

Tiptop hardtops

While retractable hardtop convertibles have been around for decades — Lancia produced a power-folding hardtop in the 1930s — engineers have taken the technology to new levels. Today's retractable hardtop mechanisms, which typically are assembled at a supplier's plant, are compact, and they stow in seconds.

If you've never witnessed a retractable hardtop in action,

check out these Web sites:

■ www.volvocars.us/Showroom/newC70/Experience.htm and click on the innovation bar. Then follow the instructions for stowing or extending the retractable hardtop.

■ www.cadillac.com/cadillacjsp/model/gallery.jsp?model=xlr and click on the features bar. Then click on the convertible bar

and follow the instructions.

The popularity of hardtop convertibles is growing. In 2004, about 250,000 convertibles worldwide had retractable hardtops, according to Polk Marketing Systems. That number is expected to increase to about 503,000 by 2010, says CSM Worldwide.

Here are some examples of these engineering marvels.

Cadillac XLR

Supplier: CTS Car Top Systems, of Rochester Hills, Mich. Time to retract: 29 seconds



Volvo C70

Supplier: Webasto AG, of Stockdorf, Germany Time to retract: 30 seconds



Opel/Vauxhall Tigra Twin Top

Supplier: Groupe Henri Heuliez SA, of Cerizay, France Time to retract: 18 seconds



Volkswagen Eos

Supplier: Webasto AG Time to retract: 25 seconds



Mercedes-Benz SLK

Supplier: CTS Fahrzeug-Dachsysteme, of Hamburg, Germany Time to retract: 22 seconds



Pontiac G6

Supplier: Karmann U.S.A. Inc., of Plymouth, Mich. Time to retract: 30 seconds

