Are We In Love or Just Crazy?

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William Faulkner wrote in 1948 that, " The American really loves nothing but his automobile." His observation retains its force over a half-century later. Thomas B. DeMarco states in his book, The Most Dangerous Addiction, that a recent Goodyear Tire survey claimed that two out of five Americans would rather kiss their cars than their mothers. Three out of five admitted talking to their cars. Some dream of cars as they dream of lovers. We dream cars will somehow fulfill our fantasies and our desires.

Americans have always cherished personal freedom and mobility, rugged individualism and masculine force. The advent of the horseless carriage combined all these qualities and more. The automobile traveled faster than the speed of reason, it promised to make everyone a pathfinder to a better life. It became the vehicle of personal democracy, acting as a social leveling force, granting more and more people a wide range of personal choices-where to travel, where to work and live, where to seek personal pleasure and recreation. This point of view was certainly reinforced when a journalist once explained, "The automobile is the handiest tool ever devised for the pursuit of that unholy, unwholesome, all-American trinity of sex, speed and prestige"

In 1901 " Motor World Magazine" highlighted the subconscious appeal of the motorcar by alluding to its horse-like qualities. "To take control of this materialized energy, to draw the reins over this monster with its steel muscles and fiery heart-there is something in the idea which appeals to an almost universal sense, the love of power."

The turn of the 20th Century marked the beginning of that love of power. The automobile soon began to affect Americans and our way of life. Perhaps tonight some of your personal memories will be rekindled. You may recall your experiences with the automobile and its affect on our collective lives.

When it all began for me, I can't be sure. What I am sure of, is that cars have been an interesting and memorable part of my life for as long as I can remember. The first family car I recall, was our 1939 Buick Roadmaster four-door sedan with dual fender mounted spares. I know my Dad owned a 1937 Studebaker before the Buick, but I have no memory of that car. Our Buick was not new. It was nearly ten years old and I was about four years old and not yet in school. The Buick had a push button radio with a letter of the word "Buick" on each button. I discovered that if I covered the letter, "I", on the radio, the buttons spelled "Buck" , which was the name of out little black terrier. It was one of the many things I learned over the years while riding "in the middle" of the front seat. This coveted position allowed me to observe and hear so much more than those relegated to the back seat. I would not occupy the driver's seat, the best seat of all, for many years to come.

My parents would not allow me to own a car while in high school. To me, this was a disappointing and frustrating decision. My dream, to own my own wheels, was put on hold. After obtaining my driver's license on my 16th birthday, I was finally able to get behind the wheel and occupy that prestigious seat. Now keep in mind, over the years I had been able to drive in and out of the garage to wash to car, or back it out to warm it up for my mother. I used any reason I could think of to have an opportunity to turn the key and listen to the sweet music coming from under the hood. All those moments behind the wheel were tiny harbingers of great experiences to come.

Since I was not allowed to own a car, a decision not to be reconsidered, I was permitted to

use the family car one night a week and if I was very lucky, an hour or two on an occasional Sunday afternoon. There were, of course, a few strings attached. First, it was my responsibility to keep the car spotless, not clean, spotless! I also had to replace all gas that I used. I was more than glad to accept these conditions.

Some say speed kills. If it doesn't kill you, it can get you into a lot of trouble. Speed can also get your driving privileges revoked. Growing up in a small town has many advantages. There are also disadvantages, like having difficulty getting away with anything. Before I received my license my parents had purchased a brand new 1959 Oldsmobile Super 88 four door hardtop. It was beautiful. My older sister, who had been driving for a few years, had told me that the Olds was really fast. How fast I asked? Very fast. She had evidently done [redacted] a little racing and unknown to me, the Olds had a bit of a reputation. On one of those rare Friday nights when I had use of the car, I received my first racing challenge from a guy in a beautiful 1958 Pontiac Starchief, a bronze and white two door hardtop. It was a great looking car and its owner evidently felt it was fast. The driver was quite a bit older and I was surprised when he asked me to drag race with him. I did and won, narrowly. I wish this was the end of this story, but unfortunately, it isn't. The next Monday evening during dinner, my father asked for my driver's license. I handed it to him with a perplexed expression that must have said, "why?" My dad then told me that while having the Olds serviced that morning at the Olds/Pontiac dealership, the mechanic doing the work on the car informed my dad that he owned the fastest "damn" Olds he had ever raced against. It had been the first car to beat his '58 Pontiac 387 tri-power. My dad was quite impressed, but I became a full-time pedestrian for the next six weeks. If I told you this event cured my love of speed and racing, I would be lying. There were many more chapters of my racing life but time does not allow them to be told and embellished tonight.

I could talk all night about countless car related experiences. Gary Seiy's '32 Model A, Jimmy Comstock's '36 Ford V-8, Jerry Schneider's '51 Studebaker, Bobby Andrulis's '58 Corvette which ended up totaled and scattered along three blocks of Ludington Avenue, my Uncle Ollie's '58 Impala and even my Aunt Irene's '57 Studebaker Golden Hawk. You all have had similar experiences and stories that you could share. Different times, different places, different cars, but stories so alike that most of us could say, "Yeah, me too, that's right, hey I knew a guy who owned one of those." On and on we could go all evening.

There are few experiences in life that remain in your memory as vividly as the purchase of your first car. It was a warm and sunny Saturday morning about a week after my high school graduation in June of 1962. My dad and I were on our way to Manistee to visit the Pontiac dealership which was owned by a man who had sold many cars to my parents over the years. I was going to purchase my first car. I had received one hundred dollars for graduation from my parents and another fifty or sixty dollars from friends and relatives. This was money for the down payment. When I saw it, I was immediately in love and I had to have it. It was a 1957 Pontiac Super Chief two door hard-top, dark blue with powder blue side spear and top. It had a 347 cubic inch engine with a four barrel carb and dual exhausts that exited through the rear bumpers. I just had to have this car and the deal was made. Eight hundred dollars including tax and license fees. WOW!!! I had to wait until the following Saturday to return to Manistee to take delivery of my dream machine. My mom and younger brothers made the trip too. This was a big deal and an experience I won't ever forget. I remember my car payments were $37 a month and I

think my insurance cost about the same. About a year and a half later, I sold the Pontiac and returned to college full time. Each month when I receive my "Hemmings Motor News," I still turn to the Pontiac section first to check out any '57 Super Chiefs for sale. Boy, would I like to own that one again.

Let's review some of the history of the automobile and how it affects our daily lives. The automobile, as we know it, was not invented by a single inventor. The story of the automobile reflects a revolution that took place all over the world. It is estimated that over 100,000 patents created the modern automobile. However, we can point to the many firsts that occurred along the way, starting with the first theoretical plans for a motor vehicle that had been drawn by Leonardo daVinci and Isaac Newton.

Why "car?" Why "automobile?" The word car comes from the Latin, carrus, a term used to describe the two-wheeled war chariot. Later it was used to describe any chariot, and later any wheeled vehicle. Ultimately "car" evolved from describing a horse-drawn carriage to a horse-less carriage.

It might seem surprising, but when the automobile came to the American scene in the 1890's, nobody knew what to call it. The word "automobile" had not yet been invented. "Horseless carriage" was thought to be a disparaging term used by those who didn't like the noisy new contraption. At the first auto race in Chicago in 1895, the sponsoring "Times Herald", called the machines "motocycles," but that was too much like "bicycles" and quickly went by the wayside. Other names suggested were: autobat, autogen, autogo, autokinet, ipsometer, autovic, molectro, motorwagon, self-motor, and trundler. The word "automobile" finally arrived from France. There it was invented by members of the French Academy which had convened especially to name this modern, mechanical marvel.

In 1769, the first self-propelled road vehicle was a military tractor invented by French engineer and mechanic, Nicolas Joseph Cugnot (1725-1804). Cugnot used a steam engine to power his three wheeled vehicle, build under his instruction at the Paris Arsenal by a mechanic named Brezin. It was used by the French Army to haul heavy artillery at a whopping speed of 2 ½ miles per hour. The vehicle had to stop every ten to fifteen minutes to build enough steam power to continue moving. The steam engine and boiler were separate from the rest of the vehicle. They hung, suspended from a large arm and hook, which was attached to the front of the vehicle. The following year (1770), Cugnot built a stream powered tricycle that carried four passengers. In 1771, Cugnot drove one of his road vehicles into a stone wall, making him the first person involved in a motor vehicle accident.

Steam engines powered cars by burning fuel that heated water in a boiler, creating stream that expanded and pushed pistons which turned the crank shaft driving the wheels. Steam engines were extremely heavy and proved a poor design for road vehicles. Historians, who accept that steam powered road vehicles were automobiles, credit Nicolas Cugnot as the inventor of the first car. In the United States, steam powered automobiles were manufactured by eighty-three companies in eighteen states and fifty-nine cities. The last steam powered car in the United States was built in Detroit by the Delling Company in 1934.

The invention of steam driven automobiles was later followed by the invention of vehicles powered by electrical engines. Between 1832 and 1839 (the exact year is not certain), Robert Anderson of Scotland invented the first electric carriage. Electric cars used rechargeable

batteries that powered a small electric motor. The vehicles were heavy, slow, expensive, and needed recharging frequently. Eventually, steam and electric road vehicles were abandoned in favor of gasoline powered vehicles. Electricity was used with success to power tramways and street cars, where a constant supply of electricity was possible. Interestingly, modern technology has created renewed interest in electrical energy and its viable use as an energy source in today's hybrid automobiles.

It may seem ironic today, but when the automobile was new, people saw it as much cleaner and much safer than horse drawn transportation. Automobiles were viewed as friends of the environment; they were much cleaner than horses. In 1900 in New York City, for example, 120,000 horses pulled cabs, carriages and delivery trucks throughout the city. Each day, this army of horses, deposited three and one half million pounds of manure and 60,000 gallons of urine on the streets of the city. In addition, over 15,000 dead horses had to be removed from the streets each year. The large animals were also considered dangerous. Even experienced riders and teamsters were continually being injured or killed by horses. The automotive inventors were well aware of the potential advantages of a "horse-less" carriage and dozens tried to develop some form of automobile. The motorcar promised to eliminate animal waste and provide safety for the city's travelers.

At the turn of the 20th Century just one in every 9,500 Americans owned an automobile. Forty percent were steam powered, thirty-eight percent were electric and just twenty-two percent were powered by gasoline burned in an internal combustion engine. There were fewer than 14,000 vehicles on the American roads in 1900. Worldwide, fewer than 10,000 cars were produced that year. By 1902, more than fifty firms were manufacturing automobiles in America. A year later, in 1903, forty year old Henry Ford, with the financial backing of Alex Y. Malcomson, formed the Ford Motor Company in Detroit. Ford's company was capitalized with just $28,000 with Ford and Malcomson each holding twenty-five percent of the stock. A year later, the United States surpassed France in the production of automobiles, becoming the world's largest producer. The United States held this position until surpassed by Japan in 1980. By 1920, Americans owned and operated over five million automobiles, five times the rest of the world combined. It seemed our love affair with the automobile was well on its way.

By the late twenties, the number of auto manufacturing companies had dropped from a high of 108 to only 44. The phenomenal market growth of the past twenty years had ended. The market had shifted to replacement of used vehicles. The trade-in and used car market had come to play an increasingly important part in automobile sales. The American market of first-time buyers of new cars had reached saturation. Fine second-hand autos in excellent condition sold for about the same price as a new Model T. Between 1927 and 1930, Chevrolet purchased and destroyed over 650,000 used cars to prop up the market for new vehicles.

1927 was the last year of production for the Ford Model T. Sales dropped to 1/3 of the 1926 total. Even at a price of about $200.00, Ford could not maintain new car sales. By this time more consumers were buying three and four year old used cars rather than a Model T because they perceived the used cars as better values with more features. When Ford shut down production of the Model T, the company had sold nearly 16 million Tin Lizzies. Closing down production of the Model T also meant 100,000 workers lost their jobs.

By 1930, the United States had 26.7 million registered vehicles. This rapid growth in the

number of autos on the American roads continued. By 1935, more than 50 million cars had been sold in this country, one car for every five Americans. Remember, at the turn of the century this ratio had been one car for every 9,500 Americans.

The late 30's marked the beginning of cars being sold on credit. Unheard of just a decade earlier, credit sales of automobiles had become the standard. In the 30's, installment purchases accounted for more than 2/3 of all new car sales. With the automobile leading the way, credit purchases of expensive consumer items, such as home appliances, was becoming a way of life for Americans. We have moved from financing 2 out of 3 new cars in the 30's to financing more than 9 out of 10 new cars today. Now, new car purchasers are paying more, making the lowest down payments ever, and are committing to increasingly longer loans. In 1995, the average down payment was 15%. Today the average down payment is only 3% to 5%. The average loan today is for 63 months compared to the average of less than 48 months just five years ago. Here is a financial shocker! Five years ago banks financed an average of 89% of a new vehicle's cost. Last year, it was 101%. New car buyers are seeking loans that cover the cost of the new car and additional thousands of dollars to pay what is still owed on their trade-in vehicle. Many consumers are paying more per month for their cars than they are for their homes. Is this love or just crazy?

The depression years of the late 20's and early 30's, raised havoc on the auto industry. Countless companies folded. Those that survived were reorganized and down-sized. Many tough decisions were made regarding models offered and marketing strategies. The annual production of automobiles in the United States dropped from the 1929 peak of 5.3 million units to just under 2.4 million units in 1930.

In 1932, Cadillac was one marque that was nearly eliminated because of slow sales. A young engineer, Nicholas Dreystadt, asked to speak to the GM board of directors to plead the case to save Cadillac. At this time, GM practiced the discrimination of not selling Cadillacs to Black buyers. Dreystadt informed the board that affluent Blacks were purchasing Cadillacs by deception, getting white friends to make their purchases. Why not, reasoned Dreystadt, simply include affluent Blacks in the market for Cadillacs? Dreystadt was given eighteen months to try his strategy. It worked! By 1934 Cadillac was again profitable, and by 1940 had achieved a one thousand percent increase in sales. This represented one of the first steps in breaking down racial discrimination in marketing. Dreystadt's initiative is cited as the first effective example of genuine niche marketing in the auto industry.

As the 30's ended and the 40's began, the auto industry became the "big three" and the "middle five." General Motors, Ford and Chrysler accounted for ninety percent of U. S. production. The majority of the remaining ten percent went to the "middle five" made up of Hudson, Nash, Packard/Studebaker, and Willis Overland.

During World War II the auto industry was converted to manufacture war materials. From 1940 to 1945 the U.S. auto industry produced more than twenty percent of the total output of war materials. By 1945, as a result of suspended auto manufacturing during the war, America was down to only twenty-five million cars. Of these, more than half were over ten years old and nearly worn-out. We needed new cars and we wanted new cars!

By 1950, auto makers were back in full production. The United States was now building

two-thirds of the world's automobiles. We were producing eight million units of the worldwide total of 10.5 million units. Second place Britain rolled out fewer than a million new vehicles and the struggling Japanese industry produced only 32,000 cars and trucks.

The 50's and 60's are probably the cars most of us remember best. Do you recall waiting each fall for the unveiling of the new models? The mystery was enhanced by showroom windows covered with brown paper. We all waited for the first peek of the '57 Chevy, the '63 Stingray split-window coupe, the '64 Mustang and countless others. American "muscle" and American "pride". Automobile slogans became an important part of our language. "See the U.S.A. in your Chevrolet", "When better cars are built, Buick will build them", "Ford has a better idea", "The standard of the world, Cadillac". It was an exciting time as we witnessed the exaggeration of chrome, fins, multiple headlights and gadgetry never imagined. These were accompanied by unlimited horsepower and amazing speed. Most major televison programs were sponsored by an automobile company. Even Lawrence Welk was brought into our homes by Dodge. Do you remember Route 66, where the star of the show was a shiny Corvette convertible? Each year from the late '50's through the early '60's, Chevrolet introduced the new Corvette model on this show.

America was rolling and it needed roads on which to drive its cars. More cars were being purchased and we were driving them everywhere. Our cities were not designed to manage this increased amount of traffic. It was paramount that a national road network soon be developed.

Earlier, in the '30's, Alfred P. Sloan, then president of General Motors, established a "highway lobby" in Washington D.C. to pressure the government to build more roads. This lobby gained strength and eventually led to the establishment of the Federal Highway Trust Fund. This Highway Trust Fund built our current American highway system. Federal taxes on fuel provided the revenue for the Highway Trust Fund. These revenues could only be used for the construction of new roads. Because we built more roads, we drove more. Because we drove more, we bought more fuel. With the taxes collected on these increased fuel sales, we built more roads. The cycle continues today.

The auto industry has always influenced federal decisions. Executives from this industry have been appointed to key government positions such as Transportation Secretary and even Secretary of Defense. Road building became a national priority. Once this process began it was and is, virtually unstoppable. By the 1970's cities were being forced to build roads that no one wanted. City residents were no match to the highway lobby and were unable to control or influence highway development in their cities. Highways continued to be built through the centers of American cities where they divided and destroyed neighborhoods, blocked off access to public parks, waterfronts and city streets. This process continues today: more federal dollars are available to build new roads than to maintain existing road. This powerful lobby and road building process led directly to the decline of existing mass-transit systems and thwarted the development of modern mass-transit.

During the early and mid '70's automobile manufacturing and sales in the United States were steadily declining. The Clean Air Act of 1970 tightened regulations on auto emissions because of poor air quality in our urban areas. Costly "emission control devices" mandated for American cars resulted in poor performance and fuel efficiency. These factors were closely followed by the Arab oil embargo which limited our fuel supply and gas prices sky-rocketed. No

one wanted American cars, everyone was seeking efficiency. Foreign car sales increased because of their fuel efficiency , reliability and improved design. This trend of increasing foreign car sales (mainly Japanese) continued. Japan eventually overtook the United States in worldwide car sales in 1980. At this time Japanese automakers held a 30% market share of new car sales in the United States.

With the '90's came auto technologies that rivaled man's most sophisticated science. Cars still look good, go fast, and are filled with creature comforts. In addition, they run better, they run more efficiently and are safer than ever before. Navigation systems, tuned electronic suspensions, ABS brakes, air-bag technology, crumple crash zones, heads up displays, hybrid engines, and monitoring systems that forewarn of needed maintenance or repairs. Cars are truly becoming scientific miracles. Our love for them has not waned , only intensified.

All love relationships have costs. America's love affair with the automobile is costly as well. One expense is our time. In 1911 a horse and buggy paced through Los Angeles at eleven miles per hour. Today, in rush hour traffic, the automobile averages only four miles per hour. American drivers are stuck in traffic for eight billion hours a year. Young graduates who entered the work force in the summer of 2000 will spend four years of their lives behind the wheel. Despite congested traffic, road rage, polluted air and rising gas prices, Americans have not changed their driving or car ownership patterns. Suburban commuters resolutely continue to drive alone rather than join car pools or use public transportation. Figures from the 2000 census show seventy-six percent of workers drive alone to their jobs. The figure for Michigan is seventy-three percent . Over ninety percent of Americans use the automobile exclusively for travel. Our love affair with the car has matured into a marriage, perhaps an addiction. As a bumper sticker states, "You'll get me out of my car when you pry my cold dead foot from the accelerator."

To build the four million miles of roads to accommodate our two hundred twenty million vehicles, another price is paid. Vast amounts of green space have been sacrificed. Over one and a half percent of the land in the United States is covered by public roads-an area the size of South and North Carolina. The impact of roads spreads beyond the actual roadways. Roads affect fifteen to twenty percent of the United States land mass. Every state has the equivalent of over 100,000 football fields of land devoted to roads.

Perhaps the cost that hurts most is the one measured in dollars. Transportation costs are now estimated at eighteen percent of household budgets. A 1998 report quantified household spending for transportation in 28 U.S. metropolitan areas. The eighteen percent spent on transportation was more than is spent on health care, education or food. In many cases transportation expenses outstripped housing costs. According to this report, Houston metropolitan area was costliest, with more than twenty-two cents of each household dollar spent on transportation. Houston citizens spend about $8800.00 per year for transportation. Detroit, Ann Arbor, Flint made the top ten list of transportation costs, checking in at fifth, spending nineteen cents of every household dollar on transportation, slightly above the national average.

Our love for our cars is obvious. Today, March 4, 2004,you and I combined with all American drivers logged 1.1 billion trips in our vehicles. Today,March 4, 2004, you and I combined with all other American drivers, drove more than 4.4 billion miles. Today, in Los Angeles, there are more cars than people. Today in America there are 1.9 cars for every 1.8

drivers. Gentlemen, we are in serious relationships with our cars. Whether we are "In Love or Just Crazy," there is no talk of divorce.

Are We In Love or Just Crazy?

Survey

Thinking about cars:

Your first car: Make:

Model:

Year:

Color:

Engine:

Of all the cars you have owned, which would you love to own again?

Make:

Model:

Year:

Color:

Engine:

The cars your family owned when you were growing up: Make Model Year

1.

2.

. 3.

What car would you most like to own today (Cost not a factor)?

Did You Know?

1900-1909	*There were 13,824 cars on the road in the USA *Worldwide fewer than 10,000 cars produced yearly *At least 50 new firms began manufacturing automobiles in the USA *New Brush Motorcar cost $800, a Ford Model K $2,800, a gelding horse $150
1910-1919	*500,000 motor vehicles in the USA *Willy's-Overland produced 18,200 cars, #2 behind Ford *U.S. annual production of autos passed 800,000 *The Model T got 20 miles per gallon of gasoline
1920-1929	*Introduction of balloon tires for automobiles *U.S. auto production passed 3.7 million units *13 million cars on U.S .roads *Ford Model T cost $260, more than 10,000 dealers selling Ford automobiles
1930-1939	*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma became the first city with parking meters *Cumulative sales for U.S. automakers (since 1900) passed 50 million units *GM recognized the UAW as a collective bargaining unit *GM introduced the first automatic transmission
1940-1949	*National Labor Relation Board forced Ford to allow collective bargaining *First Volkswagon Beetle produced *First tubeless tire introduced *U.S. auto production accounts for 2/3 of worldwide total
1950-1959	*Studebaker and Packard merge under economic pressures *Ford introduces first two seat Thunderbird *Eight percent of cars sold in US were imports, half were Volkswagons *Chevrolet introduces its new 265 cubic inch V8
1960-1969	*Studebaker-Packard is the first auto manufacturer to introduce seat belts as standard equipment on all models *Ford introduces the 1964 ½ Mustang ($2,300 base price) *Vehicle Air Pollution and Control Act set standards for allowable auto emissions *US automakers losing market share to foreign competitors, US producing 45% of world market down from 75% in 1950
1970-1979	*Clean Air Act tightened regulations on auto emissions *US still largest producer of auto's (8.3million) Japan number two (5.3million) *70% of cars sold in US were V8's, 20% 6cylinders, 8.5% 4cylinder engines *$1.5 billion in federal guaranteed loan staved off bankruptcy for Chrysler Corp.

1980-1989

*Japan automakers held 30% share in US market
*Japan surpasses US in auto sales, becomes world's largest auto producer
*Chrysler purchases American Motors, "Jeep" trademark only valuable asset in the takeover
*Nearly 20% of all imported cars sold in US were "captive" imports, they were manufactured abroad but sold in the US under domestic nameplates

1990-1999

*Over 11% of manufacturing of foreign"imports" was done in the US
*The "Hummer," the military's High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle put on market for Civilian use, Arnold Schwartzenegger bought the first one to be sold (he now owns five Hummers)
*Mercedes-Benz and Chrysler merge to form Daimler-Chrysler
*Plymouth marque discontinued by Daimler-Chrysler, Oldsmobile begins to be fazed out by General Motors