

(Sample from *Newark Star Ledger* special sections)

## **Trends in Design, Color and Accessories**

**By Jim Koscs**

Americans don't want much in a new car: style, performance, comfort, safety, reliability, a great stereo and decent gas mileage -- all for under \$20,000. Today's car buyers can have it all, as carmakers appear to be more attuned to what they want.

### **Old Is In**

Lots of folks have fond memories of their first cars, and carmakers are cashing in on the sentiments with designs and nameplates that smack of nostalgia. Ads for the redesigned Mustang say "It is what it was and more." The new model recaptures the spirit of the old with such nostalgic touches as tri-lense taillights, side scoops, the chrome pony emblem and, inside, a dual-cowl instrument panel like the '69-'70.

Chrysler took a giant design leap forward with its new Cirrus sedan, but affixed a name badge introduced on the first Chrysler in 1924. Monte Carlo was one of Chevrolet's most popular models in the '70s and '80s, and customers didn't bite when the Lumina coupe replaced it in 1989. Now the Monte is back, as a front-drive luxury/sport coupe available with a modern 210-horsepower dual overhead cam V-6.

### **"Equipped, Not Stripped"**

European and Japanese brands pioneered the concept of building cars with a high level of standard equipment. "Saabs, like most European cars, have very few options available," says John Kramer, vice president of sales and marketing for Saab Cars USA. "Even our 'base' models include such standard equipment as air conditioning, telescoping steering wheel, heated seats, cassette stereo, power windows and anti-lock brakes."

Domestics, for the most part, have stopped offering "strippers" and joined the party. Chrysler's ads for the Neon give the base price and the "nicely equipped" price. Chevrolet launched its redesigned Lumina as "Loaded. Standard." The car's \$16,000 base price includes air conditioning, stereo, power door locks, tilt steering wheel and a theft-deterrent system.

### **Ergonomics/Interior Design**

The domestics have caught up with their imported competition in the realm of interior design, and are also offering better seating comfort. Riviera is the first Buick equipped with the division's "new generation of orthopedically designed seats." If Ford's Contour and Mercury Mystique dashboards look European, it's because these corporate twins are the domestic versions of Ford's European Mondeo.

### **Compact Sport Utes**

Compact sport utes continue to grow in popularity, even outpacing minivans. "Young families want a roomy vehicle that's sexier than Ward Cleaver's station wagon," says Bob Markovich, senior editor of *Home Mechanix* magazine. Markovich says this year's sport utes are more car-like than ever.

The luxury goes beyond the opulent interiors with leather seats and CD players. Steering and suspension systems reflect a bias toward comfort and safe, secure on-road handling. "Maybe one in five of these vehicles is ever driven off-road," says Markovich.

### **Power To The People**

The V-8 engine, a mainstay of domestic cars in decades past, is now found mainly in luxury and sports models. Oldsmobile's Aurora gets a smaller, 250-horsepower version of the aluminum "Northstar" found in Cadillacs, where it's available in 275- and 300-horsepower versions. Lincoln's redesigned Continental marks the first time Ford has installed a V-8 in a front-drive car. These new V-8s come with something its forebears didn't -- fuel efficiency. Most V-8 luxury sedans can upwards of 25 miles per gallon in highway driving.

In the 1980s, almost every carmaker offered turbocharged engines. Saab, Volvo, Nissan, Toyota and Mitsubishi are the holdouts. Saab, long a turbo advocate, also offers non-turbo V-6 engines in its 9000 and redesigned 900 models.

Buick, Pontiac and Oldsmobile offer a supercharged 3.8-liter V-6 engine in some models. More than 82 percent of new Rivieras have this 225-horsepower option. Like a turbocharger, a supercharger boosts power by pressurizing incoming fuel and air. A supercharger is belt-driven, like an air conditioning compressor. A turbocharger is driven by hot exhaust gases.

More compact models get V-6 engines this year. Honda introduced a V-6 Accord, with 170 horsepower, and Ford's Contour/Mercury Mystique offer an optional 170-horsepower, 2.5 liter V-6 that doesn't need its first tune-up until 100,000 miles.

Chrysler touts the inexpensive Neon's ability to scoot from 0-60 in about eight seconds -- tops in its class -- with the standard 132-horsepower four-cylinder engine. The two-door is even quicker with the optional 150-horsepower engine.

### **Safety**

Today's cars are the safest ever, with dual airbags installed in nine out of ten new ones, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Anti-lock brakes (ABS), once exclusive to high-end luxury models, are available on nearly every passenger car, either as standard equipment or an option. Two out of three new pickup trucks and sport utes have a driver's side airbag. Some, like the Ford Explorer and Land Rover Discovery, have dual airbags

### **Winter Driving**

Traction control, which limits wheelspin on wet or icy roads, was first introduced on expensive sports and luxury models. It's more widely available this year, even on some inexpensive cars like Saturn and Ford Contour. BMW goes traction control one better on its high-end cars, adding "Dynamic Stability Control," which stabilizes the car in fast curves.

Demand for traction control is regional. "It's not a very popular option in Florida," says Martin Schorr, a spokesman for Buick.

Audi and Subaru take a different approach to winter driving by offering all-wheel-drive as an option on every model. Audi used to package its "Quattro" feature only on its priciest cars. For '95, it's available as a stand-alone option for a reasonable \$1,500.

### **Side Impact Protection**

Side-impact crashes account for about 30 percent of all passenger vehicle occupant deaths, so the federal government set standards for these collisions. About 25 percent of each carmaker's passenger cars must meet the standard this year, and all of them by 1997.

Volvo this year became the first company to offer side airbags. Standard on the 850 Turbo model and optional on other 850s for \$500, these bags are built into the sides of the driver and front passenger seats. They deploy to prevent occupants from banging into one side of the car, or each other. Look for side airbags on more cars over the next few years -- BMW will probably be next.

Noticed more cars driving with their lights on in daylight? It's not because drivers are becoming more forgetful. Mandatory on all cars in Canada and some European countries, "daytime running lights" are standard on Saabs, Volvos and some Chevrolets. The high beams run at 80 percent of their normal brightness to draw attention to the car, thus, helping to reduce accidents.

### **More Bells And Whistles**

Don't you just hate it when someone else drives your car and monkeys with the seat and mirror positions? The Lincoln Continental uses a "Memory Profile System," which stores the settings of 12 different comfort and convenience features for two drivers.

Want to breathe a little easier when you drive? Saab was the first company to offer cabin air filtration in 1978. Some high-end luxury cars offer it, but the least expensive car to have it is the Ford Contour/Mercury Mystique, which start at a little over \$14,000.

Car stereos have come a long way since 8-tracks. Lexus now offers an in-dash CD changer, so you don't have to open the trunk to switch from Perlman to Pearl Jam. One

third of Mustang drivers opt for the Mach 460 sound system, which, as its name suggests, packs a 460-Watt wallop to wake up any small community.

If you thought remote garage door openers were neat, you'll love the built-in universal devices available in many luxury cars. They learn codes for several different doors, for all your homes. And if you remember the 1957 Dodge LaFemme model, you'll certainly appreciate the return of the factory-issued umbrella in the Continental.

### **Colors**

Dark green has replaced white as the most popular color for cars, according to Bob Daily, color marketing manager for DuPont Automotive Finishes. "In the early '70s, the avocado greens were in," he says. "Today, Polo, Hunter and Emerald greens are hot."

White isn't going out of style, though. It's right behind green in popularity on luxury cars and full-size and intermediate cars, and still the most popular choice for sports and compact cars (see chart). There's been a small surge in popularity for dark purple, too, according to Daily. He thinks these eggplant-like hues will be with us for a while, but that the lighter, majenta-like tints will be a short-lived fad.

### **And finally, a sign of aging baby boomers...**

Chrome wheels used to be for high school kids with jacked-up GTOs, but more luxury cars are rolling out of the factories with them. Nearly a third of Cadillacs came with the factory versions last year.