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Extreme Makeover: Garage Edition

Forget the standard
'two-car garage' of
real estate ads.
These Classic Chassis
Car Club members go
all out for their rides.

By David Taffet

Photography by Arnold Wayne Jones



Terry Watson, right, has enough old cars to keep his mechanic, David left, busy. Watson converted an old factory into a garage showplace complete with '50s-era kitsch.

Gordon Markley and his partner, Russell Buescher, faced the same problems many encounter when they purchase an older home: Not enough closets or kitchen space; fewer bathrooms than they'd like; and modern cars that don't fit into a 1920s-era garage.

Like many other Oak Lawn-area property owners, their solution involved a tear down. But unlike those ever-present developers, their demolition remained confined to the garage. In its place, Markley built a two-story, New England-style carriage house in keeping with the architecture of the neighborhood. His idea for the cedar shake addition came from three similar detached garages on his block.

Upstairs in the new addition he added living quarters with everything anyone could need to live comfortably: bedroom, bathroom, cupboards, game cabinet, a 60

square foot closet, even a home theater. Downstairs is a kitchenette, bar, buffet, lavatory and room to park their three cars. Markley says a fourth could fit.

What kind of person gives more attention to his garage than to his own home? A member of the Classic Chassis Car Club, for one.

Jack Lewis, vice president and co-founder of Classic Chassis, says his group's members are "mostly people who love the cars they knew as kids." Not only do they collect them, but they participate in monthly events that recall the era of these cars with road rallies, cruise nights and last month's trip to the Galaxy Drive-In. They are hardcore enthusiasts of all things automotive, not merely gearheads.

While most people probably don't think of the garage as part of the living area of the house, Markley says the area is great for parties. "We back the cars out

and have great flow from that space to the brick patio where we put the bartender."

For additional storage, Markley hung Mission-style cabinets in the garage and painted the walls sage green. Several pictures hang but the floors remain concrete. "You know, it may be nice in here, but it's still a garage," he says.

For a car enthusiast, the three automobiles that call the carriage house home — a Cadillac STS, a Honda Civic and his "future classic," a 1995 Cutlass convertible — are practically like pets. Markley explains that Oldsmobile only made convertibles from 1990 until 1995. "They came and went and were pretty rare. In 1995, they made maybe 3,000," he says.

By garaging the convertible and protecting it from hail and extreme Texas heat, he knows his will be one of very few of that model remaining. Given their own

indoor space, the recent cars stay newer longer as well.

Terry Watson made his first classic car purchase in 1976, and has made such steady increases over the years, he now has 20 autos, most housed in a converted factory that looks more like a showroom floor than a garage. Watson even has his own mechanic, who maintains his fleet.

But Watson's warehouse isn't merely a storage facility — it's a kind of 1950s museum with cars as the theme. In the front sitting room, Watson maintains a vintage jukebox and period décor, and old promotional films about Cadillac and other classics play on a continuous loop.

Watson doesn't just leave the cars on blocks, either. He says he drives them all around town frequently, although he has never leased them out to movie studios, even though he has received many offers. They simply don't treat the cars as well as he does, he says.

Steve (he asked not to disclose his last name) also did more than just modify a garage to store his cars. "I've always been a car nut," he says. "I didn't start getting into old cars until 10 years ago."

To accommodate his restored vehicles — all nine of them — he rebuilt the entire house. Steve was looking for an interesting property with a small house to tear down. He purchased one in Oak Cliff on



Steve's nine-car garage, carved out of a cliff face, holds his collection of classic American muscle cars.

a hillside and designed his new, 4,500 square foot home above the garage.

After the tear down, he dug 26 feet into the limestone cliff. Still, the driveway is steep. The garage covers about 1,400 square feet and stands 15 feet tall. The three-story house that sits on top affords a panoramic view of downtown Dallas. Interior or exterior stairs lead up to the house.

He has been in the house less than a year and the garage remains a work in progress. "I'm going to do some appropriate flooring," he says. He also plans

to decorate with old gas station and automotive memorabilia.

Six of Steve's 1960s-era muscle cars sit on the floor of his garage and three rest on lifts. He found his first lift in a hobby magazine when he ran out of room for his car collection at his old house. He assembled it, dismantled it and reassembled it here by himself. The two others he had installed.

Steve favors General Motors' cars because "you fix them once and they stay together," he says. His collection includes four Grand Prix, a '68 Firebird and a '66 GTO.

Most collectors begin with older cars in better shape, he says, but

as his preferred cars have become rare and more expensive, he has become more adventuresome.

"Gradually, I started buying cars in less quality condition. There's something exciting about dragging some beat up old car out of the pasture and giving it new life." A '62 Olds Starfire just came out of the paint shop.

Once restored, the cars "become part of the family." So what happens if he finds another car beyond the nine his garage will hold? He laughs and admits he actually has 10 now, as well as the Lincoln Navigator he personally drives. Maybe it's too soon to start worrying about those, but

Russell Buescher, left, and Gordon Markley use the downstairs of their garage to house their cars (including their black Cadillac) and to throw parties; upstairs, below, is a mother-in-law suite that also serves as their media room.



you eventually he'll have to decide. You can't just turn your family out on the street.

The Classic Chassis Car Club meets the first Tuesday of each month at El Fenix, 1601 McKinney Ave., 6 p.m. 214-446-0606. Classic chassis.com.

Convertibles for all *three* coasts

**East, West or Gulf,
there's a convertible
out there for all
coasts, all seasons
and all lifestyles.**

By Casey Williams

The Audi TT Roadster, above, has the sex appeal and glamour of California; the Saturn Sky, below, is perfect for a drive to the Gulf Coast.

Buying a convertible on the West Coast is a no-brainer. With day after day of warm breezes, sunny skies and mountain roads, all sloping towards the Pacific, you would be a fool not to drive with the top down at every chance.

But what about the rest of the country? Don't we deserve convertibles too? Even if you live in Dallas, feast your eyes on towards these cars that call to mind all three coasts: West, East and Middle.

Audi TT Roadster

Set against California's Golden Gate, the all-new Audi TT Roadster is not overshadowed by the bridge's picturesque beauty. Like the first-generation TT, which looked like a debutante Beetle, the 2008 model is exquisite for its simplicity. When it was recently named 2007 World Car Design of the Year, jurors commented, "While there is a clear connection to the original TT's Bauhaus styling, the second-generation model evolves it into a more modern form."

Motoring the little two-seater along is either a 250-HP 3.2-liter V6 with all-wheel-drive or a 200-



Photo courtesy Audi

HP 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder driving the front wheels. Both models can be ordered with Audi's S-tronic transmission, which functions mechanically like a true manual transmission, but has an automatic clutch. Choose the turbo for excellent fuel economy ratings of 22/29 mpg city/highway or the V6 to whoosh from 0-60 mph in 5.6 seconds on the way to a 130 mph top speed.

You're sure to enjoy a driving experience as beautiful as the TT's museum-quality exterior. Steering and the suspension system have been completely re-vamped for better handling; an independent rear suspension replaces the Beetle's economy-class affair. All the better to control from the exquisite A4-inspired interior bathed in leather, aluminum and the highest quality materials to live in a sub-\$80,000 car.

Setting its sights on the left coast, the all-new Audi TT Roadster is as stunningly beautiful as its predecessor, but would now be comfortable on a trip to visit the other coasts. Prices start at \$36,800.

Saturn Sky Roadster

Even though new Saturns will

be built in Delaware and Belgium, their spiritual home will always be the original one near Spring Hill, Tenn., in the foothills of Appalachia. Corvettes and Cadillac XLRs are bred an hour north in Bowling Green, Ky. The landscape encourages you to put the top down and go for a romp. Of course, you'll smell the residuals of galloping horses, but that just keeps it real.

Where the Pontiac Solstice, a clone of the Sky under its skin, looks like a smooth Italian, the Sky aimed for baby Corvette attire. Projector beam headlamps, creased fenders and chromed vents behind the front wheels look stunning on the Sky's trim figure. I love the one-piece clamshell hood and fenders.

Power is plentiful on the Red Line version. The high Sky spools out 260-HP from a turbo four-cylinder engine. With the snick-snick 5-speed manual transmission, drivers will see fuel economy ratings of 22/31 mpg city/highway. Under the skin is what looks like a scaled down version of the Corvette's frame structure. In fast corners, the car is incredibly balanced. Just like a Corvette. Superb.



Photo courtesy Saturn

Designers lavished attention on the interior, specifying a stitched instrument cluster hood and door padding, black piano finish on the center stack and touches of chrome on the doors and center console. Everything feels and looks custom crafted.

Perfectly at home on the Middle coast, the uniquely-American Sky is not just a pretty body, it is a real honest-to-goodness top shelf piece of engineering. Sky Red Lines start at \$28,425. Non-turbocharged models can be adopted for around \$23,000, or less than half the price of the famous Chevy.

Chrysler Sebring Convertible

In contrast to the "whatever goes" West coast and relaxed Gulf coast, East coast drivers are a little more conservative. Chrysler developed the all-new Sebring convertible to appeal to people who prefer the romance of

canvas, vinyl or the buttoned serenity that comes with a folding hard top.

Designers focused on the Crossfire in creating the Sebring. An eggcrate grille, corrugated hood, scalloped fenders and wrap-around taillamps resemble those on Chrysler's little two-seater, but a large four-place interior takes a few friends along for the ride.

Interior style is also based on the Crossfire with silver finish on the center console, tortoise shell trim on the doors and steering wheel, and three huge gauge pods. Available heated and cooled cupholders, MyGIG entertainment system with hard drive and Bluetooth hands-free phone connectivity keep even the stuffy contemporary.

Under the pretty skin are three engine choices that include a 173-HP 2.4-liter four-cylinder, 189-HP 2.7-liter V6 or 235-HP 3.5-liter V6. With the four-cylin-



Photo courtesy Chrysler

The finely tailored Chrysler Sebring conveys sophistication at a reasonable sticker price.

der, Sebring convertibles achieve 23/31 mpg; top engines get 18/28 mpg. Any of the three engines are efficient and zippy.

In a survey, Chrysler found that two-thirds of convertible owners want a folding hardtop, which seals the car as tight as a coupe when raised. Still, that left one-third of drivers who prefer the romance of a soft top, either vinyl or canvas. Not surprising when you realize Rolls-Royce gave its

\$400,000 Phantom Drophead Coupe a canvas top just so owners can hear raindrops pitter and patter. With the Sebring, everybody is happy.

Keeping both the conservative and expressive pleased, the Chrysler Sebring is an elegant and comfortable cruise. Prices start at \$26,145 — hard to resist on this coast, *that* coast ... or any coast. Even the Trinity River's banks.



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Wagons that go both ways

Three big crossover vehicles combine comfort and performance.

By Casey Williams

The Toyota Highlander, above, is like a Camry but with a lot more room — and a hybrid option. The interior styling of the Buick Enclave, below, is eye-catching.

People aren't the only things that have feminine and masculine sides rolled into one.

Tougher than a car and softer than a truck, crossovers swing on both sides of the fence. Based on a car chassis, they usually ride on a four-wheel independent suspension system with no full frame

underneath, yet they offer all of the utility and comfort that comes with an SUV. They can work hard, but also enjoy playing on curvy roads and grassy fields.

Take a look at these sexy new crossovers.

Buick Enclave

As if crossovers aren't confused enough, imagine one that also wants to be a luxury car. And like Anne Heche at the Beverly Wilshire, Buick's Enclave does it all and looks ravishing doing it. Best of all, it displays a bold enough statement to remind us of the mid-century, when General Motors dominated auto design.

A bold, toothy grille with clear-lens headlamps hints at traditional luxury, but updated for the current age. Body sides are sculpted with broad arcs and creases and are filled with 19-inch chrome alloy wheels. Six ventiports on the hood tell you this is a Buick.

Hand-crafted surfaces inside feel like a modern interpretation of 1940s Buicks — which is to say, beautiful and elegant. Luxuries include a leather-wrapped and



Photo courtesy Toyota

real mahogany steering wheel, leather seats, XM Satellite Radio, rear seat DVD entertainment system, in-dash CD changer, analog clock and rear back-up camera. Middle row seats slide flat against the fronts to allow easy entry to the third row.

All you'll hear from the Enclave is a throaty confidence from the exhaust system, but you'll know the 275-horsepower V6 engine is getting the job done. The smooth suspension and alloy wheels roll over broken pavement serenely, StabiliTrak electronic stability programming and all-wheel-drive keep the Enclave on the straight and narrow, and steering inputs are interpreted with precision. Much better than full-size SUVs, fuel economy is rated 16/24 mpg for front-drive models, 16/22 mpg for all-wheel-drive.

Whether going to Nebraska or a posh club, the Enclave has the space and style to make an entrance for much less than competitors: Front-wheel-drive models begin at \$34,990 while all-wheel-drive starts at \$36,990.

Toyota Highlander

Toyota's Highlander is basically a Camry station wagon if you look at the bits and pieces, but those are pretty good bits from which to piece together an incred-

ible crossover. All-new for 2008, the mid-size wagon looks tougher, more refined and better than ever. It is also fuel efficient.

Penned, penciled and crayoned at Toyota's Calty Design Research Center in Newport Beach, Calif., the Highlander haunches over its wheels with a wide stance, Tundra-like front end, high ground clearance and subtle chrome details. Despite being a pumped-up station wagon, it looks as beefy as the evergreen Land Cruiser. Pedestrians are protected by a new hood/fender system that deforms upon impact.

Feeling as airy as a California afternoon, the interior features second row captain's chairs, a fold-down third row seat, quick release glass hatch, navigation system and backup camera. The second row can be converted to a three-across bench by lifting the center seat out of a hidden compartment under the front center console. A full array of airbags (dual front, side, side curtain and driver's knee) protects everyone.

Here's the best part. Toyota offers a gas/electric hybrid version of the Highlander that runs with a 3.3-liter V6 engine, continuously-variable transmission, batteries and electric motor. It nets 270 horsepower, but achieves a most-impressive city/highway



Photo courtesy Buick

miles per gallon of 31/27. Getting the fuel economy of a mid-size car in a roomy SUV while still pumping out the power is quite a feat of engineering. But this is Toyota we're talking about.

What can you say about a bisexual SUV that doesn't know if it wants to burn gas or electricity? Does it matter? Just love it for what it is and be loved in return. Expect to pay around \$30,000 for well-equipped models, a little more for a hybrid.

Chevy HHR Panel Van

Chevy's HHR is already a very popular and chic little crossover, but the Panel edition takes its confusion to an entirely new level. Equal parts car, SUV and van, it also has some '49 Suburban genes. Grandpa's lineage is obvious in the face and body contours, but where granddad worked hard for a living, the HHR Panel is a prettied-up party boy

that works harder at getting plowed than plowing.

The Panel has the same tight handling, tall seating position, retro styled interior with iPod input jack and refined road manners of regular HHRs, but blacks out all side windows behind the driver, shaves off the rear door handles, and replaces the back seat with flush storage bins.

Chrome 17-inch wheels are so West Coast, but look great under the wagon's bulging fenders. A full-length rubber matt protects its insides from water and muck. As a project for class, students from the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit dressed up these factory custom models with cool graphics to show how the Panel can make a great surf wagon, flower delivery truck or anything in between.

Since most of the HHR Panels will be owned by businesses and young drivers, it is important for the vehicle to be efficient while



Photo courtesy Chevrolet

FIRE POWER: The Panel Van from Chevy combines old-school styling with many modern touches, like built-in iPod capabilities and a sleek ride.

making quick deliveries. Driven by a 175-horsepower 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine, with the option of a five-speed manual or four-speed automatic transmission, the HHR has the goods to haul buns (or petunias). Fuel economy is rated 23/30 mpg.

It seems the HHR Panel is a crossover that kept crossing over until it flipped completely out. It

may also make buyers completely flip out when it becomes available with a back seat and four door handles this fall. Until then, take your roommate for a ride and enjoy the ride — either in front or trying out the rear compartment. Sexual orientations are your business with blacked out privacy afforded. Well-equipped models start at \$18,595.

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Euro driving in America

Crave Old World elegance without the sticker shock of pricey foreign cars? Have we got some deals for you.

By Casey Williams

The Volvo C30, above, was made for quick trips to the patisserie along cobblestone roads. The Toyota Yaris, below, is a bargain beauty.

While walking down the Champs Elysées between the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triumph in Paris this spring, as my partner was going gaga over the idea of dropping a load at Prada or Benetton, I did what I always do: watched the cars. I even coerced my partner into the fashionable Peugeot, Renault and Mercedes showrooms for a few

minutes. He tolerated my obsession again in Italy when I bought every car magazine on the rack.

After Air France touched down in Dallas, I wanted to relive Europe as often as possible. It is easy enough to buy great mozzarella, French wine and wood-fired pizza in the States. But surprisingly, driving like a European in America isn't hard, either.

A European sensibility says something about you, whether it's the carefree romance of Italy or the precision speed of Germany. All of these cars are available (or soon will be) on both sides of the Atlantic. And though not all are



Photo courtesy Volvo

from European makers, they conjure that kind of feeling. What would one say about you?

Saturn Astra: Crave Autobahn, Honestly

You can't beat Saturn retailers, who must take daily truth-and-happy pills in their morning whoop sessions. No haggle, no hassle still rules.

This fall, you'll be able to buy an exact copy of the award-winning and Autobahn-blasting Opel Astra, engineered in Germany by General Motors, from Saturn. Minor changes to badging and bumpers are all that differentiate the cars from primo European versions.

Available in three- and five-door bodies, American Astras will scoot with 140-HP four-cylinder engines (given high gas prices, maybe GM will bring over Opel's diesel and hybrid models, too). Firm steering harmonizes with the accomplished suspension. Electronic stability control is available.

Interior design and trim are straight from the homeland. Supportive sport seats, straightforward analog

gauges, available two-panel sunroof, thick steering wheel and black piano finish on the center console look and feel great. Expect prices to begin around \$18,000 when sales commence this fall.

Toyota Yaris: Want Armani, Afford Target

When Americans got the pugly Toyota Echo, Europeans devoured the refined Yaris. Lucky them! Toyota apparently came to its senses when it designed the second-generation Yaris because we got one too. Good for that, because it is a great little car.

Styled in Europe, the car's molded plastic look is handsome both as a four-door sedan and three-door hatchback. A tall cabin with center-mounted instruments provides open space for four passengers. The car is surprisingly peppier than its 106-HP would suggest. I had no trouble cruising at 80 mph on the highway. As welcome in the States as in Europe are fuel economy ratings of 34/40 mpg city/highway. With prices beginning at \$11,150, the Yaris is the car that keeps you in couture, but hardly dings the clients piggy bank.



Photo courtesy Toyota



LOOK SMART: The SmartCar proves that big ideas come in small packages.

**Volvo C30:
Queenly Swede**

Volvo's C30, based on the S40 sedan, is a pissy little hatchback. Cars like this are very popular in Europe because they occupy a small footprint, enclose a surprising amount of interior space, are easily filled through a rear hatch and go down the road with the maturity of a much larger car. They are also incredibly safe with side airbags and strong crush zones – making them even more ready than most for life in the land of the SUV. Rear styling is based on the classic Volvo P1800ES sport wagon.

All C30s are powered by turbocharged 5-cylinder engines that produce 227-HP – a rambunctious amount for a subcompact hatchback. Prices start at \$22,700, but step up to "Version 2.0" for \$25,700 for premium features like the Dynaudio sound system installed on upper level Volvos. The Swedish-built C30 may be a hot little queen, but it protects and cuddles passengers better than your mother.

**Smart For Two:
Can't Get Over That
European Vacation**

On a walk through the cobblestone streets of Florence, I was nearly whacked by a speeding Smart. They're everywhere — in

front of espresso cafés and on Via della Vigna Nuova loading up Armani. They're perfect in Italy, and thanks to Indy-racecar owner and auto dealer Roger Penske, they'll soon be a perfect fit in America – perfect for motoring around the city and suburbs.

Although Smarts, developed by Swatch and DaimlerChrysler, have been in Europe since 1998, they're foreign to most Americans. Small enough to park nose-in to a curb, the ForTwo coupe and convertible are safe, comfortable (two fit easily), efficient (40 mpg), and fast (90 mph).

Like Swatch watches, Smarts will look as stylish on campus as at the valet ramp. Get your café racer early in 2008 for under \$15,000. As stylish as a Vespa and nearly as efficient, a Smart will never let you forget your incredible European vacation.

On our last day in Paris, passing through from Italy to Dallas, we walked by a Cadillac showroom with a new Escalade in the window. It was hard to imagine how that Texas-built truck would fit into French traffic. Then again, Smarts look just as strange in Dallas. But probably not for long. You could haul home miniature Eiffel Towers, photos of Michelangelo's David, Murano glass from Venice. But wouldn't you rather drive one of these cars every day?

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Night riders for dark knights

Who needs doors on a vehicle? These open-air rides pack a wallop.

By Casey Williams

The futuristic look of the Wraith, above, makes for an imposing profile; the Night Rod by Harley-Davidson, below, will blow you away.

Each of us has a little gothic vampire deep inside. We buy evening wear, splash on evening fragrances, sneak into shrouded clubs, dine under candlelight, and even put on shadowy makeup or black fingernail polish. So why not have a set of evening wheels that reach into your dark little soul and tug at your dark little heart? Are you tempted to give into your inner hellion and raise hell all night? Try riding one of these angels on two wheels.

Confederate B120 Wraith: The Bugatti of Motor Bikes

Confederate Motor Company was founded during 1991 to build highly specialized luxury motorcycles for connoisseurs and aficionados. To accompany the Hellcat, a stunning sporty bike, the company recently unleashed its evil twin. Confederate's B120 Wraith began its haunt on April 2, 2007.

JT Nesbitt, Confederate's chief designer, has a degree in sculpture and the Wraith is evidence. "I think things can be hand-crafted as long as love, care and attention are spent with the assembly of the machine. I believe a machine can be imbued with a soul," he says. He sees his work as "a bridge between conceptu-



Photo courtesy Confederate

al modernism, fine art and vehicle design."

It is impossible to convey in words alone how menacing the Wraith looks. Nesbitt based its style on pre-1916 motorcycles, but gave it an exposed carbon fiber chassis, carbon fiber front suspension and aluminum rear suspension. I love all of the exposed components that look like they were formed and bolted by hand. Multi-adjustable titanium shock absorbers, a five-speed transmission, and smooth 120-cu. inch 45-degree twin engine are state of the art. Nothing was done on the cheap.

If Harley-Davidson is the Mustang GT of motorcycles, then the Wraith is surely a Bugatti.

Day or night, it is disturbingly beautiful. Children and animals will run in freight.

Should you

want to clear the neighborhood of small mammals, expect to pay \$72,000 for one of only 250 B120s to be built.

Harley-Davidson RSC Night Rod: La Bella o la Bestia?

I saw an advertisement in an Italian auto magazine with photos of a silver Harley-Davidson VRSC V-Rod and of the widowed black VRSC Night Rod with the caption, "La bella o la bestia?" — "The beauty or the beast?" You can have the V-Rod either way.

Even among Harleys, the V-Rod is special. Penned under the supervision of Willie G. Davidson, grandson of the company's founder, it is a low slung sport/touring bike with large pipes, deftly integrated frame, swept-back headlamp, juttied out front wheel, fairing-bracketed radiator and low 25.2-inch seat height. Night Rods are distinguished by blacked-out mirrors, rear shocks and a steel frame. Black machined slotted disc cast aluminum 18/19-inch front/rear wheels and orange pin striping convey the sense of a scorned spider looking for fresh prey.

The bike's 125-HP V-twin



Photo courtesy Harley-Davidson

engine has the Harley trademark rumble, but it runs like a Porsche. Jointly developed by the German automaker and H-D, the engine was the brand's first to be water-cooled. Night Rods are available with a reduced lever effort clutch, anti-lock brakes and a smart security system.

La bella o la bestia? Well, both! Since its debut, the V-Rod has been a smash success. It has enough attitude to entice your mischievous side, but is polished with sheen of class. Order it in black and only you will know how sweet this devil really is. Prices for the Night Rod start at \$14,995.

**Vespa LX150:
Cappuccino at a
Dimly Lit Cafe**

What in hell, you might ask, is a Vespa doing in a story about ominous dark-clouded motorcycles? Granted, the Vespa is a little less like rolling thunder and more

like clapping patten. But, if you really want to sneak through the night, the Vespa is a much better choice than the booming Wraith or Night Rod.

It is also cool enough for an appearance in the "Transformers" movie. Italian, efficient and inexpensive, it is the perfect fashion accessory for a night on the town.

When in 1946 Enrico Piaggio, a member of the manufacturer's founding family, first saw the simple little motorbike, he exclaimed, "It looks like a wasp!" And it does. A very tasteful little wasp that comes in colors like Portofino green, graphite black, daring plum, dragon red and midnight blue. A windshield, footrest mat, chrome kit, leather seat and alarm system are optional on the latest LX150, the star of "Transformers." Unlike most motorcycles that force leaning over the gas tank, you take a Vespa straight up with easy access to a storage bins in front of

The Vespa is almost too cool for words.

the footrest and under the seat.

Engineers made the Vespa as contemporary underneath as the designers made it up top. Power comes from a 150cc 1-cylinder air-cooled engine, connected to a continuously variable transmission that propels the two-wheeler up to 59 mph in the straights. Fuel economy is an astronomical 72 mpg.

If the Night Rod and Wraith are armed gangsters in a speakeasy, then the Vespa is like a cappuccino at a dimly lit café. It may look like a wasp, but the LX150 barely



Photo courtesy Vespa

buzzes through the night. Best of all, a base price of \$4,299 will hardly drain your bank account. It might even enlighten your heart.



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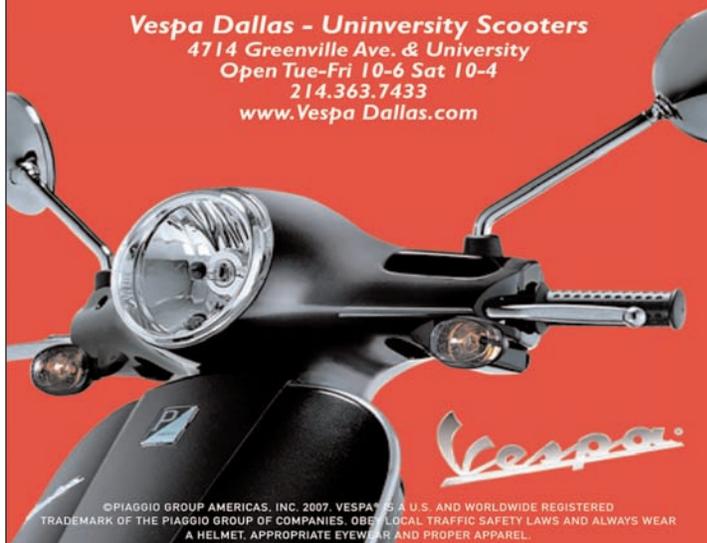
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Ask the experts

Three car sales professionals 'fess up about what they drive, what they like and the oddest requests from customers

By Arnold Wayne Jones

Who knows more about cars than those who deal with them on a daily basis? So we asked several salespeople around town to weigh in with their thoughts on the best, the oddest and the personal. Here's what they had to say.

**David Snyder,
University Park Audi**

What's the favorite option offered on one of the cars you sell?

It's hard to pick any, but I have two: The Quattro all-wheel drive system and the Bluetooth capability.

What kind of car do you personally drive?

My partner and I have a 2001 Jeep Cherokee Sport and a 1990 Toyota Corolla (with only 47,000 miles). We have had both cars for a few years now and what we like best about them is that we have no car payments. I see payments in our near future, though.

What's the strangest request you've ever had from a customer?

Someone called in on a used car we had on the lot and wanted to know what kind of gas the former owner had used in the car.

Do you have a favorite car on the lot?

I don't. Each one of the cars we offer has features I think are really great, which makes it easy to get excited about all the cars.



Photos by Arnold Wayne Jones

David Snyder, above, stands beside an Audi TT; Ava Skipworth, below, shows off a Saturn Sky.

**David Thomas,
Suburu of Dallas**

Of all the cars you sell, which one floats your boat the most?

I really like our new '08 Tribeca because everyone thinks it's a Lexus (it has the same style) but it costs much less. I always like "cache" for less! It also has a nice feature: "Puddle lights," which offer perimeter ground illumination; it's pretty cool-looking at night and a nice safety feature as well.

What car sits in your driveway at home, and what do you like about it?

I drive an Outback because I commute 50 miles and day and I need the great gas mileage. And my Rottweiler fits in it!

What's the funniest thing that ever happened to you when doing a sale?

A customer brought his girlfriend in to look at cars one day. He then came back a week later and bought the exact same car for his wife — who, like his girlfriend, was an attractive blonde. Well, I got their names mixed up and he was busted — oops!

**Ava Skipworth,
Saturn of Mesquite**

Which of the cars you sell is your personal favorite?

I love to sell the Aura because it offers the kind of luxury usually found in more expensive automobiles. Customers love the car and I enjoy their enthusiasm around the product.

What kind of car do you drive?

I usually drive demos because I like to have the opportunity to test many vehicles. My favorite by far is Saturn Sky Red Line edition! The Sky is sexy, but with an edge.

What's the oddest request ever made by a customer?

I had one customer buy a car for their nanny, who requested bulletproof glass.

What feature on one of your cars has the most value to you?

Embarrassing as it may be to admit, OnStar has unlocked my keys from my car more than once, and has helped me find my way around with directions.

What's the most outrageous thing you've ever done in a car?

That would be too revealing — even for your readers!





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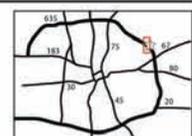
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GAYWHEELS' 10 MOST RESEARCHED CARS

By Joe Tralongo, Gaywheels

If there's one thing gays do well, it's spend money. But before you spend it, you have to save it, which may account for the number of frugal cars that made Gaywheels.com's Top Ten Most Researched list.

1: Toyota Yaris. The Yaris is the perfect date; it's cute, cheap and eats like a bird. For the first-time buyer, as well as those looking for a fuel-efficient second car, the Yaris offers legendary Toyota quality and reliability at a price just about anyone can afford.

2: Saab 9-3 (right). Saab's 9-3 sedan and convertible are two unconventional alternatives to the myriad of Mercedes-Benz, Acura and BMW cars jamming the gay ghetto. We love them for their sleek design, super-comfy seats and oddities like the horizontally-mounted console ignition switch.



3: Mazda MX-5 Miata. No surprise here — the Miata has been a darling of both the gay and straight worlds alike. This smartly-styled roadster appeals to so many because it's so easy to own.

4: Volkswagen Jetta. Something about a German car ignites the gay driving passion. Unfortunately, something about the steep price tag keeps many at bay. Volkswagen's Jetta breaks the budget barrier by offering the only sub-\$20,000 German sedan available in the States.

5: Volkswagen EOS. Whadayaknow — another convertible! So we like the wind in our hair (or wigs) and the sun on our faces. The VW Eos succeeds as the only convertible gayer than the MX-5 Miata. The Eos is the prima donna of the topless set.

6: Dodge Caliber. The Caliber's appearance midway down the list proves gay and lesbian car buyers don't exclude domestics when they merit attention. Its low base price certainly is part of its appeal, but it boats innovative features as well.



7: Toyota Camry. Not all gays are glamour queens — some actually prefer sensibility to sensuality, although all bets are off once the weekend rolls around. Toyota's Camry proves the logical choice for those who view their car as a means of transportation and not a fashion accessory — although it's far from dowdy.

8: Audi A3. The A3 is one of Europe's most popular cars, yet Americans are just getting their first hard look at Audi's entry-level hatchback. Its strong showing puts to rest the notion that gay Americans won't buy premium hatchbacks.

9: Volkswagen Rabbit. Formerly known as the Golf, the

Rabbit is far more reliable than the original Teutonic fur ball, a car (for those of us old enough to remember) with a somewhat jaded past. Although priced slightly higher than the competition from Japan and Korea, the Rabbit offers a lot in the way of standard equipment, safety, comfort and performance.

10: Infiniti FX (above). The FX is one of Infiniti's most beautiful vehicles, a fact born out by its ability to make our Top 10 list after five years on the market. Part SUV, part sport sedan, the aggressive FX looks like nothing else on the road

For more information and reviews, visit Gaywheels.com.

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It's just a fantasy?

Spectacular vehicles have been around for decades. But while the prices have gone up, so has the excitement.

By Casey Williams

The LS600h costs a cool hundred thou, but that's nothing compared to the first high-priced auto: the Duesenberg (inset), which cost \$20,000 during the height of the Great Depression.



Photo courtesy Lexus

When the Duesenberg company rolled out its Arlington at the 1933-34 World's Fair in Chicago, a Ford V8 could be had for \$480. But the Doozy, with a price-tag of \$20,000, was something special — it even gained the nickname Twenty Grand.

In the 75 years since, the base price for a Ford has certainly gone up, but the idea of a fantasy car costing a jaw-dropping figure is still around. In fact, the Lexus LS600h sedan retails for \$104,000 — Lexus' first 100 grand car.

While the LS may not be as exclusive as a Duesenberg, it is nonetheless impressive and quite expensive. Standard Lexus LS460s are powered by a whisper smooth 4.6-litre 380-horsepower V8 engine routed through an 8-speed transmission. Step up to the LS600h for V-12 power with a V8 and standard all-wheel-drive. Unlike the Toyota Prius, the LS600h uses its hybrid system as an "electronic supercharger" to increase thrust. At full tilt, the large sedan produces 438-HP. Fuel economy for the LS460 is rated 18/27 mpg city/highway; the LS600h is rated 20/22 mpg.

Duesenbergs were as comfortable as a Newport mansion, but the Lexus is more luxurious. Four-

place leather seats, four-zone climate control, heated and cooled seats, and duplicate climate/audio controls for both cabins keep everyone happy. Owners can select an upgraded rear compartment with twin executive-class recliners and retractable tray tables. Angels inspire the Mark Levinson audio system.

There's more. Radar-guided cruise control adjusts vehicle speed depending on traffic ahead. The car can parallel park itself! In case you aren't paying attention when "stuff" happens ahead, the radar system automatically detects a too-fast closing speed, beeps at the driver, tightens seatbelts, and applies light braking. On a three-mode air suspension system, the Lexus wafts down the highway.

Lexus commercials used to

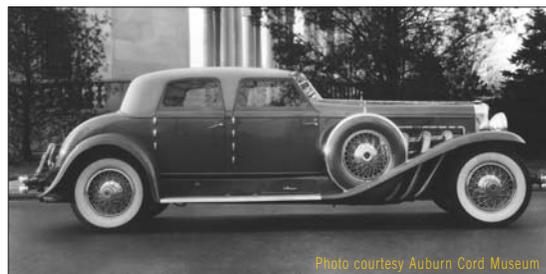


Photo courtesy Auburn Cord Museum

show an LS smoothly running with champagne glasses stacked on its hood. As expected, the latest LS is also amazingly smooth — at 60 mph, 120 mph, or whatever your conscience will allow. It made miles and time disappear at a hustled pace.

The Lexus LS may top a hundred grand, but it rolls like a million bucks. The Twenty Grand's chassis alone cost \$9,500 and while you won't have to purchase the running gear separately from the body when you enter a Lexus showroom, you would have to spend \$86,046 for our loaded LS460. Then, all you have to decide is whether you want it "supercharged" for an additional \$18,000! With time, maybe the LS will reach the status of the Duesenberg J-513, commonly known as the Twenty Grand.

Continued on Page 22

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Photo courtesy G.M.

WHO'S YOUR CADDY? The XLR-V has a Corvette heart but with luxury appointments.

Continued from Page 20

100 grand toasting your wallet? Just look at these:

Cadillac XLR-V: A Corvette-based hardtop convertible with edgy flair. Blast fast with a 443-HP supercharged 4.4-liter V8 engine. Interior gauges designed by Bulgari. Base price: \$100,000.

BMW M6: An M5 with half the formality. Rocket-quick with a

500-HP 5.0-liter V-10 engine. A carbon fiber roof, heads-up display, iDrive, and voice commands make blasting enjoyable. Base price: \$99,100.

Mercedes-Benz G55: Like a lumberjack lit from a fuse, the G55 is stuffed with a 493-HP 5.5-liter V8 and standard AWD to get the moves on. Interior accommodations rival an S-Class. Base price: \$107,500.

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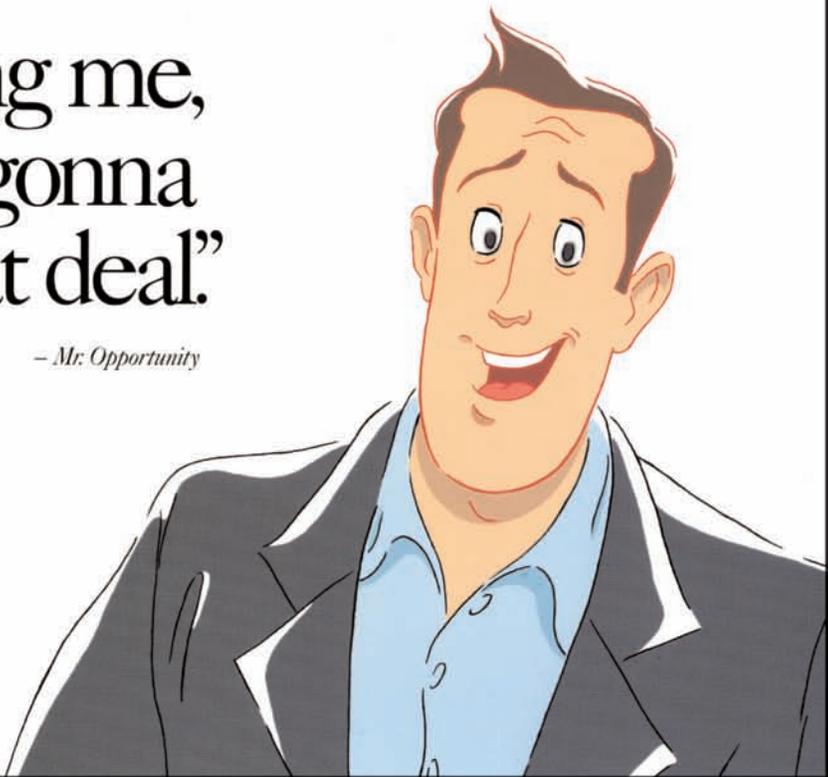
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