

## BUICK AIMS YOUNG

Those who were at Flint, Michigan last year and attended the final wingding at the J K Whiting Auditorium will remember the speech given by Mr Roger Adams, General Manager of the Buick Motor Company. Rog gave a talk on the future of Buick, where it was heading and talked about the new prototype - the Velite.

The following article is from Forbes Magazine and written by Dan Lienert. Of special interest to us Down Under is the Aussie connection mentioned in the article.

I think it is great to see Buick making a grab for its share of the market. A look in my Funk and Wagnall dictionary (funking what?) reveals that "Velites" is a latin word meaning light-armed Roman soldiers used in skirmishes in ancient legions. Okay.



"Vehicle of the Week - Buick Aims Young.

At next months New York International Auto Show, General Motors' Buick Division will show the **Velite**, a convertible prototype that Buick wants to build as its flagship model. Buick's current flagship car, the unexciting Park Avenue sedan, has grown old and will be killed after next year.

Buick says it wants to put the Velite into production but not before it replaces the LeSabre sedan in late 2005. As a rangetopping, well appointed convertible, the Velite would make Buick's image sportier and more upscale. It might even lower the total number of jokes that link Buick and old people.

At this prototypical stage, the Velite is known as a "concept car." It uses a V-6 engine and the Zeta platform, a new set of mechanical underpinnings for the convertible and other rear wheel drive cars. General Motors developed Zeta with a great deal of input from Holden, its **Australian** subsidiary, and plans to use the platform around the world. The company says it tapped the **Aussies** for the project because of their experience with rear-wheel drive cars: Holden builds the Pontiac's new rear-wheel drive GTO coupe in Australia. Zeta has yet to be used in production, but it lends the Velite a long wheelbase and short overhangs.

While the division would love to sell the Velite, Buick hinted at some other plans in a statement about the convertible, saying that the car “forges ground in the exclusive territory of expressive, upscale rear-wheel drive sedans.” What, do you ask, does a two-door convertible have to do with sedans? The answer is that in fact, Buick is considering a plan to build two flagship cars: the Velite and a new, rear-wheel drive sedan that could share the Zeta platform.

The rear-wheel drive sedan would cap a run of major changes to Buick’s sedan roster. The division’s new LaCrosse sedan will replace the tired Regal and Century lines when it goes on sale this fall. At an auto show early next year, Buick will display the 2006 model that will replace the LeSabre later in 2005. The new car may not keep the LeSabre name but it will come in low and high end versions. Buick says it can sell the high end car to fans who don’t want to see the Park Avenue go.

These new sedans will be front-drive, like the LeSabre. The purpose of teaming the Velite with a second, rear-drive flagship would be to have a sportier Buick sedan atop the roster. The rear-drive sedan would be more expensive than the high end LeSabre replacement.

You won’t find any front-drive sedans in the rosters of BMW or Daimler’s Mercedes-Benz subsidiary. The time is right to imitate the Germans, since Americans can apparently beat them at their own game; according to Consumer Reports, Buicks now break down less than BMWs.

GM has yet to finalise plans for the Velite. It hasn’t even decided if the production model would be a convertible, even if the concept is. Buick is no spring chicken - but it will catch the attention of BMW and Mercedes if it prowls into their territory with sporty rear-drive convertibles and sedans.”

*L. Haime (WA Buicks)*