

Fins, Part II

By Jeff Kinzler

Automotive Archeology

Picking up where we left off, with the rise of the tail fin from 1948-1959, there remain several interesting questions about the direction of Cadillac styling from the mid-1960's forward.

First off, did Cadillac really kill the tail fin after the 1964 model year? In any discussion of Cadillac rear end styling, an argument could be made that the essential elements of the "tail fin" look (an upward sloping extension of the rear fender, with a rectangular or oval bumper nacelle) may have been greatly subdued after the 1964 models, but did not disappear entirely for quite some time afterward.



The original 1948 Cadillac tail fin

After creating the ultimate tail fin in 1959 Cadillac (*below*)



A 1959 Coupe

Cadillac, began a hasty retreat to smaller, neater fins beginning in

1960. This was followed in 1961



Above and below, 1960 tail fins



by a more angular body with smaller tail fins, which interestingly, ended well short of the end of the rear deck.



Rear view of a 1961 Coupe

The 1962 had a similar body with a new rear end treatment and further reduction of the fin.



A 1962 Convertible DeVille

The 1963 and 1964 Cadillacs had much simplified body styling, while the tail fins continued to shrink. However The design elements of the raised rear fender profile, twin vertical tail lights and rear bumper nacelles became so strongly identified with Cadillac (*like the Mercedes three-pointed*



1963 Convertible DeVille (above)



1964 Fleetwood Eldorado Convertible

star) that to eliminate this theme would have been tantamount to turning out a product that could not be distinguished from any other automobile. One must not forget that Cadillac's tail fin was one of the most influential automotive designs in the post WW II era. So when it became time to eliminate the upward sweep of the rear fender line, Cadillac stylists were careful to preserve many of the visual cues that made the car still look like a Cadillac from the rear.

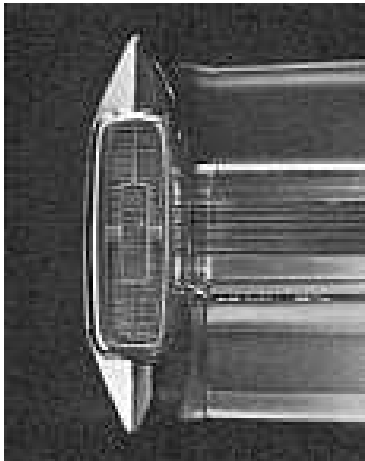


1965 Coupe DeVille

The new body style introduced in

1965 had a much more squared off appearance. The tops of the rear fenders did not contain distinct "fins" that soared upward as they extended to the back of the car, but were horizontal, leading many to proclaim the "end" of the tail fin era at Cadillac. However on closer inspection, the ends of the rear fenders still extended past the trunk lid, and terminated in chrome triangular points, not unlike the shape of many a Cadillac tail light that had previously occupied this spot. Also present were the two large rectangular bumper ends like those that had appeared under the tail fins, (and which eventually carried redundant tail lights, a safety feature). Now, these bumper nacelles became the sole location for tail lights. The '65 also had a sharp triangular point at the lower tip of the bumper, echoing the lower fin that appeared on the 1959 and 1961-62 models.

The total effect of this new design was to create an almost abstract picture of the rear styling of the previous models, while at the same time appearing fresh and different.



1965 Tail light assembly

Similar rear end treatments were used in 1966, 1967 and 1968, with increasingly bold sweep lines along the rear fenders to suggest a rising line on the rear fender, even though the tops of the rear fenders remained fairly horizontal.



1967 Coupe

It was not until 1969 that Cadillac stylists returned to a separate, distinct tail light assembly mounted at the tip of the rear fender, suggesting a closer resemblance to the tail light last seen in 1964. The fender itself



Two views of 1969 Convertible



came to a rather sharp blade, which at least from the rear of the car suggested a fin-like appendage. The 1970 models continued this theme, until a completely new body style was introduced in 1971. This body, which was carried until the 1977 down-sizing, continued the theme of large vertical bumper elements capping the rear fenders that began in 1965.



1973 (above) and 1975-76 below



While the fender edges had "blades" that extended past the trunk lid, this was visible most clearly from the rear of the car, with virtually no fin effect from the side view.

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