

# Ba-Rooooom!

David Gaynes

1969

When I was six, my old man picked up a '54 Buick, which escalated our family into the burgeoning ranks of two-car america and made the local pump-jockeys clean the windshield with those snappy strokes shoe-shine boys used to reserve for gen-u-wine alligators.

We already had a Chevy six cylinder stickshift two-door, but it was just a car. The Buick, on the other hand, was a real creampuff: two toned paint job, elephantine white-wall tires, the whole ball of wax. From its chromed phallic hood ornament to its mellow-toned exhaust pipe, it was a boss short.

Or so I thought, until that apocalyptic day that I discovered the little-heralded Buick porthole fraud, a condition, I might add, which I feel all red-blooded kids of that era were aware of, and just haven't taken the time to sit down and talk about. It's really very significant.

For many years now, the "better car" people have insisted on gracing the front quarter-panels of their cars with various renditions of fake exhaust ducts. Back in '54 they used to be called "portholes" and in fact resembled portholes not so much as they did the raked-back exhaust stacks on WW II P-51 fighter planes.

My disillusionment came the day I stuck my puny hand inside one of these openings to see what was shakin' inside. Three inches in, I was stopped cold by a wall of solid metal—the inside of those flashy die-castings.

I knew I'd been had. From that day on, I've never forgiven American cars for being as bogus as they are, nor have they, for their part, gotten any less so.

This isn't to say that there haven't been changes (Detroit calls it "progress") in the past fifteen years or so. Thank the Lord for small favors: we've gone past the "forward-look" era of monster tail-fins. The Edsel is dead. The joke is, the Edsel was no worse than any of those cars which are still foisted on the eager public today.

Let us for a moment transcend the lifelong barrage of advertising with which we have been inundated and look at the American Automobile with whatever degree of objectivity we can muster.

I ask you to reflect for a moment on the fact that (whatever gratification a car owner may get from possessing his particular car) all a car can do is transport people from point A to point B with a relative measure of comfort, safety and dependability.

Most cars are not bought or sold on that basis.

The problem is, they are just as ready to be told a year or two later that the new (new, new, all-new) cars have made then current cars (which are like as not falling apart) obsolete.

The roots of this situation extend back before Daimler and Benz were messing with the notion that there was something better than the horse.

Before the Industrial Revolution, with its mass urbanization and division of labor, people could view the things they did for a livelihood, and those activities involved in daily life (cooking, making clothes, building their own houses) as meaningful and significant activities. Unquestionably, they were. The common man could take pride in his ability to thatch a roof or plant a garden of vegetables.

With the advent of the industrialized technological society in which we live, this direct involvement with the reproduction of daily life has become almost non-existent.

Today, the average worker plays such a tiny role in the incomprehensibly large system in which he operates that he is meaningless, powerless, and interchangeable.

As a result, we have created a world in which the endless repetition of vacuous tasks is rewarded by the ability to exchange slips of paper for necessities and baubles. Television has become a substitute for any real relationship to time and space. We are spectators to our own existence.

Our personal realities are so sordidly at odds with the images we are bombarded with and aspire to fulfill that we wind up defining ourselves through the acquisition of material items rather than personal content and ability.

Which brings us to the 1970 cars.

I haven't had the dubious pleasure of driving one yet, nor do I anticipate the opportunity in the near future. Chances are exceedingly slim that you will ever see a road test in this newspaper, or cha-cha diagrams either, for that matter. It ain't our bag.

What we care about is the image that is being sold, because that image (and self-image) is what keeps this country getting out of bed every morning to grind out the same self-perpetuating nonsense.

Specifically, this year Detroit has come up with the "escape machine." One auto maker goes so far as to brand its products as such; the rest content themselves with imitating as much with every paragraph.

This year, you could be () [empty parentheses in print original] material! (if you think you're bad enough to cop the girl sprawled on the hood of the car.)

This year, you (yes, you) could drive a supersonic sexmobile with a genuine "laser strip on the side. YOU can order special "spacers" on the rear deck of your machine to increase high-speed stability at speeds above 120 m.p.h. (To fully appreciate this option, inflate tires to 40 lbs., fill up tank with Sunoco 260, advance timing 1-3 degrees. Find long, straight E-way, depress accelerator to floor. Pray.)

You can, if you have the money, buy your new dreamboat with power brakes, steering, windows, vent-windows, trunk release, antenna, seat... this is a good set-up for the man who likes to save his precious energy for Jogging.

If you get the right engine, you can actually get as little as six or seven miles to the gallon at legal speeds.

Or, you can take a look around you, realize that it ain't no good, and work to free yourself from the folly that is Amerika.

This is all fine and good. There is no doubt that most people are genuinely moved by the images that bring them to the automotive marketplace, sucker-ready to drop a wad on the current four-wheeled shucks that glitter in the showrooms.

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