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Somebody at General Motors must love Saturn. One hundred year old Oldsmobile was killed off in favor of bringing the Saturn brand in-house. Up until the early part of this decade, Saturn was a separate automaker, wholly owned by GM. Now, as a bonafide GM division, the Saturn line is finally getting some much needed new models including the Sky roadster, the focus of this preview.

In the early 1990s, dent resistant polymer cars with the "œS" designation began to roll off a factory line of a new plant located in Spring Hill, Tennessee. Several things were unusual about the project. The first was the company: Saturn. As a wholly owned but separately managed GM company, the Saturn initially escaped GM's often overbearing culture and began to produce cars on its own far removed from Detroit. The second unusual point about the company was the cars itself: compact, import-fighting models designed to withstand the onslaught from Japan of low priced, high quality cars. Available in coupe, sedan, and wagon the cars quickly caught on in part for their engineering as well as for their "œno hassle, no haggle" pricing. The sticker price on the car was the price customers paid, making a visit to the Saturn show room a pleasure and not a chore.

As time has passed, the S series grew old and was replaced by the compact ION series. In addition, a mid-sized sedan and wagon, the L series, briefly served as the "œlarger" car in Saturn's extremely limited line up beginning in the late 1990s. The L series, based on an Opel platform, was retired in 2004 and replaced by a 7 passenger crossover vehicle, the RELAY. In addition, Saturn had introduced an SUV, the VUE, which is still in production today.

All of this translates into a limited line up, too limited in fact to compete successfully with other car lines. Enter the Saturn Sky.

The Saturn Sky, much like the already introduced Pontiac Solstice is a two seat roadster. Based on GM's new Delta series platform, the Sky, which will officially make its debut next spring as a 2007 model does something that no other Saturn has ever done: generate excitement.

Similar in size and looks to Honda's S2000 Roadster, the Sky will come equipped with 18 inch alloy wheels, a manually operated soft top, a reverse opening clamshell hood, leather bucket seats, and four wheel anti-locking brakes. Standard engine will be a 2.4 170hp I4 paired with either a 5 speed manual or 5 speed automatic transmission.

Prices for the new Sky should come in at several thousand dollars higher than the Pontiac Solstice as the Sky is targeted and equipped slightly upmarket. MSRP starting around 25 thousand dollars is likely; only 10-12,000 models will be produced annually.

Other models are being planned for Saturn, but the Sky represents a fresh departure from what has long been perceived by many as a staid moniker. Judging by many published reports, the Sky is a step in the right direction and we can only hope that the other new models planned for Saturn generate at least half the hype of the Sky.

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