

MidCentury Motorama

Last year General Motors' annual show—"Transportation Unlimited"—attracted more than 300,000 visitors. In fact, it was so good that this year G.M. officials feared their 1950 show might shape up as an anticlimax. Part of their problem promptly vanished when, several months ago, the mid-century theme was hit upon as the keynote.

G.M.'s MidCentury Motorama, which opened this week in the grand ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria in New York, is more than an auto show. It tells the story of motordom's half century of progress and turns the gaze of visitors to a horizon beyond the rim of the immediate future.

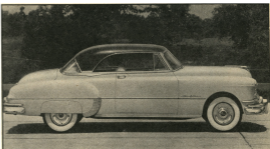
W. B. (Bill) Hufstader, the corporation's distribution generalissimo, explained how G.M. fits into the industry's glamorous past and future achievement: "If a man in 1900 had ventured to predict that the auto industry would produce more than 2,000,000 cars a year, he would have been taken for a crank. But last year G.M. alone made more than 2.77 million cars and trucks and nobody can say we won't do better in 1950."

Direction. The day before the show opened, G.M.'s top officials took an earnest look at economic problems ahead of the industry. Board chairman Alfred P. Sloan Jr. and "C. E." (G.M.'s pleasant-smiling, snow-haired president, C. E. Wilson) entertained several hundred leading industrialists at luncheon.

The theme was "Forward from Fifty." Sloan and Wilson expressed hope that the program "would stimulate a better understanding of various important industry problems."

Among Sloan's principal points were these:

- The industry's volume this year



The Catalina. Pontiac's hard-top convertible has all-weather adaptability.

will probably be about the same as in 1949. In 1951 the industry will probably continue to run ahead of the field.

- Judged by G.M.'s experience, the industry is not truly in a buyers' market yet, but can expect to be during the second half of 1950.

- Though G.M.'s dollar-profits moved up to over \$600 million in 1949, as against \$238 million in 1936, this apparent improvement was due to a change in price levels. In terms of purchasing power profits were actually no greater.

President Wilson said he could see no reason why the next 10 years should not be increasingly prosperous if world peace is maintained and revolutionary economic experiments are avoided and if we find a sound method for resolving industry-wide labor controversies. In addition, we would have to reduce Federal expenses, balance the budget, work out a solution for the Federal and private pension problem at a tolerable cost.

For 250 press and radio guests, G.M.

gave a special preview on Wednesday morning. This was the first showing of the new Cadillac and the first grouping under one roof of all makes of G.M. cars for 1950—38 car models, plus displays of Fisher Body, Chevrolet Truck, GMC Truck, Allison and Aero-products divisions. Also for the first time the public saw the 3,500 h.p. Allison T40 turbo-prop aircraft engine developed for the Navy.

G.M.'s divisions have a large measure of autonomy, which makes for stiff competition within the organization. When President C. E. was asked about the genuineness of this competition, he answered: "Oh, yes, they feel quite competitive toward each other . . . but we try to operate a little bit like a family. . . . We don't throw mud at each other too much. . . . Our cars are actually different, so that a few dollars variation in prices is not the only measurement. . . ."

Inside Race. Captains of the various divisions—the general managers—



Preview. Models such as this helped G.M.'s stylist, Harley Earl (left) and distribution chief W. B. Hufstader plan the big show.

mingled with the preview guest. Their comments highlighted the keenness of rivalry within the organization.

T. H. Keating of Chevrolet pointed out that his car blankets the lower-price transportation field with 14 passenger models and 20 series of trucks ranging from 4,100 to 16,000 pounds.

With obvious relish, Keating said Chevrolet's production last year was up 26% over 1948 to a total of 1,493,501 cars and commercial vehicles.

Chevrolet is starting 1950 with 250,000 orders on its books. Keating doesn't doubt it will hold its place in the industry and thinks the new automatic transmission will have a lot to do with it.

Chevrolet's price reductions are typical of these on many G.M. models this year. Recently Keating announced a cut of \$250 on the all-steel station wagon—new list price \$1,880. Other list prices range from \$1,250 to \$1,740. The new Chevrolet "power-team" (automatic transmission, new 105 h.p. engine and reduced rear axle ratio) will be optional on all de luxe models for \$150 extra.

Big Brothers. Pontiac, according to lanky, 59-year-old general manager Harry J. Klingler (he favors bow ties and has lots of funny stories), will be rugged competition for somebody in 1950. Pontiac's popularity hit a new peak in 1949 and Klingler thinks the car's 28 appearance and mechanical improvements will carry it right on up from there.

Oldsmobile, with dashing style and high compression engine under its hood, will not take anybody's dust in 1950, either, declared Oldsmobile's boss Sherrod E. Skinner, 53, by training a precision engineer. Recently, Olds knocked off up to \$65 on the "88," its most popular model. Cutting out some accessories for which buyers had had to pay brought the car down to as much as \$235 below last year's "88."

For Buick with lower lines, roomier bodies, a new power plant with higher



The Bel Air. Like other 1950 Chevrolets it comes with "Powerglide," the new optional automatic transmission. (SEE: Motorama)

compression and models in numerous price ranges, manager Ivan L. Wiles, 51, an ex-statistician with graying hair, claimed confidently: "It'll be the year's pacemaker." Wiles saw a chance that G.M.'s second most popular car, fourth in the whole industry, would move on up toward the No. 3 spot. Price cuts ranged from \$75 to \$310 on all models from the three-passenger Sedanet at \$1,695 to the Roadmaster Estate Wagon at \$3,300.

Even Cadillac, which holds aloof from ordinary dust-of-the-road competition, took note of the price-cutting trend. Cautiously, manager Jack Gordon, 49, who put in a decade developing Cadillac's engine, observed that no one these days need hesitate to buy a Cadillac for fear of seeming "ostentatious." Eight other makes, in fact, have models selling for more than the lowest-price Cadillac.

Besides the new cars, the grand ballroom featured two attractions which will be repeated at intervals during the eight days of the show. *Motors and Melodies* was a review of America on wheels in the first half of the century, with actors and actresses depicting period scenes and the role the motor car played in the nation's development. And *Mid-Century Modes*—a showing of current styles in women's clothes—was staged against the background of a 30-foot-tall "Pillar of Progress."

Prospects. Vice President J. M. Crawford, in charge of engineering, headed a panel that was questioned by automotive writers. Tomorrow's automobile, he predicted, will be more complex than today's. This is shown by the popularity of the automatic transmission. One of G.M.'s biggest problems now, he said, is to get more miles per gallon out of gasoline. From 30% to 40% better mileage will be obtained, Crawford believes, by increasing compression ratio and reducing engine friction losses. This means that when higher octane gasoline becomes more generally available motorists will make two filling stops to cover the same distance they cover today with three stops.

Before the Mid-Century Motorama was thrown open to the public (admis-

sion free) "C. E." took his place at the head of a reception line and shook hands with 3,500 guests who had been invited to the special review. In the line with him were the three executive vice presidents, M. E. Coyle (manufacturing operations), Albert E. Bradley (financial expert) and Harlow H. Curtice.

Observers remarked that in this prolonged show they displayed the same vitality that was characteristic of the industry—a vitality that had made it able to stand up and take it during the war and throughout the hectic postwar years.

For Stronger Chains

Many industries—hotels, lumber, restaurants, shoes and department stores—have for years had training schools to better their service. Last week, a statesmanlike businessman, Lansing P. Shield, 53, president of the Grand Union Co. and board chairman of the National Association of Food Chains, announced that chain stores will follow this example.

Fourteen members have put up \$100,000 to organize a college training program in food distribution, Shield said. His association has just signed a five-year contract with Michigan State College to develop the courses. It will be done under Dean Herman J. Winegarder of Michigan State's School of Business Administration and Public Service. Material used in the courses will be available to all colleges and universities.

The first year, while basic research is being done to decide what the courses should include, 20 graduate students will be trained, the second year between 40 and 50. Michigan State anticipates that from 500 to 600 undergraduates soon will be taking courses there. Recruits will be sought from undergraduate business schools.

Three main objectives of the training will be:

- • To attract and develop men with executive capacities.
- • To provide better facilities and larger opportunities for present and future employees.
- • To increase the effectiveness of



Old vs. new. "Powerglide" has reduced gears from tangleful to handful.