start. GM Styling VP William L. Mitchell has always been enamored with the long hood and bobbed tail, so it was no coincidence that advance styling head Chuck Jordan was amply stocked with sketches revolving around this theme. One, known only as the "flame-red car," drawn by chief Olds stylist Stan Wilen, was particularly favored, but until this point in time, there seemed little chance of production. The marriage of the fwd concept and the sketch was a natural.

The trials of Jack White's publicity department are worthy of sympathetic mention even though, of course, they started late in the game. White was well aware of the innuendos against fwd that were sure to be cast by competition, and the only way to prove that these were unfounded was to engage the competition in a run for the record up Pikes Peak. However, parent GM, as is well known, frowns on any such endeavor, even though this particular record is held by Parnelli Jones in a Merc with a time of 13 minutes, 52.2 seconds. In a bit of masterful light-footedness, Olds consultant Bobby Unser climbed in at 14 minutes, 9.9 seconds and since he didn't win, it wasn't considered anything but proof that fwd is nearly as good as the best. So, White was permitted to issue the first performance-oriented press release to emanate from a GM source in over a decade.

Elsewhere in this magazine, you may read our very favorable impressions of the Toronado after a 2700-mile road test. The complaint of our photographer that he couldn't quite reach the ashtray when he was strapped by his seat belt in the front passenger seat wasn't quite enough to upset our conviction that here, truly, is not only the car of the year — but perhaps the decade. /MT



Like the Toronado, MOTOR TREND's Car of the Year trophy, the industry's most coveted award, has all-new design for 1966.



61-year-old Harold Metzel spearheaded the Toronado program, first as chief engineer and then as general manager for Olds.