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General Motors's™ Saturn division is one of the few bright spots for the troubled U.S. automaker. As of this writing, the parent company is in the midst of plant closings, massive layoffs, and big losses. Bankruptcy may be the ultimate "out" for GM, but even if the company doesn't choose that route, changes are coming nevertheless. Fortunately, the Saturn division is one of the few bright spots for the legendary automaker as are Cadillac, GMC, and select models including the Corvette and the company's big trucks. For Saturn, there is a certain "AURA" about the division both in model name as well as in sensation.

Step back two decades and General Motors is all abuzz over a new car company in the process of being created: Saturn. As a wholly owned subsidiary of GM, Saturn was designed to take on Japanese rivals Toyota and Honda by building compact cars that American drivers really wanted and could rely upon. It worked. For most of the 1990s, the "S Series" was the sole model for Saturn; available in coupe, sedan, and wagon, the S Series achieved cult status and had a loyal following of owners who regularly congregated for meets at Spring Hill, TN where the cars were built. Even when the vehicles' design aged, the S Series maintained its high status with Saturn aficionados.

By the late 1990s, two new lines of vehicles were added to the Saturn brand. The VUE, became the company's sport utility vehicle while the "L Series" was the first large Saturn. In reality, the "L Series" was a midsize car as it was heavily derived from a model sold by GM's European division, Opel. With the latter model, Saturn hoped to provide the larger vehicle that S Series owners desired. Unfortunately, sales figures barely exceeded half of the quota anticipated by Saturn, so after a few years the model was retired.

Today, Saturn is no longer a separate company. With the demise of Oldsmobile, Saturn is now a full fledged division of General Motors. While some see this move as a bad thing, it has resulted in new products for the brand.

Soon after the L Series was retired, the RELAY was introduced. As the first Saturn model built on a U.S. G.M. platform, the 7 passenger people mover was a far cry from previous models. Still, the vehicle has filled a gaping hole in the Saturn line up.

Just this past Spring the SKY was introduced, an upscale limited production convertible. To say that the car has been received with gladness is an understatement. Quite frankly, the SKY is the "halo" car needed by Saturn, but fortunately the division isn't stopping there.

Although the L Series was a flop, GM is once again turning to its Opel division to produce a car. Combining Opel styling with a U.S. G.M. platform, the AURA sedan will be rolling into a showroom near you very soon.

So, what is so special about the AURA? Its good looks! Although it is nearly impossible to describe the vehicle without showing you a picture, the AURA is simply one imposing car. Although a sedan, the AURA is sporty looking with a grille that is not too far removed from the new SKY. With a 3.6L V6 engine mated to a six speed automatic transmission, the 250 h.p. AURA will definitely compete with the Camry, Accord, and Maxima for sales as well as for performance leadership. Throw in 19 inch wheels, a sporty interior, and responsive handling and the AURA just begs to be driven.

The best part of the AURA is that it isn't the L Series, a car criticized for being too bland and uninspiring. One look at the AURA and you can see that Saturn got it right this time.

Prices for the AURA haven't been announced yet, but you can expect fully loaded models to retail below \$25,000 well within the range of its competition.

Will the AURA succeed? Well, it has too! Look for Saturn to do all that it can to make sure that the model is marketed to those who would buy one: the cross section of the North American populace. Yes, Saturn has turned a corner and hopefully the same can be said for the entire company.

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