

Yes! We have arrived, haven't we. A gossamer web of material wealth: every man's dream. We've reached the culmination of that lofty, sublime zenith known as "having it made." The house and pool in Trousdale. Or maybe it's a mansion in Pacific Heights or a penthouse apartment high above Sutton Place. We've just purchased an early Seurat for the den.

Arrival of the Fittest

And now it's time. Time for that new automobile. • The ad men know where it's at. As we glance through *The New Yorker*, *Holiday*, even *Life*, we find them there, the Cads, Continentals and Imperials . . . parked in front of The Fairmont or The St. Moritz, a genesis of Pierre Cardin dinner jackets, Lord & Taylor evening gowns and the ubiquitous glitter of authentic Tiffany ice. • Sure, you want comfort, luxury, all the solid dependability a car in this class should have. But come on, man, let's

drop the pretenses. Let's have a little honesty. See the doorman in those ads? Well, that's where it's really at. After we're through with all the justifications in the guise of mechanical and comfort reasoning we get down to basics. This car should be, and is, a symbol. Like those other acquisitions, a symbol of our predominance in the eyes of our peers. Yes, folks, our American nemesis . . . the Status Symbol. Top of the line status symbol. We pay homage to ostentation; it's part of our condition if you're adroit enough to maintain the image. As Dumas said: "Nothing succeeds like success."

• We have our thesis: comparison is now legitimate. Coupe de Ville, Continental, Imperial; which gives the most status?

Where do you go for a valid reaction? The doorman, the parking attendants. Manhattan, Miami, Chicago, San Francisco, Beverly Hills . . . at the clubs, the restaurants; which cars materialize first? Which are parked back there in the corner or out in front? That's the gauntlet they have to run. *The Test*. Status. That's the clincher. But before the *raison d'etre*, let's compare some of the tangible benefits you ascribe to for almost eight grand.

By Bill Sanders

Even the names conjure up visions of aristocratic splendor: Imperial Le Baron, Coupe de Ville, Continental.



COMFORT & RIDE

Some divergence in seating comfort is evident, but only in degree. Full creature comfort is the goal in each car, consequently everything is supple, thickly padded and plush. Our Imperial had individual bucket seats; the Cadillac and Lincoln-Continental had bench-type seats with bucket backs and folding center armrests. The Imperial also had a folding center armrest, which, when up made the central part of the front seats available for a third passenger. Bucket seats in the Imperial were comfortable and front seat leg room was spacious. Having each seat individually adjustable is a desirable feature. The Continental seats were the most comfortable from every consideration of all three cars. As we stated, though, this is only by a slight degree. Continental seatbacks

are effectively contoured to hold you firmly, besides being deeply padded. Huge Coupe de Ville seats look great with their space-age design headrests, and comfort matches looks.

Six-way power seat adjustments are a must for cars of this calibre. They aid driving and riding comfort immeasurably. In a group of cars all weighing close to 5000 pounds with suspensions designed to give the smoothest, softest boulevard ride, each has come comparatively close to maximum potential.

Rear seat room and luxuriousness is much more divergent. Considering the size of these cars, more rear seat room could be allocated, but both the Cadillac and Continental had adequate leg room. In fact, the de Ville had enough leg room to move around comfortably. Rear seating in the Cadillac Coupe de

Ville is deliciously intimate and private.

Imperial rear seat leg room was dismally inadequate. With bucket seats in a full rearward position there was absolutely no knee room on the right side. A good feature on the Imperial is an automatic front seat adjuster. Push the back forward on the right hand bucket seat to enter or leave the rear seat and the power-operated bucket seat moves forward automatically to the most forward position, allowing an easy step in or out.

Rear seat headroom was good in each car despite the low overall height.

CONVENIENCE & UTILITY

Each car has power window and door locks placed in armrests, convenient for driver and passengers. Lighters and ashtrays are placed close to each passenger location. Inside door



Imperial LeBaron

(Above, left to right) Imperial has a small red light just above the window and door lock switches in driver's door to make it easier to locate the right switch at night. Entire instrument panel is illuminated rather than individual instruments, causing too much reflection. For a large car, the Imperial has very little leg room, though a good feature is the automatic front adjuster on the two-door. When the right hand seatback is pushed forward for entry or exit of the rear seat, the seat moves forward automatically to its front position. (Right and below) New styling is very tasteful and contemporary.



Arrival of the Fittest



Photos by: Pat Brollier, Gerry Stiles, George Foon, Dan Schimmel



handles are most convenient and easy to operate on the Imperial. The Lincoln rates second. You almost have to get a new wrist to open the Cadillac doors from inside. A continuous shelf still runs across the top of the Imperial dash, with instruments and switches located on a flat panel beneath. Both the Lincoln and Cadillac have instrument panels recessed in front of the driver with a padded ridge projecting out and around. Complete instrumentation is a good feature of the Imperial dash. The other two use only a fuel gauge. Chrysler uses a new "floodlight" effect for instrument illumination. Light shines down on the entire dash rather than coming from the instruments as in normal use. We don't like this new approach. There is too much reflection from the gauges. Chrysler has also incorporated a small red light just above the window and door lock switches in the driver's door, making it easier to locate the correct switch while driving at night.

We like the instrument panel layout

on the Coupe de Ville and Continental, except for the fact that instruments and switches are only visible and accessible by the driver. Door armrests that conceal storage boxes are a great convenience item on the Imperial.

Each car has a cruise control. Cadillac still has it on the dash with a revolving drum for speed selection. We like the type used by the Continental and Imperial better. A simple button is located in the turn lever indicator. We can't understand why Lincoln doesn't use the same cruise control setup as the Thunderbird, which is far and away the best of any car, with buttons located in the center bar of the steering wheel.

Each car has a huge, carpeted trunk. The Lincoln has the most meticulously appointed luggage area, with the spare and jack also covered by carpeting.

HANDLING & STEERING

For the price you pay, the Imperial has one big thing going for it. Unfor-

tunately, not many luxury car owners will be interested in peerless handling characteristics. Even on the road course at Orange County Raceway, the Imperial was edifying when it came to handling. In fact, it handles as well as cars half its size. It goes into corners as hard as you care to push it and drifts effortlessly with only minor understeer. And, the Imperial is more than five inches longer than in 1968.

As we said earlier, ride is ideal for ponderous cars, but both the Cad and Lincoln handle like what they are: ponderous cars. Taking a sharp turn too fast in the Lincoln is quite an experience. First you feel the outside tire start to roll under as the car plows. Next, the sensation is felt that the wheel too will go under if you don't slow down. So you'd better back off.

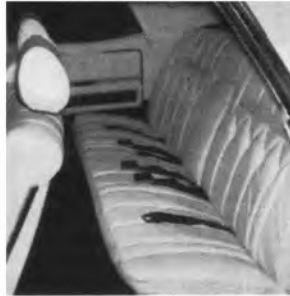
Variable ratio steering is a good feature on the Cad, but under conditions of hard handling the front end and steering felt wobbly, which was probably due to the quickly changing ratio: we never experienced it at any other



Cadillac Coupe de Ville

(Opposite bottom, left to right) Dials are not as complete as one who is interested in "how his car is running" might desire, but what is there is easy to read. All are recessed in a padded compartment in front of the driver, but perimeter projections appear as though they could be absolutely dangerous for a center passenger in case of a collision. Rear seat room and comfort in the two-door de Ville is surprisingly better than four-door competitors. The Lincoln may have the most meticulously appointed trunk, but the Cadillac Coupe de Ville's sure one helluva gas.





Lincoln Continental

(Far left) For years we've been carping about the dreadful brakes on domestics, so you can imagine our awe when the Continental stopped from 60 mph in less than 110 feet. (Left) Rear seat room is adequate, but should be better in four-door. Quality was best of all cars. (Left corner) New grille received criticism as resembling mid-Fifties bug screen. Door contains all power controls in very easy-to-find and functional arrangement. Trunk is pure class.





Arrival of the Fittest

time. Understeer was also very noticeable on the Cad, although it didn't have the desperate roll and pitch of the Continental in really hard corners.

BRAKING

We know the stopping distances of the Imperial and Continental from 60 mph will cause an avalanche of letters, but the distances [Imperial: 116.7 feet, Continental: 109.9 feet] represent the mean and are not even the *best* of the multiple stops made.

Our test Imperial showed a 100 percent improvement over the 1968 model we tested. Stopping from 60 mph our Continental experienced considerable rear wheel hop. While it didn't affect stability, the wheel hop was uncomfortable.

Stopping in what must be considered a more "normal" distance from

PERFORMANCE

| | CHRYSLER IMPERIAL LE BARON | LINCOLN CONTINENTAL | CADILLAC COUPE DE VILLE |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Acceleration | | | |
| 0-30 mph | 4.3 secs. | 3.3 secs. | 3.5 secs. |
| 0-45 mph | 7.3 secs. | 5.6 secs. | 5.8 secs. |
| 0-60 mph | 11.6 secs. | 9.0 secs. | 9.4 secs. |
| 0-75 mph | 18.4 secs. | 13.3 secs. | 13.9 secs. |
| Standing Start | | | |
| 1/4-Mile | 82.1 mph 17.2 secs. | 85.7 mph 16.2 secs. | 83.8 mph 16.5 secs. |
| Passing Speeds | | | |
| 40-60 mph | 7.0 secs. 512.4 ft. | 5.0 secs. 366.0 ft. | 4.9 secs. 358.6 ft. |
| 50-70 mph | 7.4 secs. 651.2 ft. | 5.1 secs. 448.8 ft. | 5.6 secs. 492.8 ft. |
| Speeds in Gears | | | |
| 1st ...mph @ rpm | 51 @ 4400 | 53 @ 4600 | 52 @ 4400 |
| 2nd ...mph @ rpm | 86 @ 4400 | 88 @ 4600 | 85 @ 4400 |
| 3rd ...mph @ rpm | 84 @ 3000 | 95 @ 3500 | 98 @ 3500 |
| MPH per 1000 rpm (in top gear) | 28.0 mph | 27.1 mph | 28.0 mph |
| Stopping Distances | | | |
| From 30 mph | 19.0 ft. | 29.0 ft. | 26.2 ft. |
| From 60 mph | 116.7 ft. | 109.9 ft. | 149.8 ft. |
| Gas Mileage Range | 9.0 to 10.8 mpg | 8.6 to 10.0 mpg | 9.2 to 11.8 mpg |

Arrival of the Fittest

60 mph, the Cadillac experienced a definite lack of stability and required much more wheel correction.

PERFORMANCE

If our thesis of status holds true we are sure prospective investors won't develop ulcers at the thought of quarter-mile times for these cars. However, they do perform adequately for their power-to-weight ratios and have adequate push for passing situations. In the performance race, the lively Continental beat the Coupe de Ville, even though the latter has ten more horsepower and 25 more lbs.-ft. torque.

QUALITY & CONSTRUCTION

This evaluation is probably the most important, even considering status and prestige. Examining all the salient features, such as quiet ride, solid construction, quality of workmanship and materials, we've got to give it to the Continental. Even the vaunted Cadillac has lost some of its quality aspects from 1968. The Continental evidences a much closer attention to detail in construction and has the quietest ride. Both the Cadillac and Imperial seem to utilize too much plastic and flimsy material where it shouldn't be used or seen. One feature mars the Lincoln. The automatic headlight dimmer switch is on the left front fender in a position that detracts from the car's appearance. The other cars have it hidden behind the grille.

The lack of quality in our Imperial was annoying. With only several thousand miles on the odometer, rattles were already developing. Overall finish was not up to that of the other two tested.

STATUS

Back to the beginning. Status. Prestige. After all is said and done, where it's truly at. What does make the heads turn and the doormen and parking attendants hustle just a little faster in deference to what you're driving? Since Beverly Hills is our closest laboratory, we experimented there. Result in the Status Standings: the Coupe de Ville is still king, with the Continental a close second and the newly styled Imperial a grudging third.

Unfortunately our Continental was a light bronze color with a white vinyl top, a definite detraction. All black. That's the only route for a four-door Continental. And for that reason and the overall quality we have to go the whole route with Lincoln. /MT

SPECIFICATIONS

| | CHRYSLER IMPERIAL LE BARON | LINCOLN CONTINENTAL | CADILLAC COUPE DE VILLE |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Engine: | 90° OHV V-8 | 90° OHV V-8 | 90° OHV V-8 |
| Bore & Stroke — ins. | 4.32 x 3.75 | 4.36 x 3.85 | 4.30 x 4.06 |
| Displacement — cu. in. | 440 | 460 | 472 |
| HP @ RPM | 350 @ 4400 | 365 @ 4600 | 375 @ 4400 |
| Torque: lbs.-ft. @ rpm | 480 @ 2800 | 500 @ 2800 | 525 @ 3000 |
| Compression Ratio | 10.1:1 | 10.5:1 | 10.5:1 |
| Carburetion | 1 4-bbl. | 1 4-bbl. | 1 4-bbl. |
| Transmission | automatic | automatic | automatic |
| Final Drive Ratio | 2.94:1 | 3.00:1 | 2.94:1 |
| Steering Type | Power | Power | Variable Ratio Power |
| Steering Ratio | 19.08:1 | 20.4:1 | 12.2:1 — 16.0:1 |
| Turning Diameter (Curb-to-curb-ft.) | 44.9 | 46.7 | 44.8 |
| Wheel Turns (lock-to-lock) | 3.5 | 3.3 | 3.1 |
| Tire Size | 9.15 x 15 | 9.15 x 15 | 9.00 x 15 |
| Brakes | Power front disc, drum rear | Power front disc, drum rear | Power front disc, drum rear |
| Front Suspension | Independent torsion bar | Independent coil springs | Independent coil springs |
| Rear Suspension | Semi-elliptic multi leaf | Semi-elliptic multi leaf | Trailing arm, coil springs |
| Body/Frame Construction | Unitized | Unitized | Separate Body/Frame |
| Wheelbase — ins. | 127.0 | 126.0 | 129.5 |
| Overall Length — ins. | 229.7 | 224.2 | 225.0 |
| Width — ins. | 79.2 | 79.7 | 79.8 |
| Height — ins. | 55.1 | 54.9 | 54.4 |
| Front Track — ins. | 62.4 | 62.4 | 62.5 |
| Rear Track — ins. | 61.1 | 61.0 | 62.5 |
| Curb Weight — lbs. | 4980 | 5208 | 4780 |
| Fuel Capacity — gals. | 24 | 25.5 | 26 |
| Oil Capacity — qts. | 4 | 4 | 4 |

PRICES/OPTIONS

| IMPERIAL LE BARON | LINCOLN CONTINENTAL | CADILLAC COUPE DE VILLE |
|---|---|---|
| 2-door hardtop base price \$5788.00 | Lincoln Continental 4-door sedan \$6063.00 | Cadillac Coupe de Ville base price \$5720.90 |
| Imperial Le Baron | Leather with vinyl interior 137.80 | Vinyl roof 152.65 |
| Bucket seats — leather — dark | White vinyl roof 152.20 | Leather upholstery ... 137.90 |
| saddle 361.60 | 9.15x15 Belted Tires... 56.40 | Twin rubber floor mats front & rear .. 16.70 |
| Sure Grip differential 58.00 | Power vent windows.. 72.20 | Five white wall tires.. 56.85 |
| Tinted glass 54.25 | 6-way power seat with passenger recliner 149.60 | Stereo radio (AM/FM) 288.40 |
| Air conditioning/ heater/automatic temperature 507.85 | Spare tire cover 11.90 | Soft-ray glass 52.65 |
| Door edge protectors.. 5.20 | Tilt steering wheel ... 72.20 | 6-way front seat adjuster 89.50 |
| License plate frame — front and rear 12.10 | Deck lid release and speed control 135.20 | Two door edge guards 5.30 |
| Automatic speed control 85.35 | Rear window defogger with environment control 42.00 | Automatic climate control 515.75 |
| Power seat — bucket — 6 way — left & right 217.10 | Air conditioner 503.70 | Power door locks & seatback release ... 68.45 |
| Power door locks 47.90 | AM/FM radio, rear speaker, power antenna 244.00 | Tilt & telescope steering wheel 94.75 |
| Power trunk lid release 30.50 | Automatic headlamp dimmer 51.20 | Twilight sentinel 31.60 |
| Radio — Golden Touch Tuner — AM/FM: ... 234.35 | Tinted glass 52.50 | Remote-control trunk lock 52.65 |
| Includes rear seat speaker and power antenna | Appearance protection group 18.40 | Rear window de-fogger 26.35 |
| Steering wheel tilt and telescope 95.20 | Power door locks ... 68.20 | Cruise control 94.75 |
| Fiber glass belt tires 9.15x15 83.45 | Flared wheel covers .. 59.10 | Guide-matic headlamp control 50.55 |
| | Automatic ride control 97.10 | |