

WANNA BE STARTIN’ SOMETHIN’

In a decade of excess, *more* meant everything from cars to cinema.

Buoyed by the prosperous, “trickle-down” economy of Reaganomics, ex-hippies donned pinstripe Armani suits, charged their three-martini lunches to expense accounts, and enjoyed a taste of the good life. The concept of the “yuppie,” the young urban professional, became a cultural touchstone: the socially liberal, fiscally conservative generation coming of age in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and elsewhere around the country. It was a *nouveau riche* generation that sought new experiences, expanded their culinary palates, bought imported luxury cars, held high fashion and trendiness above all else, and could actually afford it all.

New sounds were defining the culture: the synthesizer-driven experiments of New Wave, via bands like Duran Duran and the Talking Heads. Hair Metal took off with The Scorpions, Ratt, and Mötley Crüe, with their umlauts. The era of arena rock arrived, with soaring vocals and power chords from Bon Jovi, Journey, and Guns N’ Roses. Packaged neatly via cassettes in the new Sony Walkman, self-expression through musical tastes was easier than ever. Anyone could carve out their own niche.

American culture was louder, bolder, more action-packed than ever—and projected around the world at a dizzying rate. Action movies were a form of soft propaganda that reached deep into Asia and behind the Iron Curtain, where Soviet citizens got bootlegs of Stallone’s *Rambo*, Schwarzenegger’s *Terminator*, and Seagal’s *Above the Law*. The most lasting blockbusters of the 1980s were defined by their spectacle, their special effects, and their potential for sequels. Helmed by visionary filmmakers like James Cameron and Steven Spielberg, every ensuing film had to be bigger and more intense than ever: *Aliens*, *Terminator 2*, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, to name just a few that defined the decade.

Cars and pop culture were never more intertwined. David Hasselhoff drove the Knight Industries Two Thousand: a talking concept Pontiac Firebird that became his sidekick on *Knight Rider*. *The A-Team* used a custom Chevy van to break out of prison for a crime they didn’t commit. *Ghostbusters* brought a 1950s-era Cadillac hearse into the modern era, repeating the cycle of 30-year-old nostalgia but with proton packs. And in the *Back to the Future* series, Doc Brown had originally been meant to build a time machine out of a refrigerator. Instead, he opted for a DeLorean DMC-12.

The DeLorean was itself a gem from the future, designed by Giorgetto Giugiaro in the folded-paper tradition, mid-engined and gullwing-doored, and rendered in stainless steel. It was a dream of the charismatic, fearless John Z. DeLorean, who had been instrumental in developing the Pontiac GTO. If director Robert Zemeckis hadn’t recognized that it was much more exciting to see a car hit 88 mph (142km/h) than a refrigerator, the DMC-12 would simply have been an odd footnote in the annals of automotive history. Reflecting the zeitgeist, there were even gold-plated American Express models.



Opposite: *Knight Rider* star David Hasselhoff with his titular ride, the Knight Industries Two Thousand (replica above).

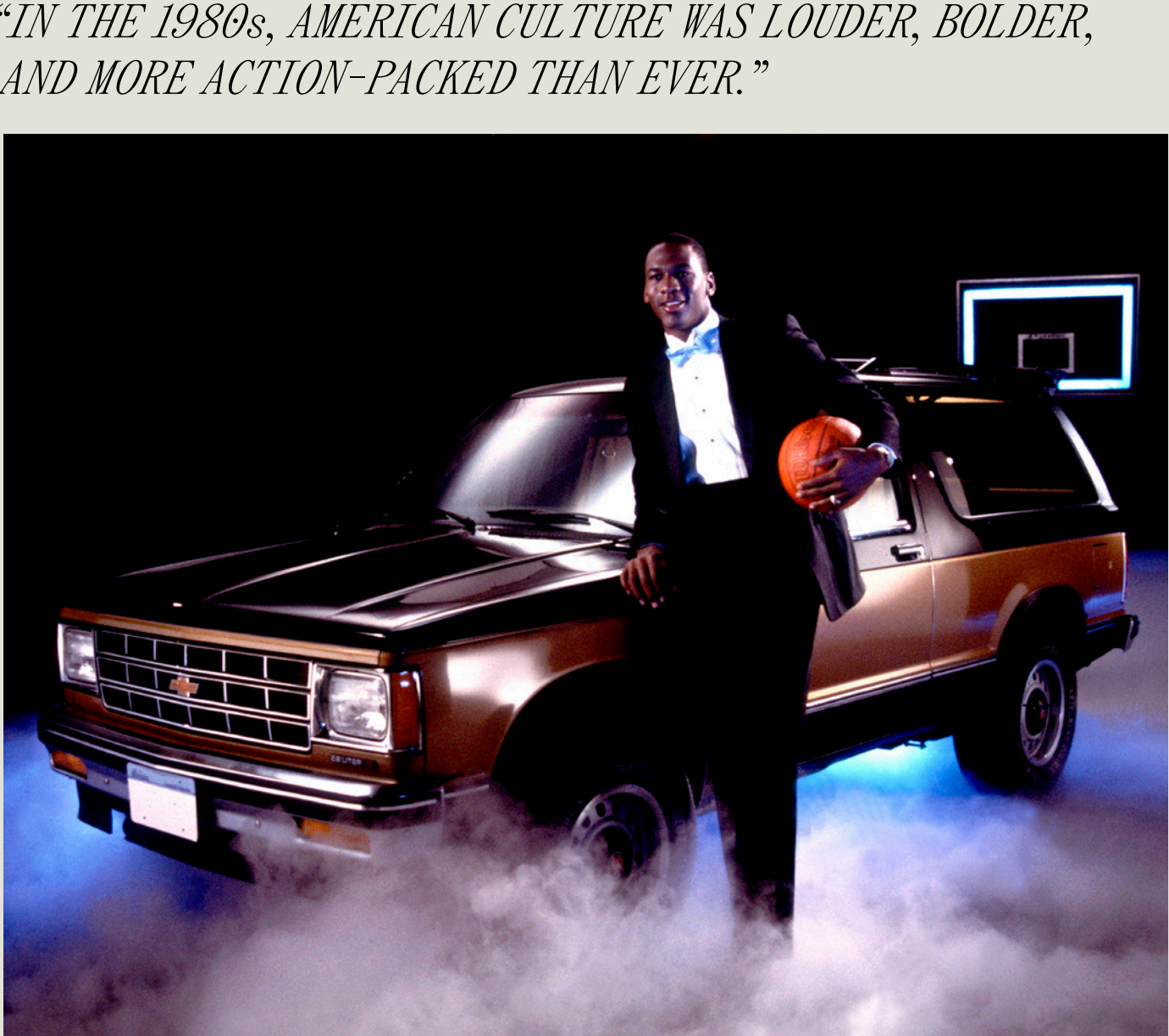




American Express ran an extravagant promotion in its Christmas 1980 catalog: a DeLorean with 24-karat gold plating. Only two were ever sold.



Top left: Tommy Lee, drummer for iconic hair-metal band Mötley Crüe, at the height of his fame. Bottom left: The Sony Walkman brought truly personal music to the masses. Right: Michael Jordan was the highest-scoring player in the 1986 NBA season, leading the Chicago Bulls to single-season records.



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Following the challenges of downsizing in the 1970s, American carmakers finally had a grasp of practicality. The Chrysler minivans carved out a brand-new niche when they debuted in 1983 by combining the versatility of full-size vans with the driving dynamics of a compact platform. That platform, in fact, was the K-car, a front-wheel-drive layout versatile enough to underpin everything from minivans to Shelby-tuned sports cars—and even the ultra-luxurious Chrysler convertible TC by Maserati, which Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca called the prettiest Italian immigrant since his mother. Ford turned its back on the traditionally styled LTD with the Taurus. In both design and development, it was

quietly revolutionary: interior and exterior designers and engineers formed a cohesive unit, working under a new culture of quality and incorporating aerodynamics not yet seen on a family sedan. Shorn of chrome, and even devoid of a grille, the Taurus was a design risk for such a mainstream vehicle. Yet, the make-or-break strategy worked, reversing nearly \$3 billion in losses Ford had suffered in the past four years. Within the teeming halls of GM, Oldsmobile sought to demonstrate the new Quad 4 series engines—so in the guise of the Aerotech concept, the four-cylinder turbocharged units were tweaked to 900 horsepower, wrapped around streamlined bodies, and driven by Indy 500

legend A. J. Foyt to 275 mph (443km/h). Even Chevrolet took its long-aging, detuned, and hopelessly exaggerated Corvette and completely revamped it from the ground up with the innovative C4 generation, featuring impressive performance credentials that could successfully compete against the era’s top supercars. That wasn’t enough for Callaway Cars, whose nearly 900-horsepower Sledgehammer set a record-breaking top speed of 255mph (410 km/h) in 1988. Like the rest of the era’s iconic supercars from Ferrari and Porsche, it was bold, unstoppable, and brimming with more power than it knew what to do with—much like Schwarzenegger, back-to-back in *Commando* and *Predator*.