Saturn: That Was Then, This is Now by Hiteshbhoi

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Step back in time with me if you would, about 20 years to be precise, to an era when automaker General Motors was busy making plans for their all new company, Saturn. This wasnâ€™t to be just another GM division mind you as Saturn was created as a separate import fighting company meant to take on the likes of Toyota and Honda. By 1990, the first Saturn cars rolled off a bucolic Tennessee countryside assembly line signaling a new cooperation between workers and management. Immediately, the funky little â€œS Seriesâ€• of sedans, wagons, and coupes were a hit and GM was soon lauded for taking a bold initiative.

Today, Saturn is much different from the brand that took on Japanâ€™s top automakers. Instead of being a separate, wholly owned car company the make is now one of General Motorsâ€™ many automotive divisions. The S Series sold well and the introduction of subsequent models helped the brand, but ultimately parent GM decided to pull the company within the Generalâ€™s fold as it chose to close down Oldsmobile instead. Current models being sold by Saturn are much different from what was originally offered, but the company has managed to keep one huge attribute that originally propelled the brand forward: people are first. Letâ€™s take a look at Saturnâ€™s current line up and the vehicles soon to be introduced.

ION â€“ After a decade of service, the S Series was retired in favor of the comparably sized ION. Unlike the S Series, the ION does not include a wagon, but it does include a four door coupe and sedan. Unfortunately, the car is not very competitive with similar models and GM is looking at an Opel-inspired car to take its place by the end of this decade.

VUE â€“ A recent makeover has kept the VUE, Saturnâ€™s small SUV, competitive. In addition, a pending hybrid model is expected to strengthen the line and talk of an all new compact model showing up in 2009 has the auto world abuzz.

RELAY â€“ Saturnâ€™s first minivan is a clone to models sold by Chevrolet and Buick. Unlike earlier Satur models which featured polymer side impact panels [to limit dents], the RELAY is all sheet metal and simply a copy of other divisionsâ€™ vehicles. Still, the RELAY has filled an important hole in the Saturn line up by offering a larger vehicle for loyal Saturn owners.

SKY â€“ Forget what you might have thought about Saturn previously. The SKY roadster is a hit for one big reason: it is absolutely sexy. Sharing components with the Pontiac Solstice, the SKY has radically transformed the brandâ€™s image all by itself. Priced under $25,000, the SKY is competitive with the Mazda Miata and is a low cost alternative to the BMW Z4.

AURA â€“ Another vehicle built to battle the divisionâ€™s bland image, the AURA steps in to the midsize category replacing the L Series which was discontinued two years earlier. Based on GMâ€™s Epsilon platform, the AURA borrows heavily from GMâ€™s German division -- Opel â€“ while incorporating a style and design that favors the Saturn SKY.

OUTLOOK â€“ To be introduced before the end of 2006, the OUTLOOK will be Saturnâ€™s first bigger SUV. Although considered to be a â€œcrossoverâ€• by many, the OUTLOOK is a 7 passenger SUV mean to complement the smaller VUE. With the addition of the OUTLOOK in the Saturn fold, GM will take a break before tinkering with the Saturn line up.

Truly, Saturn of 2007 will look much different from Saturn of the 1990s. For years, Saturn dealers were content to sell only one model â€“ the S Series â€“ but todayâ€™s Saturn is going well beyond all of

With a hybrid VUE in the line up and other variations of existing models also being planned, the once spartan Saturn line up is nearly filled to capacity. This is great news for Saturn loyalists looking for choices beyond the base models and a promise that GM is investing money in its import fighting division.

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