

ENDPAPER

The Road Less Traveled

BY TRACY YOUNG

The biggest challenge facing the auto industry right now is the trend toward sport utility vehicles, sales of which topped 1.5 million in 1994 while luxury car sales stayed flat. Consequently, a number of high-end-car makers have been following Range Rover's lead and are busily developing their own elegantly appointed four-by-four's. What remains to be seen is whether the Germans, the Swedes, et al. can project the middle-American toughness that gives the sport vehicle its cachet.

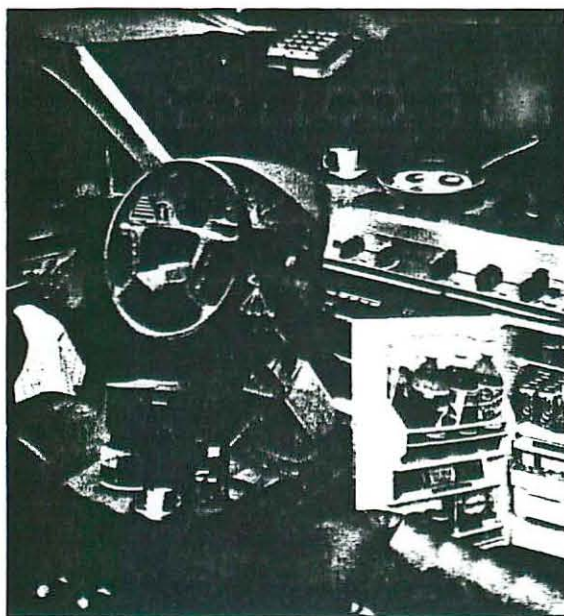
THE BMW LATTE

The Bavarian Motor Works enters the sport utility market with its most innovative model since the 535i Touring. While the "Latte" shares the traction problems that have plagued other Beemers, it more than compensates with the kind of conveniences today's upscale truck owners demand: a Braun espresso console; heat-resistant triple-carbon cup-holders with front and rear anti-sway bars and full-sport jounce bumpers, and a CFC-free miniature Jenn-Air refrigerator, which tucks into the dash. (The limited-edition "William Sonoma" also includes a camp-size Viking stove and a complete set of All-Clad cookware.)

Truly the ultimate dining machine, the "Latte" comes equipped with a Lohman turkey-calling kit for those adventurous souls who consume only what they kill. As for luxe, *calme et volupté*, the tasteful interior is what you expect in a German automobile: leather this supple looks good enough to eat. With a "Latte," you run out of road before you run out of food.

THE MERCEDES DKNY-SL

With the stunning, new "DKNY-SL," Mercedes-Benz (Stuttgart) and Donna Karan (New York) have together come up with a stylish way to capture the women's market, which currently accounts for 46 percent of total auto sales in the United States. The solution is remarkably simple: a four-wheel-drive transmission mounted to a shopping cart. But God is in the details. A vast web of cargo netting keeps packages under control during intensive maneuvers. Conveniently situated in both driver- and passenger-side door panels is a hair dryer/nail clipper/tweezer/mascara wand/eyelash curler/lipstick brush licensed by the company that



makes the S.O.G. Paratool. The interior mirrors are Dorian Gray-scale tinted. And standard with each vehicle is an inflatable Safe-T-Man, available in salt-and-pepper-haired white lawyer; black-haired, brown-skinned M.D., and bald Hispanic personal trainer. (Button-on legs are optional.)

THE CADILLAC SAN CLEMENTE

The "San Clemente" is the first sport "ute" created especially for the mature market. It comes fully loaded with four-channel antilock disk brakes on all four wheels and a Magellan Global Positioning System that not only keeps the driver oriented but can also retrieve lost golf balls.

A generously sized glove compartment snaps open to reveal an attractive pullout heart-rate monitor, occult-blood home test kit and Wahl personal trimmer. Nonslip, cushioned floor mats

are available in 20 decorator colors. And a unique Owner Profile System "remembers" seat position, mirror settings, radio stations, birthdays and anniversaries.

THE SAAB ROAD WORRIER

The Saab "Road Worrier" has taken the safety features of the Discovery and put a sober Swedish spin on it. For starters, the vehicle has a digitally monitored top speed of 40 m.p.h. The chassis is a titanium boxed shell. And each seat back contains a Duram Emergency Smoke Hood in case you're forced to park near a restaurant that allows cigarette smoking. Most important, Saab knows that safety features can often be liabilities and that researchers at the University of Michigan Medical School have found extensive evidence of air-bag trauma. The "Road Worrier" is fully prepared for such an emergency with dual Air Bag Evac Kits. Encased in upholstery-leather sheaths with child-proof rivet closures, these hand-forged Buck knives will allow you to cut yourself free if an air bag should accidentally deploy.

When push comes to shove, the "Road Worrier" is a family car. Child-seat covers sewn from the same rugged thornproof oilcloth used in Princess Anne's shooting breeks will protect your car's interior from spilled formula, vomit stains and puncture wounds; snug-fitting metal mesh effectively separates children from the adult passenger compartment, and, for lesbian couples waiting to adopt, a Cassell's Chinese-English dictionary stows neatly in the glove compartment.

THE MACK DE SADE

The "De Sade" is just the rig for any freewheelin' libertine who thinks a four-by-four is too vanilla. The club cab sports all the amenities, from the genuine P.V.C.-covered bench seat and studded-leather racing-harness-type restraints to a full-featured TENS Unit and autoclave. Out back on the flatbed, there's plenty of room for a quartersawed oak pillory, two 14-gauge aluminum spanking horses with retractable blaze-orange safety triangles and a locking wire-mesh cage with ergonomic padded cuffs. Privacy is also an option with an all-steel cap that installs in a matter of minutes, if you have willing help. Purchase your vehicle before Oct. 31 and receive a dealer rebate — plus a gross of heavy-duty lash straps. As if spending this kind of money on a truck weren't punishment enough. ■