

# SPORTS CAR ILLUSTRATED

September 1987  
\$3.00 (Canada \$3.50)



## KREMER PORSCHE

190 MPH STREET-LEGAL COUPE

## MERKUR SCORPIO

DOES IT LIVE UP TO ITS CLAIMS?

## COMPETITION:

CORVETTE/LOLA GTP



**Driving Impressions: Cadillac Allante',  
Toyota Celica GT-S, Dodge Daytona Shelby Z,  
Classic Roadster's Sebring 5000, and more.**





# CONVERTIBLE RENAISSANCE

*Topless cruising mounts a comeback*

By Gary Witzenburg

*Most of us have fond memories from our mis-spent youths. If we weren't lucky enough to have a ragtop we probably knew someone who did.*

*For those not blessed with dashing looks or athletic stardom, a convertible --any convertible -- meant instant popularity. It didn't have to be new. It didn't have to be expensive. It needed only to have a top that removed or retracted.*

*In those days, at least, no better magnet for the opposite sex had yet been invented.*

*Convertibles were for dating and courting. For summer nights and starlit skies. For cruising with your pals, showing off and getting into mischief.*

Then one day they were gone. First the compacts and intermediates, then the "ponycar" Camaros and Mustangs, then the rest. Last to go among the domestics (in 1976) were the Chevy Corvette and Cadillac Eldorado. And that left only VW's Rabbit ragtop at one end of the scale, the megabuck Mercedes, Rolls-Royce and Aston Martin at the other, and a handful of aging imported roadsters in between.

The reason convertibles disappeared from the market was simple: people stopped buying them. The government turned anti-car, the country grew conservative, and OPEC shut off the flow of oil. Safety, economy and environmental concerns dominated the industry's and most car buyers' minds. And since convertibles are expensive to build, the carmakers logically quit making them once demand had ebbed.

Credit Lee Iacocca and Chrysler Corporation for boldly kicking off today's convertible comeback: it was 1983 when a new Chrysler LeBaron rag-top (and its sportier Dodge 400 sibling) hit the streets. Then came an open-air Mustang from Ford, Buick Riviera and Cadillac Eldorado luxury soft-top from General Motors, drop-top versions of Chevy's Cavalier, Pontiac's Sunbird, Porsche 911. Toyota's Celica, Saab's 900, AMC's



Renault Alliance, and the new generation Corvette.

Jaguar of England brought its XJ-S Cabriolet to America several years after launching it in Europe. Italy's Alfa Romeo introduced both cheaper and plusher versions of its old favorite Spider, the former called "Graduate" after the movie a Spider once co-starred in, the latter "Quadrifoglio", Italian for four-leaf clover, an Alfa symbol. Ferrari chopped the top off its slow-selling Mondial to make it a Cabriolet.





Maserati shortened its Biturbo coupe and sawed off the roof to transform it into the lovely Maserati Spyder convertible.

So here it is summer 1987, and America is in love with convertibles again. No fewer than eight new ragtop models have joined the growing list since fall, and more are on the way. From the lively Renault GTA to Porsche's awesome 911 Turbo Cabriolet, the choice for topless motoring has never been better.

#### Renault GTA

VW brought the pocket rocket brand of motoring fun to America with its Rabbit GTI in 1983, and now nearly everyone sells affordable sporty spin-offs of everyday econo-cars. But only one has a retractable top. Compared to the workaday Renault Alliance it's derived from, AMC's \$13,264 GTA convertible has a livelier 95 bhp engine, close-ratio 5-speed transmission, front and rear spoilers, "ground effects" side skirts, high-performance

brakes, suspension, wheels and tires and a monochromatic paint scheme available in black, white, red or silver.

**Model:** Renault GTA  
**Wheelbase:** 97.8 in.  
**Overall Length:** 163.8 in.  
**Width:** 65.0 in.  
**Height:** 53.1 in.  
**Curb Weight:** 2291 lbs.  
**Standard Engine:** 2.0 four cylinder  
**Maximum Horsepower:** 95 bhp @ 5250 rpm  
**Maximum Torque:** 114 lbs. ft. @ 2750 rpm  
**Optional Engine:** N/A  
**Standard Transmission:** 5-speed manual  
**Optional Transmission:** N/A  
**Base Price:** \$13,264

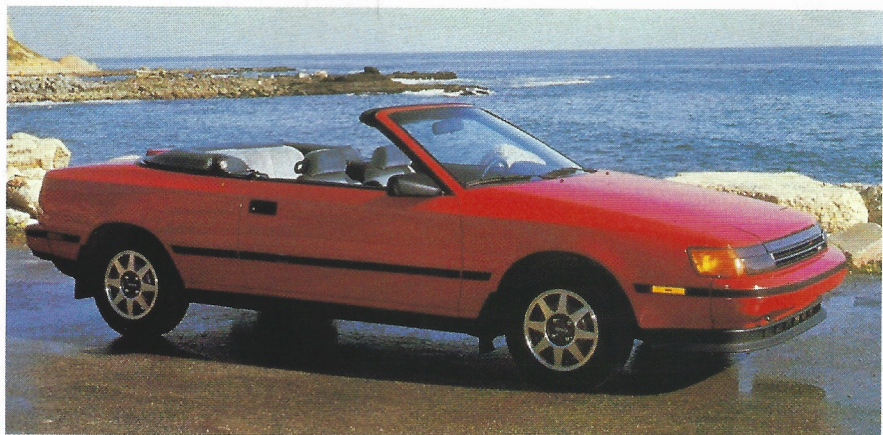




### Chrysler LeBaron

Not to be confused with the shoebox-shaped traditional LeBarons or the contemporary Euro-style LeBaron GTS sedan, this lovely new Chrysler is a purpose-designed (not converted) stablemate to the new LeBaron coupe introduced last fall. It comes with a smooth fuel injected four with optional turbo power, and with a choice of 5-speed manual or 3-speed automatic transmission. Power rack and pinion steering, gas-charged shocks, electronic instruments, a trip computer and a pull-out holder for your morning coffee are standard for around \$14,000.

**Model:** Chrysler LeBaron  
**Wheelbase:** 100.3 in.  
**Overall Length:** 184.9 in.  
**Width:** 68.4 in.  
**Height:** 52.2 in.  
**Curb Weight:** 3250 lbs.  
**Standard Engine:** 2.5 four cylinder  
**Maximum Horsepower:** 100 bhp @ 4800 rpm  
**Maximum Torque:** 133 lbs. ft. @ 2800 rpm  
**Optional Engine:** 2.2 turbocharged four cylinder  
**Standard Transmission:** 5-speed manual  
**Optional Transmission:** 3-speed automatic  
**Base Price:** \$14,000



### Toyota Celica

When Toyota's popular Celica was redesigned for 1986, most agreed it was a beautiful job. The all new chassis was fully independent with front-wheel drive, the curvacious new body was aerodynamic and sleek, and the top-of-the-line GT-S boasted twin cam, 16-valve, four cylinder power. But the excellent Celica convertible was gone. That oversight was corrected for 1987. Now all Celicas have 16-valve fours, and the GT convertible's engine is

good for 115 bhp. Power top, mirrors and rear quarter windows are standard for the immodest sum of \$17,298.

**Model:** Toyota Celica  
**Wheelbase:** 99.4 in.  
**Overall Length:** 173.6 in.  
**Width:** 67.3 in.  
**Height:** 50.8 in.  
**Curb Weight:** 2700 lbs.  
**Standard Engine:** 2.0 four cylinder  
**Maximum Horsepower:** 115 bhp @ 5200 rpm  
**Maximum Torque:** 124 lbs. ft. @ 4400 rpm  
**Optional Engine:** N/A  
**Standard Transmission:** 5-speed manual  
**Optional Transmission:** 4-speed automatic  
**Base Price:** \$17,298





### BMW 325i

Yuppie favorite BMW, which has not built a factory convertible since the 507 roadster of the late 1950s, now offers this crisply designed open-air 325i, complete with a new high revving six cylinder engine producing 168 horses. The manual top is easy to lower and raise thanks to gas assist struts, and it stows away out of sight under a fiberglass cover. Standard equipment includes ABS brakes, alloy wheels, leather seats, power

windows, automatic air conditioning, an on-board computer and a premium stereo for a sobering \$28,775.

**Model:** BMW 325i  
**Wheelbase:** 101.2 in.  
**Overall Length:** 175.6 in.  
**Width:** 64.8  
**Height:** 54.3  
**Curb Weight:** 3015 lbs.  
**Standard Engine:** 2.5 six cylinder  
**Maximum Horsepower:** 168 lbs. ft. @ 4300 rpm  
**Maximum Torque:** 164 lbs. ft. @ 4300 rpm  
**Optional Engine:** N/A  
**Standard Transmission:** 5-speed manual  
**Optional Transmission:** 4-speed automatic  
**Base Price:** \$28,875

### Jaguar XJ-S

Jaguar's luxury sports coupe appeared on our shores in 1976, followed by a semi-convertible Cabriolet version (with fixed roof structure and window frames) a full decade later. Now comes the lovely factory authorized conversion by coachbuilder Hess & Eisenhardt of Cincinnati, Ohio. The power top folds deeply into the big cat's body without affecting its trunk, but the rear seat is sacrificed for additional storage. A silky 262 bhp V12 engine, an interior covered with burl walnut and leather, and most every conceivable amenity is standard for about \$47,000.

**Model:** Jaguar XJ-S  
**Wheelbase:** 102.0 in.  
**Overall Length:** 191.7 in.  
**Width:** 70.6 in.  
**Height:** 47.8 in.  
**Curb Weight:** 4040 lbs.  
**Standard Engine:** 5.3 V12  
**Maximum Horsepower:** 262 bhp @ 5000 rpm  
**Maximum Torque:** 290 lbs. ft. @ 5000 rpm  
**Optional Engine:** N/A  
**Standard Transmission:** 3-speed automatic  
**Optional Transmission:** N/A  
**Base Price:** \$47,000





### Chevrolet Camaro

The last factory convertible Camaro was built in 1969, 18 years ago. Now this latest Chevy joins the Cavalier and Corvette in Chevrolet's growing soft-top stable. Available on any Camaro model from base coupe to IROC-Z with V6 or V8 power (up to 190 bhp) and 5-speed manual or 4-speed automatic transmission, it's a factory authorized conversion performed by ASC, Inc. "There's really one main reason to have a Camaro convertible," says Chevy chief engineer Don Runkle with a grin. "It's a fun car to drive." Price: \$15,208.

**Model:** Chevrolet Camaro  
**Wheelbase:** 101.0 in.  
**Overall Length:** 188.0 in.  
**Width:** 72.8 in.  
**Height:** 50.0 in.  
**Curb Weight:** 3279 lbs.  
**Standard Engine:** 2.8 V6  
**Maximum Horsepower:** 135 bhp @ 4900 rpm  
**Maximum Torque:** 160 lbs. ft. @ 3900 rpm  
**Optional Engine:** 5.0 V8  
**Standard Transmission:** 5-speed manual  
**Optional Transmission:** 4-speed automatic  
**Base Price:** \$15,208



### Cadillac Allante'

The famed Pininfarina design house of Turin, Italy, which styled this twin-top, two-seat convertible with Cadillac cooperation, assembles the bodies and interiors. Special 747s deliver them to Detroit for mating with their powertrains and suspensions on a mini-assembly line. Each 170 bhp Allante' V8 is dyno tested for 48 minutes before going into its car, and each finished car is track tested for 25 miles before being

loaded for shipment. The warranty is seven years/100,000 miles, the price is \$54,700, and fewer than 8,000 will be produced this year.

**Model:** Cadillac Allante'  
**Wheelbase:** 99.4 in.  
**Overall Length:** 178.6 in.  
**Width:** 73.4 in.  
**Height:** 52.2 in.  
**Curb Weight:** 3495 lbs.  
**Standard Engine:** 4.1 V8  
**Maximum Horsepower:** 170 bhp @ 4300 rpm  
**Maximum Torque:** 230 lbs. ft. @ 3200 rpm  
**Optional Engine:** N/A  
**Standard Transmission:** 4-speed automatic  
**Optional Transmission:** N/A  
**Base Price:** \$54,700



**Porsche 911 Turbo**

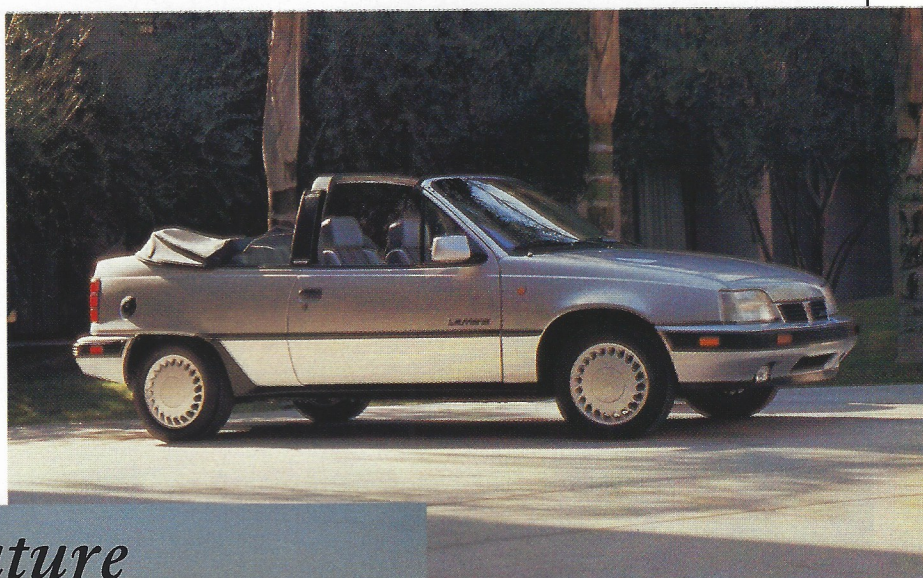
There's nothing new about the whale-tailed Porsche Turbo, and the 911 Cabriolet has been around for several years. But now there's a 911 Turbo Cabriolet. Combining the breathtaking performance of the 282 bhp Turbo with the Cabriolet's charisma results in the consummate show-off machine for Beverly Hills trolling. Imagine top-down 0 to 60 acceleration runs of 5.5 seconds and 150 mph bugs in your teeth. A mere \$78,415 buys this ultimate road-going Porsche; or you can ante up another \$23,826 for the newly introduced, racing derived slantnose body option.

- Model:** Porsche 911 Turbo
- Wheelbase:** 89.5 in.
- Overall Length:** 168.9 in.
- Width:** 69.9 in.
- Height:** 51.6 in.
- Curb Weight:** 2976 lbs.
- Standard Engine:** 3.3 turbocharged six cylinder
- Maximum Horsepower:** 282 bhp @ 5500 rpm
- Maximum Torque:** 278 lbs. ft. @ 4000 rpm
- Optional Engine:** N/A
- Standard Transmission:** 4-speed manual
- Optional Transmission:** N/A
- Base Price:** \$78,415

Convertibles aren't for everyone, of course. We don't recommend topless cruising through dangerous neighborhoods or on noisy, truck infested freeways. Nor do we suggest leaving Christmas packages or expensive aftermarket sound systems in highly vulnerable soft-top cars.

But wafting down the right road

on the right day with the right company aboard, there's nothing quite like the top-down experience, nothing quite as satisfying as 360-degree scenery and the sounds and smells of nature on the roll. If a couple of hours of that doesn't put you straight with the world, friend, then probably nothing will. **SCI**



*Two for the Future*



Like Cadillac's Allante', the Chrysler/Maserati will feature both hard and soft-top and is the product of a joint effort between an American automaker and a famous Italian coachbuilder. Aside from styling, the principal differences will be under the hood -- a 16-valve, intercooled, turbocharged four cylinder instead of the Allante's aluminum V8 -- and on the window sticker, where the price is expected to come in at less than \$30,000. Cars should hit the showrooms soon after you read this.

A bit further over the horizon is a proposed convertible version of Pontiac's new LeMans subcompact. Essentially a German Opel manufactured by GM affiliate Daewoo of Korea, the LeMans has four cylinder power, and is sprightly in character and pleasantly affordable in price. If approved for production, the conversion surgery will likely be performed in the U.S., and the Euro-look four-seater could make it to market by next summer with a price tag in the \$11-12,000 range.