

# Automotive

## Renault Medallion Finding a Profitable Niche in West

American Motors Corp. kicked off the most ambitious new product year in its history with the introduction last month of the compact 1988 Renault Medallion. Since its debut March 1, the new family car has found much favor with buyers, especially in the West.

Available in both four-door sedan and five- and seven-passenger station wagon models, Medallion is the first of three new Renault car lines (two imported, one built in Canada) to debut in North America this year.

The Medallion is built at Maubeuge, France, and is based on Renault's R21 sedan and Nevada wagon — both highly successful in the European market.

Robert Williams, AMC's manager for the Western Region, said in its first 30 days of sales Medallion outsold "our popular 'pocket rocket' Renault GTA by a surprising 38 percent."

"In the Medallion, we have an attractive, roomy family car that is certain to appeal to a broad spectrum of the buying public, especially those who want a balance of value, comfort, ride, handling and fuel efficiency," said Joseph E. Cappy, AMC president and chief executive officer.

"We're confident that the Medallion is the right product,

at the right time, to ensure Renault is competitive in the standard compact segment of the North American car market," he said.

The Medallion four-door sedan is offered in DL and LX versions, while the station wagon is sold in a DL model exclusively.

The base price of the four-door DL sedan is \$9,965, while the DL station wagon model is \$10,693.

"Dollar for dollar, we have the Japanese hands down with the new Medallion," said Doug Steed, general sales manager at Buerge Renault-Jeep.

"Its exceptional ride comfort is usually found in cars that cost considerably more money," Steed said. "The ergonomics are well thought out, and its roominess goes unmatched in its class."

Power for the Medallion is supplied by an upgraded version of Renault's fuel-injected 2.2-liter overhead cam, aluminum engine. It delivers 103 horsepower at 5,000 rpm and 124 foot-pound of torque at 2,500 rpm, which is equal to, or better than, most competitors in the standard compact segment.

The front-wheel-drive Medallion features an in-line engine/transmission layout. A five-speed manual transmission will be standard with a

three-speed automatic available as an option.

Medallion offers excellent fuel economy rated at 25 miles per gallon in city driving and 33 mpg on the highway for the sedan equipped with a five-speed manual transmission. With an automatic transmission, the sedan delivers 20 mpg city and 26 highway.

The Medallion station wagon, which like the sedan affords seating for five, also has ample room to add a third bench seat, primarily for small children, in the rear of the vehicle, bringing total seating capacity to seven.

All parts of the Medallion body exterior have been carefully integrated, including limousine-type doors for easy entry and exit; wide door opening angles; semi-flush side window glass; streamlined side rear view mirrors; aerodynamic wheel covers; and integrated front and rear bumpers.

The aerodynamically crisp exterior styling features sloping nose, steeply rake grille and windshield and high rear deck lid, which results in a deep rear luggage compartment on sedan models.

Medallion also offers the largest interior volume index in its class (115 cubic feet for

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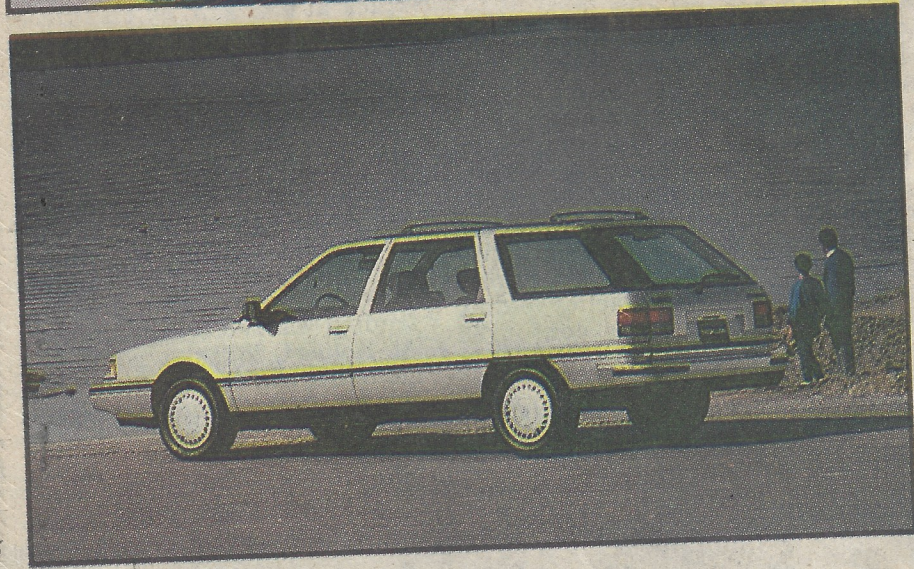
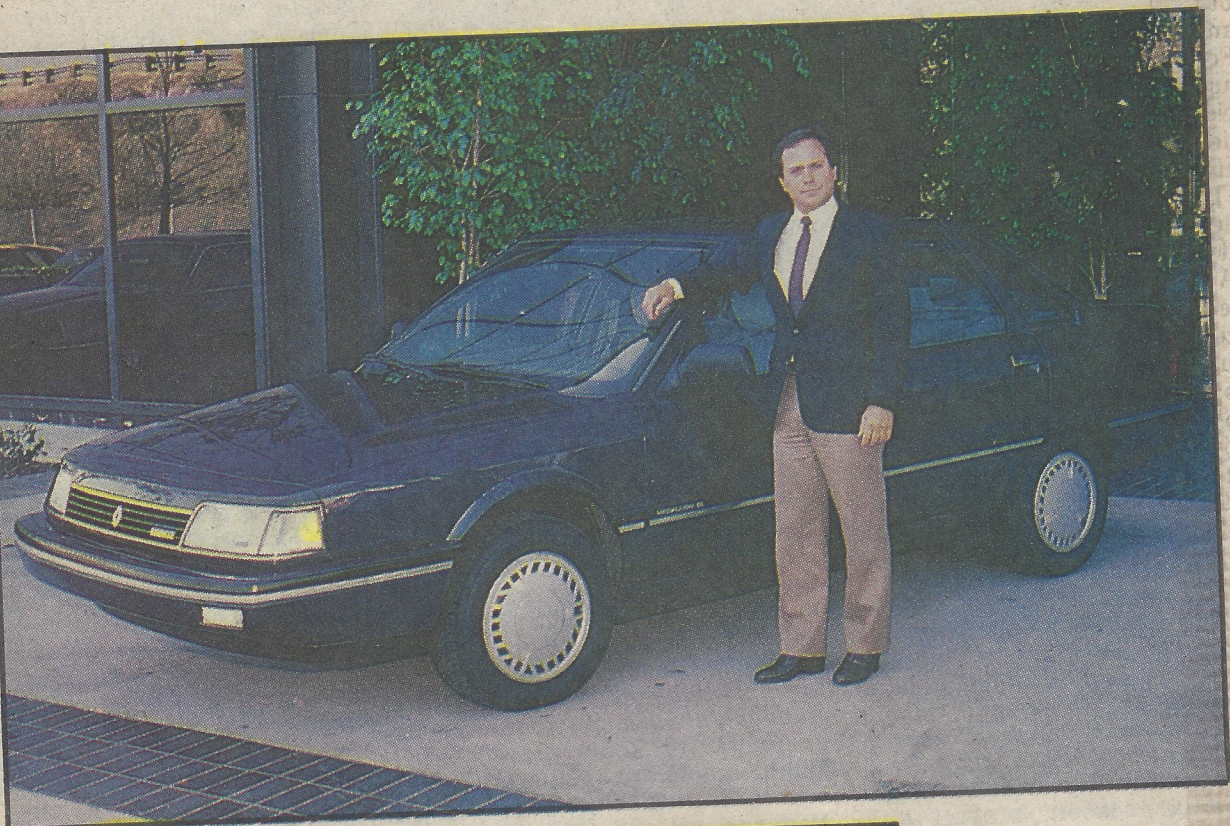
## Lancer, Shelby's First Luxury Car,



Gary Witzenburg

Let me put it this way: The Shelby Dodge Lancer is probably the finest Shelby car that my mother could enjoy.

In fact, she did, since it just happened to be visiting when I was testing former racer Carroll Shelby's latest creation. We drove it 100 miles the coast and back one day, downtown another, around



The 1988 Renault Medallion has outsold the "pocket rocket" Renault GTA in the West by 38 percent, according to AMC Western Regional Manager Robert Williams (above). The sedan and station wagon models are compact family vehicles that fare very well against all competitors in their class.

## Gets Rave Reviews Even From Mom

town several more.  
"It certainly rides nicely," she said during the daylong run. She never would have said that about a Shelby Cobra or Shelby Mustang of the '60s. Not that Mom doesn't appreciate fast, sexy cars... She does. She's even a racing nut. But those original Shelby products — thinly disguised racing cars, really — were as crude,

rough, noisy and uncomfortable as they were brutally powerful.

And she probably wouldn't have cared for either of the other two Dodge-based Shelby cars that have rolled out of his new Whittier, Calif., plant since it opened last summer. The first was an Omni GLH-S sedan; the second, a Charger GLH-S coupe. ("GLH-S," OI'

Shel explains with a twinkle and a grin, means "Goes Like Hell — Somemore.") Both were very fast but left much to be desired in comfort and sophistication.

Not so Shelby's Lancer. Based on the already nice Dodge Lancer SE sports sedan, it's the first-ever luxury Shelby. Besides a subtle aerody-

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# Lancer

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dynamic package (front and rear airdams, side skirts, rear spoiler) it features standard air conditioning; power windows, door locks and mirrors; a six-way power driver's seat; an overhead console with lamps, compass and outside thermometer; and even (get this!) a state-of-the-art, 10-speaker Pioneer compact disc (CD) player/tuner.

Not that it's wimpy or soft. Shelby's engineers take the Lancer's 146-horsepower turbocharged four-cylinder engine, revamp its turbo intake system and add a power-enhancing intercooler. The result is 175 reliable horsepower and 175 pounds-feet of torque from just 2.2 liters of displacement. Zero to 60 mph takes 7.7 seconds, according to Shelby, and top speed is a cool 135 mph — compared to about 8.3 seconds zero-to-60 and 115 mph for the stock turbo Lancer.

Meanwhile, Shelby's chassis wizards substitute rear disc brakes and high-performance vented front discs for the Lancer's stock disc/drum system. They swap its standard springs for slightly stiffer ones that also lower the car half an inch. They add newly developed Monroe Formula GP twin-tube, nitrogen-charged front struts and rear shocks, along with a larger rear anti-sway bar.

Finally, in place of the Lancer ES's already-fine standard tires and wheels, they install a set of jumbo Goodyear "Gatorback" high-speed radials on special 15-by-6.5-inch cast-aluminum Shelby wheels. The bottom line is .85-g's of cornering power (on a test-track skidpad) vs. the standard Lancer Turbo's .78-g's.

There's no question where Shelby has aimed this car: directly at much more expensive European sports sedans. "I like to put all of these ingredients together for a certain little segment of the market: the guy who really loves automobiles but can't afford those stupidly priced European cars," he recently told me.

"They've done a brilliant job of hoodwinking the public that they're vastly superior to what's built anywhere else in the world," he continued, "and that's just a bunch of crap, in my opinion. This is truly what the public conceptualizes to be a European-type touring car, it's done 100 percent in Ameri-



Carroll Shelby stands in front of Lancer, his first luxuriously appointed car.

LeMans, but a heart condition forced his retirement the following season.

Two years later, he wedged a Ford V-8 engine into a shapely British AC body, beefed up its chassis and created the now-coveted Shelby Cobra sports car. Next came the Shelby GT-350, a Mustang-based sports coupe that proceeded to blow Chevy's Corvettes off the country's racing tracks just as the Cobra had before it.

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— Carroll Shelby

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Discouraged by mushrooming government regulation and persecution of performance-oriented cars, he quit the car-building business to concentrate on other ventures (including Shelby wheels and Carroll Shelby Chili) in 1970. Twelve years passed before he returned to develop high-performance cars and components for Lee Iacocca, his chief supporter at Ford in the 1960s, now chairman of Chrysler.

A Chrysler-Shelby Development Center in Santa Fe Springs, Calif., opened for business in 1982, and the '83 Dodge Shelby Charger soon followed. Other Shelby-developed high-performance Dodge models since then include the very hot '87 Daytona Shelby Z sports coupe.

There's a major difference between Shelby-brand prod-

with the three-speed automatic and a sumptuous leather interior (two more Shelby firsts), our prototype press tester looked terrific and was great fun to drive. Once past the initial turbo lag, it accelerated smoothly and very quickly, and its cornering was excellent.

Mom also loved the superb CD stereo, standard on the Shelby Lancer. So did I. Whether listening to Bach or Billy Joel, it was easily the most impressive in-car sound I've yet experienced. It was complicated, but not too difficult once I was used to its many multifunction buttons.

On the negative side, enjoyment of the faster five-speed manual version is diluted by substandard shifter feel and precision due to Chrysler's flaky cable-type linkage. And the automatic really should be a performance-tuned four-speed instead of Chrysler's everyday three-speed. Also, the excellent Shelby steering wheel, being fatter and smaller in diameter than the stock Lancer wheel, blocks much of the driver's view of the tach, speedometer and full gauges.

Then there's the limited availability. At this writing, only 400 five-speed Shelby Lancers and an equal number of automatic versions, all in deep red, are scheduled to be built before production moves on to something else (probably a super Shelby Shadow). If you want one and don't yet have it, you'd best hurry.

The five-speed model lists for a reasonable \$16,995 at your authorized Shelby dealer (try the nearest performance-oriented Dodge store), while the automatic version —

... a big way power driver's seat, an overhead console with lamps, compass and outside thermometer; and even (get this!) a state-of-the-art, 10-speaker Pioneer compact disc (CD) player/tuner.

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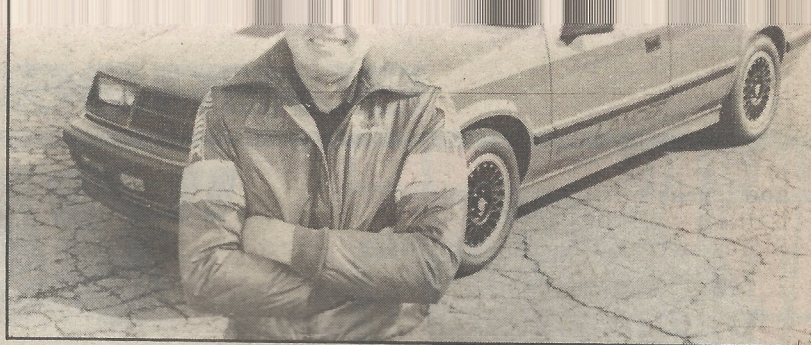
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Never one to mince words, Carroll Shelby grew up near Dallas, Texas, and dabbled in cement trucking, oil field roughnecking and chicken farming before taking up sports car racing in 1951 at the comparatively advanced age of 29. He won his first race and a whole lot more, including the prestigious 1959 24-Hours of



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There's a major difference between Shelby-brand products and Dodge Shelby models: The former begin as Dodge cars, which are purchased from Chrysler then modified in the Whittier plant and marketed through specially selected, franchised Shelby dealers. The latter feature Shelby-developed performance packages but are built entirely by Chrysler and available at Dodge dealerships nationwide.

None of which was especially important to Mom; she just liked the car. Even equipped

with the three-speed automatic and a sumptuous leather interior (two more Shelby firsts), our prototype press tester looked terrific and was great fun to drive. Once past the initial turbo lag, it accelerated smoothly and very quickly, and its cornering was excellent.

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And if your mother doesn't like it, she just doesn't know cars.

*Gary Witzenburg is a widely published automotive writer with a background in auto racing and engineering. He is also founder and president of the Car Consultants, 5308 Derry Ave., Suite I-203, Agoura Hills, Calif. 91301.*