



Several thousand words ago in this very column I permitted a slight prevarication to slip into the prose. I'm feeling a tinge guilty about that. You know, it's the New Year and I DID make that resolution about prose prevarication (not to mention illiteration) so I want to start the New Year off right and make amends.

Toward the end of that stirring eulogy about the mighty Maxima I made an idle boast that the new Walrich buggy would be red. I lied. I mean that WAS the plan. I had it all figured out, it's just that sometimes it's better not to plan too specifically, especially when your plans get published.

Those that choose hawking automotives as their life's work have historically fallen into my category of Those I Would Least Like To Be Stranded on a Desert Island With. They are joined by door to door encyclopedia salesman, ambulance chasing shysters, television evangelists and professional wrestlers. By and large this is a shifty lot. They make promises that others have to keep. They lie about gas mileage and about how good their service department is. Once a contract is consummated the final insult is the amnesia they suffer as a direct result of counting their commission bucks. Taking all this into consideration, securing the required level of intestinal fortitude just to walk into a showroom requires months of effort. The steps are all too familiar to any of you who share my distaste with the unnecessarily cruel practice of choosing, negotiating for and finally getting possession of a car.

Step one can take months of reality testing. Do I really need a car? Unless you live in midtown Gotham City and never leave the place the answer is inevitably yes. Unless your life's ambition is to imitate Rip Van Winkle check off the yes column. Unless you have two years worth of taped soap operas to catch up on, quit stalling, the answer is yes.

Step two is a warm up for step three so it cannot be skipped. What kind of a car do I want? Reliable—sure. Attractive—without a doubt. After all, you are what you drive? Affordable—quit dreaming, there is no such thing. OK, now we've narrowed it down to a reliable attractive car we can't afford. Good.

Step three is a toughie. Foreign or Detroit? This is perplexing when you consider that your two choices are Michigan or the rest of the world. It's even harder when you remember the solemn promise you made to yourself after you finally unloaded that last

bucket of bolts and EPROMs from a domestic manufacturer. But, you are older now, your memory has faded and there is that whopping 75 trillion dollar deficit that you really should consider after listening to the heartbeat of America.

Step four begins to narrow the field with the real nitty gritty of the selection process. What shape car do I want, what kind of interior seating, how many speakers for the stereo system? Do I want to press a button or crank up the window? Are four doors an important thing in my life, and do I want to be able to unlatch the trunk lid from inside the car? Is the antenna in the windshield? Is there a good place on the dash to camouflage the fuzz buster? Does it really matter how many liters the engine is and why? Is that thing in the trunk a real tire or something that can double as a spare for the Soap Box Derby or a standin for the Pillsbury bake off?

Step five is the culmination of steps one through four. You've exerted all this energy making decisions and you have a firm mental picture of exactly what you want. You have also given up on the idea of affordability and have promised yourself you will go out less. Now you have to actually go out and find that car. Obviously this requires a face to face confrontation with one of THOSE salesmen. I don't care where you go, they are all the same. They all wear sports jackets of natural materials and pinky rings with gaudy stones. They all are groomed within an inch of their manicles and every one of them, without exception, has a picture of a simply adorable child on his desk. A picture of the mother of said child is not evident. These guys are friendly, gregarious, a tad suggestive if they think they can get away with it and will move mountains to make a sale, provided they confer with the manager first. Believe me when I tell you that this is a universal ruse. There are no managers to confer with. All these guys do is disappear to the mens room for the prescribed period of time or pay a brief visit to the shop and have a good laugh with the service manager. Be patient, you'll get to know HIM well about 1000 miles after the deal is made.

I think the thing that really irks me about buying a car today is that salesmen have lost the inclination to dicker. Half the fun of buying a car in the good old days was

playing Let's Make A Deal. It was a great exercise in mental gymnastics and almost always resulted in a sale. Think back with me for a moment. The object of the negotiation is selected and he gives you the price in much the same way that God gifted Moses with the two stone tablets. You sneer and get up to leave. He clears his throat, gives you a long hard look and decides that maybe he could do a little better. You remain standing. He begins to make bizzare calculations and scratchouts on his pad and comes up with a better figure. You pause pensively and make a counter offer. He shrugs his shoulders, shakes his head and excuses himself for the mandatory trip to see the manager. You sit down again trying to figure out the status of the negotiations. He returns with a counter offer. You then insist on a few extra goodies for that price. He lowers the price again but without the goodies. You slowly shake your head and tell him you're going to have to think it over and will call him later. He then stops you dead in your tracks and utters those winning words, "what do I have to do to make this sale, right now?" You've got him! Great stuff.

Step six is a mundane but necessary detail. The car is selected. The salesman tells you the price complete with disclaimers about tax, tags, dealer prep, blah, blah, blah. Financing, insurance papers, credit checks all indicate your willingness to give up your first born male child to a life of Dickensonian horror if one payment is late. Bringing in a paycheck stub to verify the income you have reported is a borderline crass and demeaning procedure. It reminds me of how I felt when my mother wrote a note to my seventh grade homeroom teacher explaining that yesterday's absence was due to cramps!

Somehow, all of the decisions get made, the i's get dotted, the t's crossed, and off you go in your brand new buggy with the strong aroma of Eau de Assemblyline. You make firm commitments about car washing and changing the oil. You even go so far as to tell yourself you are NOT going to smoke in the car. Would that those promises should last as long as the payment schedule does!

Well, I've just been through it step by bloody step. After all this it hardly seems relevant that the thing ain't red!