

# Are foreign cars made by miracle workers?

There is an attitude among some drivers that foreign cars are made by little miracle workers who do good work.

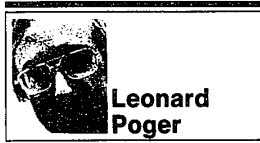
Part of the notion is that American cars are made by beer-drinking slob who don't give a damn about their work or the products they make.

I'm no personnel management expert. But I have talked a lot of cars over the past 24 years and talk to colleagues and neighbors about their cars — both American and foreign.

I've concluded that the "little ole miracle worker building those foreign cars" is really a myth.

This is based on my experience with a Volkswagen, bought in 1970, driven for about 81,000 miles, and which died in 1978 of what medical doctors call "TBF," total body failure.

I've driven most of my American cars more than 81,000 miles in a shorter period of time, which means those miles were harder.



**Leonard Poger**

**THE PROBLEMS** with the VW started within a year of its purchase.

First, the body started to rust, even though I had the car rustproofed a month after it was delivered.

About 1 1/2 years into the car's life, I discovered another fact about imports.

It happened when the muffler system needed replacement.

With American cars I previously owned, I merely drove to the corner Midas or Tuffy shop and had the job completed during my lunch hour. I ate at a nearby boneyard, so there was no inconvenience for me.

But with the VW, the muffler manufacturers at that time (mid-1971) didn't even look at foreign cars.

I was forced to call several VW specialty service shops to get prices.

I also found out that you have to wait several days to get the car into the shop. Then the fun starts.

The muffler replacement — a half-hour job for my 1966 Mustang — requires 2 1/2 hours for a VW, and there is no guarantee on the parts.

I was used to the lifetime guarantee on my previous cars.

So for double the price of an American car muffler,

I had to arrange with a co-worker to pick me at the VW shop, drive me to the office and then drive me back later in the day.

In the meantime, I was without wheels for the day.

**THE NEXT** shock about the "savings" promised by the VW ads came when the car was three years old. At 30,000 miles, according to the owner's manual, it was time to repack the wheel bearings.

On my Mustang, that job was done by a corner gas station for about \$5 (in the late 1960s) in less than a half-hour.

Now in 1973, the VW service cost \$50 — a wheel. The job was completed, but I never had the wheels repacked at the next 30,000-mile period.

What happened to the car? A lot of things, but not the disastrous threat of wheels locking up on me if the bearings weren't repacked.

Once in a while, I would have a stalling problem on cold mornings.

With American cars, high school auto shop students on my block would easily correct any problems.

But with a foreign car, even licensed mechanics weren't familiar with the VW carburetor.

**ABOUT** 1976, the transmission went out and had to be repaired for about \$230.

A year later, I had a new experience. While driving on Five Mile near Farmington Road, I drove through a large curb-side puddle.

In seconds, I wished I was wearing a giant diaper over my slacks.

The car's floor had rusted out and the water from the puddle splashed up into the passenger compartment.

A co-worker was kind enough to replace the floor with a new sheet of metal.

But that wasn't the end of my problems. While driving over a rough railroad crossing, I heard a "thunk."

The car was still moving, but there was some funny noises under the front end.

Returning to my friendly service shop, I was told I needed a new front axle — which cost me about \$330.

While shopping around for service prices outside the VW dealership, I noticed an interesting double-standard in repair prices.

At a major department store service shop, the price for a specific job (I don't remember what it was) was \$75 for American cars.

The price for VWs was \$34.95.

**THE END** of the bug came on a Saturday morning in mid-March.

I was on my way to cash a state income tax refund check. The car started fine, but it wouldn't move when I tried to engage the transmission.

After a few obscenities and gesturing to God to ask "Why me?" I left the car in the parking lot and quickly turned to the want ad sections of several newspapers to find a suitable used car to replace the bug.

This isn't to say that all foreign cars are problems, or that all American cars were built to last a lifetime.

But the savings in gasoline of about \$160 a year (based on 15,000 miles of driving a year and 50 cents per gallon prices) was more than off set by the additional service charges — not to mention the extra time and inconveniences.

Since the VW experience, I have bought three used cars — all American.



**Daniels' den**  
**Emory Daniels**

## 'No rooms at the inn'

Several years ago six travelers entered a small town in the east looking for a place to stay.

The six young men were looking for jobs as well as lodging. But in other towns they had not found either.

Somehow they hoped this small village would be different. Rejection had become a way of life, but they still were not used to being scorned.

And even as they walked down the streets of this village, they felt very uncomfortable because the townsfolk were staring, watching every move the six made.

A cold feeling came over each — once again, rejection.

Rejected because they were different from other people. Not real different — just a little. Some looked just a little different, a blank stare in the eyes as if they were daydreaming. Some talked differently, a slight slur as if they had a swollen tongue. One man was clumsy and stumbled along as he walked. Another was different because, although a grown man physically, he thought like and behaved as a child.

Yes, each one was just a little bit different from all the "normal" people in the village. But that difference was enough to cause the rejection. Nobody would hire anyone who was different; no one wanted a neighbor who wasn't exactly normal.

**AND SO** THE six travelers went from house to house, from neighborhood to neighborhood, from hotel to motel, looking without success for a place to live.

Eventually they left and found a place to live on the edge of the village. There was this large house on a hill, and at the bottom of the hill was a cave carved into the mountainside.

The cave once was used to house animals and so was carved into stalls. But there no longer were any animals at the manor and so the retired farmer in the large house agreed that the travelers could live in the cave.

The six men did chores for the farmer who, in turn, fed them. At night they returned to the cave to sleep.

Once a year they would rise up in the morning, leave the cave, and walk down the hill toward the village in search of more comfortable lodging.

But each year they would return to the cave in the evening because there never was any room for them in the village.

The townsfolk still shied away from them because they were different. And as the years passed, another reason to abhor them emerged.

"The men were cave-dwellers. They don't live in nice brick homes as we do, but have spent all these years in the cave. They lack ambition and are shiftless; in fact, they probably are dangerous. They don't mean to do any harm, but living like that isn't normal."

And so the men became known as the cave-dwellers, and the word spread that they were not only a little bit different but also a little bit dangerous, especially to young, innocent, defenseless children.

The six gave up hope of ever living in the village because, indeed, there was no hope. And so they remained in the cave, content to do chores for the farmer in return for food.

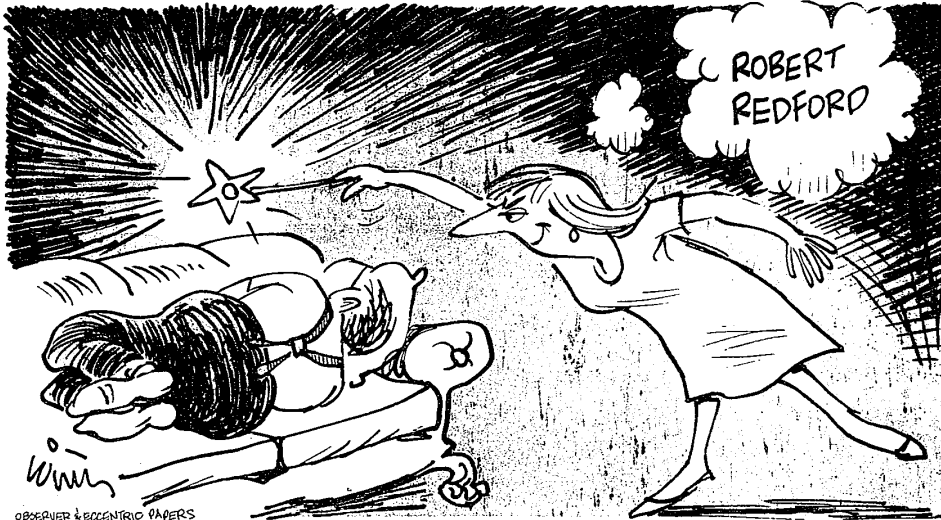
But it was too late for them to live a contented life. The townsfolk, wanting to protect the innocent children, would occasionally climb the hill out of town and throw stones at the cave-dwellers. Once someone set a fire in the cave but, fortunately, the men were on top of the hill chopping wood at the time.

Eventually the farmer died and the cave-dwellers had to leave because there was no one to do chores for in return for food.

They did not return to the village, though, because down there they were hated and feared. Instead they wandered endlessly in search of another cave, and for another caretaker.

And for the rest of their lives they were greeted with rejection, hatred, fear and scorn — all because they were a little bit different. They were adults, but they also were retarded.

For them, there was no room at the inn.



OBSEVER & ECCENTRIC PAPERS

## Area shops laud magic wand

*Do not attempt to operate until you have mastered complete instructions enclosed.*  
— Warning printed on Magic Wand box

Has the Pet Rock craze of several years ago met its match?

Thirty-year-old Laura Chatain of Harbor Springs is beginning to think so — certainly, she's wishing and hoping it has. Laura is the inventor of the new gift gimmick, the Original Magic Wand.

Wife of a sail maker and mother of two children, she and her family in 1978 moved to Harbor Springs from California.

Laura was struck with the need to invent something that could solve a pesky problem which seemed to be cycling around her mind. Why must a person make only a wish once a year, while melted wax is running down the candles onto the birthday cake, while others are shouting, "Make a wish, make a wish?"

**WISHING SHOULD BE** more meaningful than that, thought Laura.

Why not invent a magic wand that could make wishes come true any time a person really wanted to throw himself into the true art of wishing?

So Laura did just that.

She hasn't had a moment of peace since.

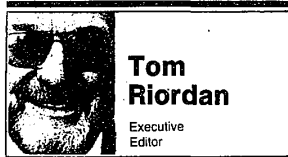
Now on sale in many local gift stores, Laura's Magic Wand is making quite a hit. Here are some comments from area shops where this zany item is on sale.

"Tom Ungroth of Crown House of Gifts, Troy: "It's doing quite well. We sold 60 units in less than two weeks."

"Esther Rosenthal of the Paper Place, Southfield: "They're selling very well. I just put in a re-order. Makes a nice Christmas gift."

"Ellen Cox, The Mole Hole, Birmingham: "It's a good seller, unique."

"Paul McDevitt of E.J. McDevitts, Livonia: "It's the type of item that people are buying, not as a gag gift but for someone they don't know what to get."



**Tom Riordan**  
Executive Editor

Marion Peck of Sonny's Hallmark, Rochester: "People are buying it because it's a \$5 gift, buying it for men and for work gifts. There's a lot of positive thinking that it may work and that is something we need."

**FROM THE CROWN** outlet in Ann Arbor, Carol Hornek points out that "the gimmick is the book that comes with it."

There's no question about that. The instruction manual is a mini-masterpiece. The introduction announces:

"You are about to receive initiation into the mysteries of The Original Magic Wand. In using this passport to the land of your heart's desire, remember one simple rule."

"Wishing is a serious business."

"Used with restraint, your Original Magic Wand will give you years of trouble-free performance."

**THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL** goes merrily on from there, telling in detail how to hold the wand ("Grasp the smooth, straight end gently but firmly between thumb and index finger."), Segments tell how to make your first wish, start your car, make children go to sleep, get a raise.

On the latter, the booklet cautions, "It is extremely important that your boss does not observe you using your Magic Wand. This point cannot be overemphasized."

After I was introduced to the Magic Wand and

read the manual, a dozen questions sprang into my mind. The only person who could give me answers would be Ms. Chatain. So there I was, chatting with her on the phone.

"Who in the world wrote that delightful instruction booklet?" I asked.

"My brother-in-law, Bob Chatain, an advertising copywriter in New York. We started talking about the idea in March or April. There were half a dozen lengthy calls. We talked and talked. You know those manuals that tell you how to operate your camera. Bob writes stuff like that."

**LIFE AT THE CHATAIN** home ATW (after the wand) became a shambles. At first, assembly of the wand and instruction booklet into its attractive container was done on the Chatain dining room table. Husband Peter and daughter Kelly, 6, and son Dylan, 4, were pressed into action.

In rather quick order, Laura found she'd better rent an empty store in downtown Harbor Springs. A full-time crew of 10 now handles boxing and shipping via United Parcel Services.

Laura continues to do the office work from her house, sandwiched between two telephones which ring constantly. Keeping pace with the needs of outlets in 36 states, including 60 stores in Chicago alone, seems like a 24-hour job.

**AS LAURA AND I** chatted one recent afternoon, the other phone would keep ringing. She'd excuse herself for a minute or two to log a transaction.

Life for Laura wasn't supposed to be like that. She and Peter and the two kids had been living in California, where she had studied architectural drafting at Stanford University.

They moved to Harbor Spring when Peter took a job with the Irish Boat Shop there. The couple wanted to create a solar home, but ended up purchasing a 150-year-old farm house. Laura said reading the deed is like taking a look at an early American history book.

But looking at history isn't her lot in life now.

Instead, Laura is making it.