COVER STORY

"It's women's day, her own is coming home to her - her 'ownest own'. '. .

And in this happy change, the automobile is playing no small part."

The Woman and The Ford: 1911

Very few people are aware of the fact that, had it not been for the confidenceand impatience — of a Mann heim, Germany housewife, Berta Ringer Benz, the automobile might not have gotten its illustrious start as soon as it did.

If the name sounds familiar, it's because Berta's husband, Karl Benz, is the acknowledged inventor of the world's first practical automobile in 1886.

The story goes that Berta had been trying to convince her perfectionist spouse that his three-wheeled contrivance - of which he had built three versions — was good enough to produce and sell.

Benz, of course, would not hear of it. So, in an act of seeming desperation, Berta awoke in the early morning hours of August 1888 and packed her two sons Eugen and Richard, 15 and 13 years of age respectively, into the Benz motorcar.

Their destination? Grandmother's house in Pforzheim, 60 miles away. Despite no paved roads, no service stations, in fact, no gasoline as it exists today (they used distillation benzene, a cleaning fluid available in small quantities from pharmacies), no lower gears to help them over hills and certainly no McDonald's, they made the trip through a combination of ingenuity and sheer physical strength.

Upon arrival, she telegraphed an alternately worried, surprised, relieved and ultimately, proud husband Karl to tell him about their journey.

As a result of this unofficial engineering evaluation, Benz was able to recognize the need for a hill climbing lower gear in the transmission as well as other modifications, and thus laid plans almost immediately for mass production.

By December 1899, his company had produced 2,000 automobiles, making him the world's leading manufacturer of the "horseless carriage."

That company, acclaimed the world over for the solidity of its product, is to-



Buick's handcrafted Reatta Convertible may well become the woman's luxury/sports car choice of 1990.

day known as Mercedes - Benz and in no small way, owes its existence to Berta Benz' confidence in her husband's

Amazingly, the automobile has officially been around for 104 years; the importance of women to its success long recognized.

. . .

However, it has only been in recent years that corporate advertising and marketing strategies have specifically called for ads directed at the woman car

Industry sales figures show that in just eight years, from 1980 to 1988, purchases of new cars by women rose 11 percent - from 36 percent to 47

By the end of the 1990 model year, it is expected that this figure, representing \$65 billion in annual car sales, may increase beyond 51 percent — a solid indicator of the burgeoning affluence of women in general.

Volkswagen's Donna Boland, manager of public relations, noted that while Volkswagen does not specifically target women's magazines or structure woman buyer specific ads, her influence and



Mercedes-Benz is looking to sell 32% of the 500SL and 300SL Roadster to women.

capabilities are not lost to them.

And with the recent launch of the allnew Passat sedan and wagon coupled with the highly visible "Fahrvergnugen" ad campaign, its success is tied into the car's acceptance by women.

"The Passat was designed for a buyer with sophisticated tastes in terms of styling and performance, but whose lifestyle demands a car with versatility and value," said Boland.

"In meeting that goal, we designed a family sedan that, coincidentally, delivered on the major features that appeal to women car buyers - dependability, handling, value for the money and comfort.

"We expect female buyers will account for 40 percent of Passat sales."

Interestingly, as early as 1911, Ford Motor Company not only recognized the

The Woman and The Automobile

By Myron D. Stokes



Left: Ford wants to recapture the top sales spot with the redesign of '91 Escort.

Below: Lexus division of Toyota has every reason to believe that its LS400 high-performance luxury sedan will be a sales success with affluent women.



significant influence that women have on the family car buying decision, but their need for personal freedom - accorded by the automobile — as well.

To illustrate: Note the following excerpt from a Ford sales brochure entitled, The Woman and the Ford published in 1911:

"It's woman's day. Her own is coming home to her - her 'ownest own.' She shares the responsibilities — and demands the opportunities and pleasures of the new order. No longer a 'shut-in' she reaches for an ever wider sphere of action — that she may be more the woman.

'And in this happy change the automobile is playing no small part. It has broadened her horizon — increased her pleasures — given new vigor to her body - made neighbors of far away friends and multiplied tremendously her range of activity. It is a real weapon in the changing order.'

Although the copy read like a paragraph from Ms. Magazine, the message was clear; the woman car buyer was extremely important to manufacturers only twelve years after the birth of the automobile and remains as such.

As we enter the 1990's, auto producers are faced with fragmenting markets - especially the U.S. - which are the result of additional car lines being presented to the public.

This requires a more focused marketing and advertising directive which will address specific segments, or niches, within the marketplace.

Among these are women, Blacks and Hispanics, as well as other ethnic groups and buyer categories.

The industry is not only responding to these new market conditions by tailoring ads to the preferences of these groups, but in the case of women, they are actually designing cars with them in mind.

As an example, the marketing objective for the 1991 Australian built, Italian designed, American/Japanese engineered Mercury Capri roadster expects that 65 percent of these cars will be purchased by young (27plus) outgoing, college educated females with a median income of \$35,000.

Capri shares componentry with Mazda's outrageously successful Miata MX-5 sports car — an unabashed hit among women buyers — and should do rather

The question should be asked, however, what types of cars are women inclined to buy?

As a rule, they tend to buy a higher mixof low - priced cars. (see chart) This tendency is directly attributable to the fact that most working women are younger than the general population, and thus have lower incomes, primarily due to lesser seniority.

Additionally, their pay in virtually all work areas has historically been less than male counterparts and as a result, they have less to spend on a car.

A random element in the woman car buyer's predictability equation is the fact that she will spend more on a convertible vehicle like Mustang or LeBaron which has list prices considerably higher than the hardtop version.

According to 1988 figures*, women purchased 55 percent of subcompact, 44 percent of the mid-size cars and 28 percent of luxury cars. As far as performance car purchases, women purchased 19 percent of all Chevrolet Corvettes sold, and II percent of Porsche 911s.

Nevertheless, there has been a trend developing that shows a growing affluence among women and is reflected by the uplevel cars purchased by them in ever increasing quantities.

"Women's buying power has grown dramatically in the last decade, partly because more than half the female population works outside the home," said Saab - Scania of America President Bob Sinclair.

"Now, women's car choices aren't dictated by tight budgets. They can buy the car they want with the options they want,

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