

U.S. auto manufacturers should throw in the towel

This is getting embarrassing — the American way of building cars, I mean. C'mon guys, let's less up. The Japanese are doing a real job on us and, very simply, we should give it up.

Even the biggest among us, General Motors, is faced with recalling 220,000 X-cars because of a faulty brake design for the front-wheel-drive cars. Some experts claim that GM just didn't have the technological know-how to do the job correctly. Naturally GM officials take offense.

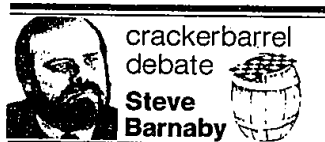
Gone are the days when the American auto industry dominated the world market. And not only will we never again rule the car-making world, we should get out altogether.

Oh sure, we shouldn't throw in the bucket tomorrow. Gradual withdrawal is fine with me. But for the sake of this economy, sound business planning and our pride, let's quit making automotive tools out of ourselves.

Like someone once suggested about the Vietnam War, let's declare victory and go home.

After all we've got our laurels on which to rest. For years we built the wide-bodied, fin-laden beasts. Cars of the future, we called them. Well, ... so we were wrong. Sure was fun, though, cruising down the road in one of those gas-guzzling monsters at 85 or 90 mph.

Remember? Every two years would be the big model changeover. America would wait in great anticipation to get a glimpse of the newest Motor City dinosaur. Press photographers would hide in the bushes around test tracks and feel a victory had



been won if they came away with a grainy, telescope glimpse of an American love machine.

Like a robbed Venus, the newest model would be draped with a sheet as a TV announcer extolled this as yet unseen beauty's virtues.

My, how we loved to buy 'em big. My how the American auto moguls loved to build 'em big. And you know what? They still do.

But the American public just isn't buying the old sex routine anymore. We found out that smaller can

be more efficient, more comfortable and better built — maybe not as sexy but less prone to recall.

We also realized the Japanese auto makers can do all these things better. And although the Big Tee auto moguls hate to admit it, they know it, too.

In a recent Wall Street Journal article, it was noted that American auto makers are turning to the Japanese for assistance in producing subcompact cars.

And the reasons are obvious. Instead of making money, the American industry loses \$1,000 for each subcompact model it builds and sells. Now that's not any way to participate in the free enterprise system.

More reasons to throw in the towel:

- Japanese assemble a subcompact in 15 hours while we do it in 30 man hours costing \$8 more an hour.

- Complete cost, starting from scratch with a hunk of iron ore, takes us 190 hours and the Japanese just 100.

- All told, experts estimate the Japanese have a cost edge of \$2,500 per subcompact over the American auto maker.

And while American automakers scramble to cut deals with Japanese industry to borrow their know-how, Chrysler with Mitsubishi and GM with Toyota, the American consumer rushes in increasing numbers to buy foreign cars.

Domestic sales were down by 18.84 percent in 1982 as compared to 1981. Fourth-quarter sales alone were down 7.68 percent despite an 8.83 percent increase in December.

The Japanese are clobbering us in the small car market. Last year they sold 49 percent of the small cars in this country. That's up from 45 percent in 1979.

Making cars? Let the people who can do it best, do it.
Computers, anyone?

the stroller
W.W.
Edgar

NY reporter makes good

DURING HIS more than a half-century of strolling along the river of printer's ink, The Stroller has enjoyed many a thrill.

He was at ringside when Luis Firpo knocked Jack Dempsey out of the ring in Yankee Stadium. He rode with Gar Wood when the Gray Fox of Algonac established a new world record in his famed speedboat, Miss America X. He thrilled when he saw his first byline over a story in the Free Press back in 1926.

But the thrill of thrills came the day he walked into the Free Press sports department and was told he was being assigned to go with the University of Detroit football team for a game at West Point with Army.

Imagine that — traveling with a nationally known college football team, working in the press box with the top sports writers from New York City.

PART OF THE thrill came when he was asked to report to Phil Reid, the kindly old managing editor, for a chat.

Mr. Reid was a fascinating person. His eyesight was so poor that he had to wear thick glasses, and he held a newspaper up to his eyes to read it. But he was one of the most kind-hearted editors The Stroller ever has met.

"I understand you are going east this weekend," he said by way of starting the chat. "Well, there are a few things I would like to tell you."

"I want you to remember that when you walk out of this building with your little typewriter, you will be the show window of the paper. So I want you to dress nicely, wear a well-pressed suit, a clean shirt and be courteous to all you meet."

"I want you to stay at the hotel and eat in the hotel dining room. And when you tip, don't be tight. Tip liberally. It may not do you any good, but the next Free Press reporter will get the benefit of it."

With that he stuck out his hand and wished The Stroller well.

THERE WAS the thrill of seeing West Point, dining with the cadets, seeing the beauty of the Hudson River. But a strange moment lay ahead.

At halftime in the football game, he received a message to catch the first train back to Detroit to cover the Lions game on Sunday afternoon.

A quick check revealed that a train could be taken across the Hudson within two hours after the game.

Two cadets were assigned to take him down the hill to catch a ferry boat across the river. Halfway down the hill, the boat was signed leaving the dock. The cadets had to get special orders to continue the journey.

When the cadets had him safely at the train, The Stroller went to tip them. The smallest bill he had was \$20, he gave it to them.

Making out his expense account later, he listed the \$20 as special automobile hire. That was aside from charging taxi fare.

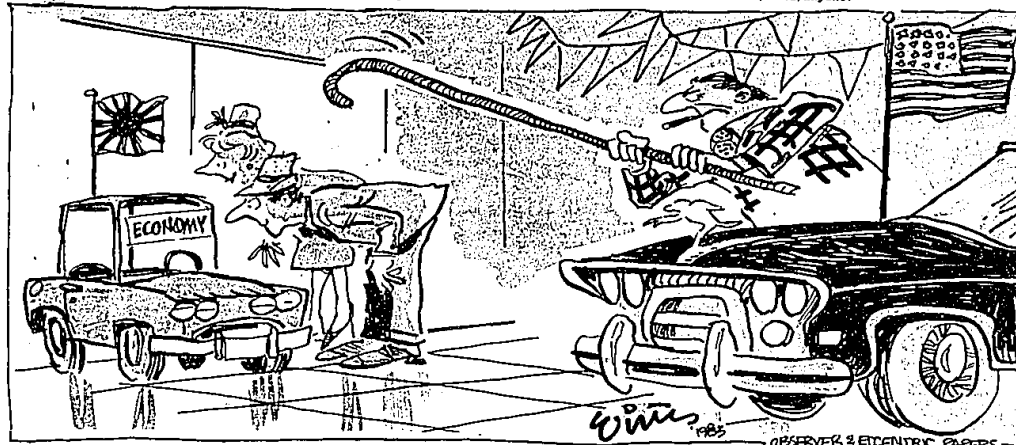
WHEN KINDLY old Mr. Reid lifted the expense account to his eyes, he noticed the \$20 charge and said, "You certainly learned quickly."

The Stroller explained, and the editor said, "And you only gave them \$20?" Turning to his secretary, he said, "Make that \$50."

Then Mr. Reid turned to The Stroller and said, "That's OK. You keep the rest as a bonus for the good job you did — on your first trip."

Is it any wonder The Stroller has that trip on the top of his list of thrills?

The like of Phil Reid isn't found in the newspaper world today.



The movies missed their big chance

WHAT IF movie cameras had been perfected, not in the 1920s, but in the 1880s? What if the first film capital of America had been 2,000 miles east of Hollywood?

As a lifelong Michigander, I have long pondered the movie industry's pronounced western state bias. Maybe I began thinking about it as a kid while watching flicks about Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, the Cisco Kid, Buffalo Bill, the Lone Ranger, the gold rush, the western plains, the Sierras and the Rockies.

Memories of the old West were fresh in the minds of the movie makers for several decades. They worked with material that was close at hand and that they knew about.

BUT SUPPOSE, as I said, the film industry had grown up in Cleveland or Detroit or Chicago.

Maybe we would have had movies not about cowboys but about lumbermen; not about gold miners but copper miners and iron miners; not about ocean pirates but Great Lakes shipping; not about Geronimo but Pontiac; not about the miserable Apaches but the poetic Chippewas.

Our tough luck, Michigan's heyday as a pioneer state had passed by the time the movie industry came along looking for material.

What started these musings was a long winter evening spent with several copies of a magazine to



Tim Richard

which I began subscribing last year after turning my attention elsewhere for a few years.

The magazine is Michigan History, published six times a year by the Michigan Department of State. Its authors pour heart and soul into their articles, even though they reach only 15,000 subscribers, don't get paid and are encouraged by the editor to do "original research leading to stunning conclusions."

THE JANUARY-FEBRUARY issue led off with an episode in the life of the Rev. Frederick Baraga, the Slovenian-born priest who later became a bishop and is a candidate for sainthood in the Catholic Church. I would wager the efforts of Mother Theresa in India are better known to modern Michiganders than their own home-grown upper peninsula missionary.

In another article, Wilson Ivins, whose career was

spent at the University of New Mexico, writes about his boyhood (1914-31) in the snows of Sault Ste. Marie — writes about it with exuberance and affection.

DAVID L. LEWIS and I have the two best jobs in this state. You know my job. Dave Lewis is professor of business history at the University of Michigan School of Business Administration, and he had a pair of articles in 1982 based on interviews with our four former living governors. It's easy to turn off the TV in the middle of the CBS Evening News with material like this.

Michigan has produced one president (Ford) and two nominees (Cass and Dewey), but did you ever hear of Omar Conger, who had shots at being speaker of the House and president? If you have any appreciation for the St. Clair Flats, you will want to meet this 19th century surveyor and lawyer who served 20 years in Congress — he's in the September-October issue.

How did a young immigrant to Muskegon from Ireland see this state?

How did we come to have such enjoyable state forests?

What form of malaria plagued the hardy pioneers worse than Indians?

The tales are all in Michigan History magazine. You won't see them in the movies.

Human need: big help from suburbia



Nick Sharkey

families were assisted.

"For many suburbanites needing help, this was a new experience," Brother Francis said. "They had never been unemployed at Christmas time."

Focus:HOPE began a project this Christmas of finding persons to donate and deliver baskets of food to the low-income elderly.

By the end of the Christmas season, more than 2,700 food baskets had been delivered to the elderly. In addition, approximately \$80,000 was donated to buy food for seniors.

"This is the first year we have done this large of a project," said Frank Bugg, project coordinator. "It exceeded our expectations."

WHILE THE Christmas giving was gratifying, the work of these social agencies (and others) must continue year round. Those who were hungry and without heat in their homes in December are no better off in January.

As Frank Bugg said, "Although over 2,700 seniors received food baskets at Christmas, our research indicates there are about 325,000 needy seniors in the tri-county area. We are pleased by what was accomplished, but frustrated because so much more needs to be done."

Focus:HOPE is in special need of suburban vol-

unteers. "Elderly persons are facing serious problems in communities such as Rochester, Livonia, Plymouth and Redford," said Bugg. "But since these areas are remote from our downtown Detroit office, the low-income elderly can only be served through local volunteers."

At the Capuchin Community Center the Rev. Lloyd Thiel worries about the future and the need for more volunteer help in the months ahead. He notes that in 1979 the center served 121,800 meals as compared to 202,716 in 1982. In 1979 6,800 clients were seen as compared to 26,334 in 1982. In 1979 there were 2,235 requests for clothing and furniture as compared to 9,616 in 1982.

"If we continue to see that kind of progression of the needy, how will we cope in the years ahead?" he asked this week.

At Dun Scotus College Brother Francis said their work cannot continue without volunteer workers. "We are strictly a volunteer organization," he said. "If we don't have the women to separate the clothes and the men to gather the food, we can't continue."

Brother Francis said Dun Scotus has helped about 10 families since the first of the year with food and money.

Focus:HOPE, the Capuchin soup kitchen and Dun Scotus are only three agencies trying to attend to the needs of the poor during these miserable economic times. Many churches and organizations continue their efforts throughout the year.

There is a place for you to help solve this problem.

Even though Christmas is only a memory, don't lose that spirit of giving.