

Newfangled electronic map works, I guess

I never really trusted new technology after they took out the old Cinema screen at the Music Hall, figuring that was final proof none of this newfangled stuff was going to last. Even my stereo still has real tubes.

Just when I'd gotten used to doing quick changes on the old 78s, I had a tough time getting used to long-play records.

Which makes me one of the last people to turn loose in the wilds of Los Angeles trying to find my way between Pasadena and Santa Barbara by navigating with a computer.

In fact, I was getting a dose of something called "technology transfer," one of those business buzzwords infecting the auto business these days. With some of the same

kind of reasoning that had us investing millions in the space program to develop technology that someday was going to reach the common man, GM bought a half dozen or so of high-tech firms a couple of years ago with the intention of bringing some of this Silicon Valley (or is it Silicon?) stuff back to Detroit.

OF COURSE the main thing the space program left us was a few odds and ends such as high-temperature cookware and one rock star walking backward on stage. GM's acquisition of Hughes Aircraft, EDS Corp. and a smattering of artificial intelligence, robotics and other high-tech companies had loftier goals. Like getting me to Santa Barbara without entering Nevada.



auto talk
Dan McCosh

The doodad that was supposed to accomplish this is called the Etak navigator, a kind of miniature television set mounted on a stalk that displayed a tiny triangle, representing me and the Olds 88 I was driving, superimposed on a map of greater Los Angeles. As I drove, the map scrolled under the tiny triangle and the position of the car on the map changed.

IT WAS a fascinating concept, originally developed by a former sailboat racer who was having a tough time finding his marina. GM has high hopes for the Etak system, which already is in the hands of a few police departments and florists. The actual navigation comes from a computer that records distance and the angle you turn the wheel, moving the display to account for

every gyration of the car with uncanny accuracy. I was so absorbed in watching the tiny triangle move over the map it took a couple of polite taps on the horn of the Datsun I was running off the road to make me return my attention to where I was going.

The maps themselves were contained in a series of tape cassettes that had to be loaded into the machine as you crossed a particular territory. They don't sound like much on the radio, I discovered.

BUT ONCE the map was inserted, the little triangle dutifully recorded my aimless circling to find the Ventura freeway, and even a side trip into a McDonald's parking lot to get some chicken McNuggets. Cross

street names on overpasses mainly coincided with the street names on the Etak map as I rolled along. As it turned out, the Pacific Ocean showed up pretty much when the little triangle predicted it would, just as I was getting used to watching the little TV screen.

I was elated, feeling as if I'd experienced the future of the automobile and some of the conveniences that await the commuter of the brave new world.

Now I figure I'm ready to try one of those new little records with the big holes in the middle.

Dan McCosh is the automotive editor of Popular Science Magazine.

Variable annuity insurance meets some needs well

Part II

Last week, we discussed several life insurance settlement options. Today we will deal with variable annuity options.

One of the major limitations of fixed annuity option is that it is, in effect, a savings account that earns a fixed interest rate for a specified period. Consequently, it does not provide a good hedge against inflation.

An alternative to fixed annuity is the variable annuity option. Simply stated, a variable annuity is a family of mutual funds within an annuity contract. Under this option, the insurance company offers an assortment of stock, bond and money market funds and puts the responsibility of choosing between them squarely on the shoulders of the policyholder.

Variable annuity contract values fluctuate with the fund's value. When annuitized, the annual payouts also vary with the portfolio's performance.

For a mortality and risk-free 0.8 percent to 1.4 percent of assets, most variable annuities provide a guaranteed death benefit (if death precedes annuitization) of the greater of the total purchase payments, less any withdrawals, or the value of the account.

The fee also guarantees that annuity payments will not be decreased should the insurance company incur adverse mortality experiences or increases in administrative costs.

Money left with insurance company

The final option for the beneficiary is to leave the money at a stipulated rate of interest with the insurance company, which acts as a trustee. The interest rate offered by the company may vary, depending upon the prevailing market conditions.

However, the guaranteed minimum interest rate paid is always approximately 1 percent. This option is the least attractive and is generally not preferred by most policy holders.

Seminar: "Lump-Sum Distribution — Five Choices," "Medicare Tax — Myth vs. Facts," "Mutual Funds — Taxable vs. Tax-deferred" and "High Returns — Must you Sacrifice Safety?"

The seminar, sponsored by the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and Coordinated Financial Planning, will

be held 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, May 9, in the offices of Coordinated Financial Planning, Sheffield Office Park, 3250 W. Big Beaver, Suite 540, Troy. For reservations, call 643-8888.

Sid Mittra is a professor of finance, School of Business, Oakland University, and owner of Coordinated Financial Planning.



finances and you

Sid Mittra

marketplace

Houston & Associates Inc. of Bloomfield Hills and Optimized Management Solutions of Birmingham have merged and are continuing operations under the name of Houston & Associates Inc.

W.B. Doner & Co. of Southfield was named runner-up in Advertising Agency of the Year competition.

Farmington Cycle World of Farmington Hills was appointed a dealer for the new Bombardier Sea-Doo, a one-or-two-person jet-driven personal water craft introduced last season by the Marine Products Division of Bombardier Inc.

Balley, Klepinger, Medrich & Muhlberg Inc. won 7 ADDYs in the Michigan competition sponsored by the American Advertising Federation.

Trowbridge House Communications Corp. of Troy was contracted by Clayton Environmental Consultants to create and produce trade show display materials for both their U.S. and Canadian operations.

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Marketing Impact Inc. of Southfield was selected as the advertising agent for Buckland Van Wald.

Robert Solomon & Associates, Advertising was named the agency of record for Precision Tune Centers of Detroit.

Smith & Schurman Associates Inc. of Bloomfield Hills won fourth place in a statewide competition to design a facility for the homeless in Grand Rapids.

Fireman's Fund Mortgage Corp. of Farmington Hills appointed Total Marketing Services as its new communications company.

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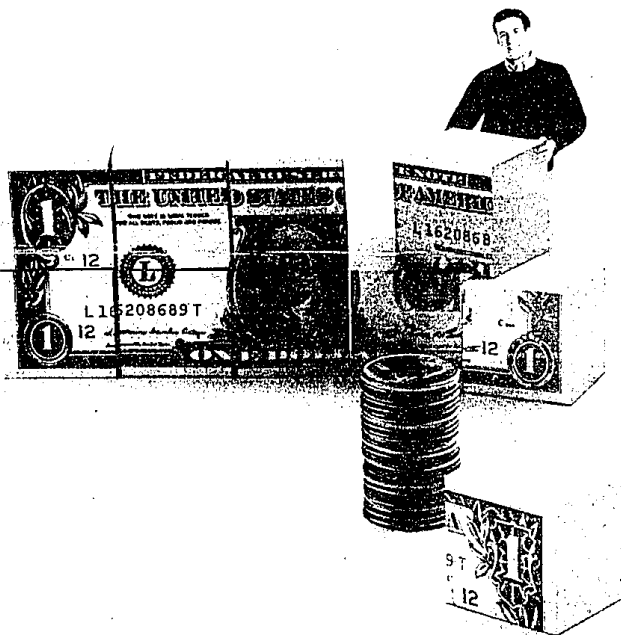
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March, 1989