



auto talk
Dan McCosh

Escort inventor is still into G's

Michael Valentine invented the Escort radar detector, the legality of which is currently being debated in the Michigan Legislature, along with similar devices that warn motorists that they are under radar surveillance by local police.

I'm old enough to bore the kids with reminiscences of a childhood before television, garage door openers, microwave cooking, rock and roll and radar speed traps. I confess I retain a mild paranoia about the microchip society that sometimes finds me pondering the loss of privacy to databanks when I shove my cash card in the bank slot.

Today, of course, we live with a near-complete breakdown of efficient law enforcement save in the area of enforcing speed limits, where the accuracy and stealth of a radar gun builds an instant and nearly irrefutable case against the speeder.

Valentine makes a plausible case that radar detectors partially counter the lack of due process inherent in radar speed detection systems. In private hands that give the individual at least some information about who is watching him.

At least that's one perspective, although the police officer parked under the 1-75 overpass suffering eyes from studying his rear-view mirror might think otherwise.

Valentine would seem to be stretching the point, until you note that at least a few states are now issuing speeding tickets based on robot traffic surveillance from video cameras. The cameras merely record the license number of the offending car and put the burden of proof on the car's owner to show he wasn't the one who was driving.

IN ANY CASE, Valentine is one of those incredibly bright and rich Silicon Valley types who are so facile with high technology they make inventing something as sophisticated as the Escort seem like coloring eggs.

In fact, he didn't invent the radar detector — which is basically a radio receiver that picks up the fre-

quencies of police radar guns — but he did develop special circuitry that made it work well enough to irritate the police.

His former company, Cincinnati Microwave, was formed as a mail-order house to sell his radar detectors. Valentine thought that direct mail would allow him to keep his costs low and it would allow him to offer lengthy trial periods — which he thought would be necessary to convince skeptical potential customers.

Cincinnati Microwave rode the boom in radar detectors enhanced by the national 55-mph speed limit. Today the market for radar detectors is estimated to top \$300 million. By the time he sold his share in the company, Valentine was rich enough to retire very, very early.

HE WASN'T finished yet, though. Valentine Research recently turned out another automotive gizmo called the G-analyst. It's a remarkable piece of technology that uses some of the innards of the navigation radar speed detection system to detect how fast a car is braking, cornering and accelerating.

It's a fascinating device, and Valentine had hopes it would improve drivers' skills, hence reduce accidents. It also seemed to be another good candidate for mail order. But so far the response has been disappointing for the G-analyst, especially compared to the demand for the radar detectors, according to Valentine.

SOME OF his best customers so far, ironically, have been local police departments who are using the G-analyst to do research in how skid marks correlate to vehicle speed in accident analysis.

His non-competitive agreements with Cincinnati Microwave are due to expire soon, and he may once again return to his original niche.

Back to star wars on the highways.

Dan McCosh is the automotive editor of Popular Science Magazine.

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an international advertising-marketing consultant and 30-year veteran in the retailing community. He is founder and publisher of the MOUSER REPORT, a monthly retail advertising newsletter and in 1985 the MOUSER INSTITUTE was established to provide classroom training. During the past several years Charlie has inspired more than 50,000 seminar attendees throughout the USA and Canada.



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marketplace

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Oberlin & Co. Advertising Inc. have moved to the Nottingham Office Plaza, Suite 135, 32300 Northwestern Highway, Farmington Hills.

R. J. Baker Advertising of Troy were named winners of the Telly Award for their commercials for Northern Michigan Hospitals.

Jay Alit & Associates of Southfield has acquired the Troy-based financial consulting firm of Cross & Co.

Sarah Wolk Associates of Birmingham was named public relations and marketing counsel for Small Business Strategy Group, Southfield.

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