

# A-Class may test Mercedes safety claims

Continued from 16B

neering and the electronic system installation.

Of the 100,000 vehicles on order, the company said about 1 percent to 2 percent have been canceled. Losses could be greater, however, if Mercedes can't recover consumer confidence in the Baby-Benz.

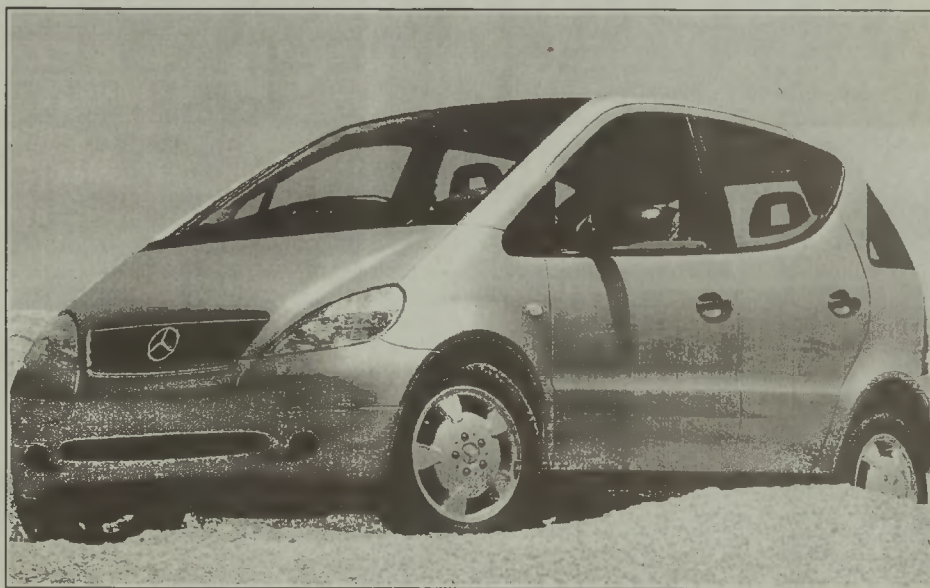
The Suzuki Motor Corp. saw sales of its Samurai plummet after a 1988 test alleged the mini sport utility vehicle tended to tip over on sharp turns. The Samurai was sold until 1995. Suzuki has a libel suit pending against Consumer Reports, which ran the test.

Mercedes-Benz spent an estimated \$588 million to develop the A-Class, and another \$632 million to set up the factory in the southwestern city of Rastatt, and \$118 million in advertising.

But Klein, from Delbrueck and Co., said that if Mercedes can demonstrate its newly engineered A-Class is truly safe, it could still meet its goal of selling nearly 200,000 cars a year.

Despite the problems, the mass circulation Bild am Sonntag newspaper announced Wednesday it was awarding the compact but roomy Baby Benz its Golden Steering Wheel award.

It was the latest of several European awards for innovative



1997 A-Class

PHOTO/MERCEDES-BENZ

technology, including having an engine that slides under the front passenger compartment in the event of crash as a safety feature.

The A-Class crisis comes as Mercedes tries to expand its market in two directions. The luxury carmaker recently unveiled a super-luxury car, the Mercedes-Benz Maybach. In developing the A-Class, it went downmarket to compete with Volkswagen and Audi.

Mercedes said the Smart car, an even smaller model in production together with Swiss watchmaker Swatch, would go on sale next spring as scheduled. The tiny-two seater shares a relatively high center of gravity with the A-Class. "We're on full alert," company spokesman Wolfgang Riecke said of the Smart car. "So far our tests have confirmed the car is perfect."

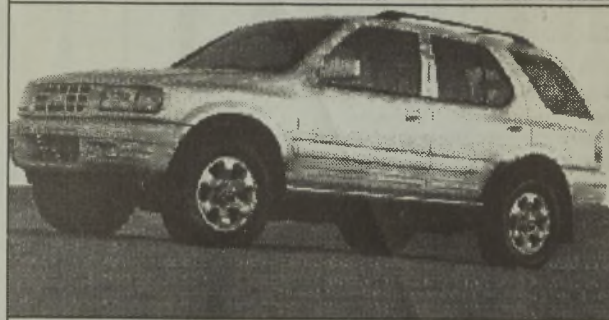
With images of the tipping model showing up on the covers of

major magazines and prominently in all the top dailies, driving the un-retrofitted models is something of a badge of courage.

One Stuttgart-area buyer, who did not give his name, said he's been congratulated several times in recent days for bravery for driving the Baby-Benz.

Even car-proud Germans are now making jokes about their beloved automaker.

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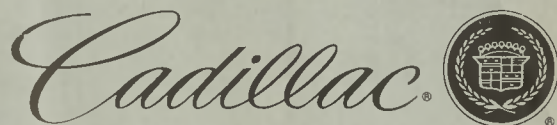


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# GM plant closes due to cost cutting

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT - General Motors Corp. plans to close a number of its manufacturing plants in the coming months as part of an effort

GM said that it will take a \$2 billion to \$3 billion charge against its earnings either in its fourth quarter or the first quarter of 1998 to cover

expenses for the closings and declining asset values.

The charge, if it falls entirely in a single quarter, could be among the biggest GM has ever taken.

GM disclosed its plan Monday in a filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. But the automaker did not say how many plants it would close or where they

would be.

The SEC filing refers to the possible sale of Delphi parts businesses that make seats, coil springs and exterior lamps. The automaker announced the possible sale of that division in September.

GM has an assembly plant in Shreveport and a Delphi parts plant in Monroe.

GM also said in the filing that

it wants to lower costs in Opel Belgium, possibly by reducing the workforce there by 1,900 people.

"Clearly there's a frontal assault on structural costs," said Scott F. Merlis, president of Merlis Automotive International Inc. "They're trying to leave no stone unturned."

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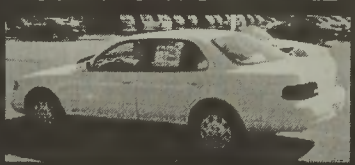
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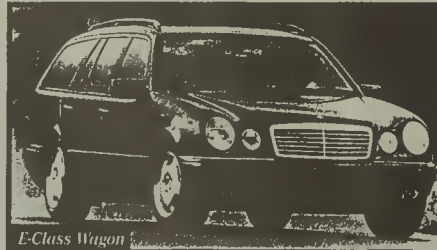
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