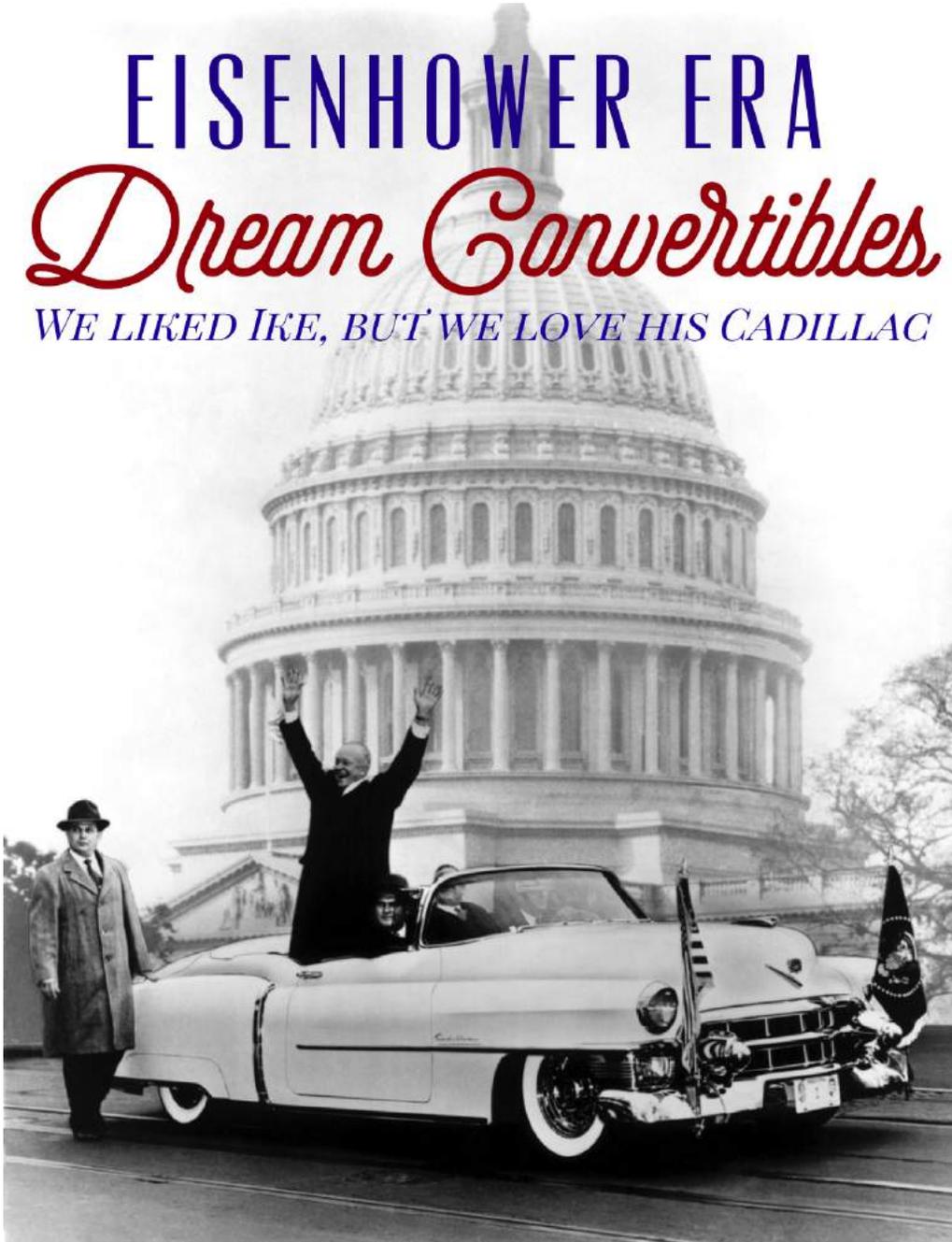


# EISENHOWER ERA

## *Dream Convertibles*

*WE LIKED IKE, BUT WE LOVE HIS CADILLAC*



*Eisenhower celebrating his inauguration in the 1953 Cadillac.*

**CONTACT:** Kandace Hawkinson  
(831) 622-1700; [khawkinson@pebblebeachconcours.net](mailto:khawkinson@pebblebeachconcours.net)

The 1950s in America were a time of unapologetic optimism, excess, and seemingly unlimited prosperity. This mindset was mirrored in everything and anything—but quite literally in the chrome-covered Michigan-made dream convertibles that defined an era. This August, the Pebble Beach Concours d'Élegance will showcase these uniquely American masterpieces in a first-time special class: Eisenhower Era Dream Convertibles.

John H. White was just 13 when he saw the first of these dream convertibles at the New York Auto Show. "GM was unveiling something that had never really been seen before," said White, who is bringing a Buick Skylark, much like the one he saw there, to the Concours. "All of the

chrome and bright colors really wowed the public—everyone wanted one.”

During this time, manufacturers aimed to make a car for any and every American dream, and as a new motoring ideal replaced wartime necessity with plush opulence, big-body convertibles were for those that dreamt a little harder. Cars of this time were not concerned with fuel economy or safety. Rather, they focused on style, comfort, and performance. With a distinctive Cadillac, Packard, or Imperial convertible, Americans could park nationalism in their driveway—or travel in style from amber waves of grain to purple mountains majesty.

The Concours will feature nine Eisenhower Era Dream Convertibles, beginning with the GM trio from 1953 that toured the country in the famed Motorama show. All are detailed below.

---

## THE GENERAL MOTORS TRIO

---

### 1953 Cadillac Fleetwood Convertible

*Owned by Ann Brockinton Lee/Robert M. Lee Automobile Collection, Reno, Nevada*

---



The flagship of the three convertibles was the Cadillac Eldorado, which made its debut as President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s inaugural ride. That brand-new, gleaming white Cadillac—the first production Eldorado (serial no. 2 of 532)—is headed to the Concours this August. Ringing in at an astronomical \$7,750—more than the Fleetwood Limousine—the luxurious car was far from understated. The torpedo-inspired bumper guards and the striking tailfins soon became hallmark Cadillac styling cues. Gold chevron emblems, commemorating the marque’s 50th anniversary, finished off the opulent look.

### 1953 Oldsmobile Fiesta Convertible

*Owned by Roy Asbahr, Gresham, Oregon*

---



The Oldsmobile Fiesta had a lesser price than the Cadillac, but with only 458 examples ever made, it was the rarest of the trio. The Fiesta had a special 170 hp variant of the Oldsmobile Rocket V8 and a host of luxury features—along with a \$2,500 premium—to differentiate it from the 98 it was based on.

### 1953 Buick Skylark Convertible

*Owned by John H. White, Sacramento, California*

---



The most widely sold trio car was the Buick Skylark, which started life as a Roadmaster Convertible before extensive customization at the factory. A four-inch cut to the windshield, swooping beltline, stainless steel Buick sweep spear, and Dayton chrome wheels made the Skylark look low, wide, and luxurious.

---

## OTHER MANUFACTURERS

---

### 1953 Packard Caribbean Convertible

*Owned by Dr. Peter Heydon, Michigan*

---



In an attempt to get its piece of the specialty convertible pie, Packard released its Caribbean Convertible in 1953. A standard Packard was sent to the coachworks of Mitchell Bentley of Ionia, Michigan, for customization. There, futuristic styling elements from Packard show cars—like the Pan American—were added, and when the car emerged, it was a show car for the streets.

### 1956 Packard Caribbean Convertible

*Owned by Bill & Kim Maya, San Clemente, California*

---



Three years later, financial struggles meant that Packard needed to do even more to attract buyers. Its strategy was throwing everything it had at its model lineup, including the final iteration of the Caribbean. Features included a push-button transmission, reversible seat cushions and a three-tone paint job. Ultimately, this would be the final year for Packard as an automobile manufacturer, and the updated Caribbean made for a grand exit.

### 1957 Imperial Crown Convertible

*Owned by Henry Hopkins, Richmond, California*



In 1955, Chrysler went so far as to launch Imperial, a standalone brand for its top-of-the-line offerings. The 1957 Crown Convertible Coupe was one of the first cars to be built on an all new Imperial specific platform, which was wider, longer, and stronger than any other Mopar. Massive fins, gun-sight taillights, and over 18 feet in length gave the convertible an unparalleled presence on the road.

### 1959 Chrysler 300E Convertible

*Owned by Joe & Gayle Hensler, Fair Oaks, California*



That year Chrysler launched the 300E Convertible, a high performance open cruiser. A leather interior, signal-seeking radio, cruise control and a limited run of 140 cars made the 300E exclusive, but its party piece was the 380 hp Hemi that made it the most powerful American offering.

### 1958 Continental Mark III Convertible

*Owned by Dieter & Patricia Balogh, Woodland Hills, California*



In 1958, Continental pushed the limits of length even farther with the release of the Mark III Convertible. The car was over 19 and a half feet long, making it the largest American production car between 1958 and 1960. With the Mark III, Continental abandoned its previously tame styling.

### 1959 Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz Convertible

*Owned by Lawrence M. Camuso, San Jose, California*



While Chrysler chased performance, Cadillac decided to amplify the best of 1950s styling. With a length of almost 19 feet and the largest tailfins ever fitted to a Cadillac, the 1959 Eldorado Biarritz Convertible was possibly the most eye-catching of 1950s dream convertibles. The example appearing at the Concours is fully optioned with air conditioning, bucket seats, and cruise control, but the most special option has to be the rose-pink metallic Persian Sand paint color. This larger-than-life Cadillac proved that too much could sometimes be just enough.

*Written by Noah Thanos*

We hope that you join us for the  
68th Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance  
on August 26, 2018

[PURCHASE 2018 TICKETS](#)

### LEARN MORE

[EVENT CALENDAR](#)



[OUR ONLINE STORE](#)



[VISITOR'S GUIDE](#)

