



Sarah Robertson, 2½, of Rochester Hills, breaks into the world of modeling by posing with such sticky car decorations as Garfield, Mr. C. Moore Bunz (a moonie), Fido Dido and Lil' Earl the Dead Cat. These are the latest in car accessory fashion, so drop those fuzzy dice!

By Amy Rosa
staff writer

Well, fall is here and you know what that means . . . Yep, that's right, time for the annual review of the coming (and currently stylish) fashions for the car!

Get out your notebook, because there are a lot of nifty things on the market these days.

Foremost, you should note that long gone are the days of fuzzy dice dangling from the windshield. If you're cool, you're into any of a number of suction cup applied stuffed animals and dolls.

For instance, almost everyone's seen the orange-striped Garfield the Cat adorning rear and side car windows.

Often Garfield might be accompanied by his comic strip buddy Odie, the stupid yellow dog. These items have been around for a couple of years. (Heck, Garfield even appeared in the movie "The Abyss," attached to the inside of a water roving machine's bubble.)

However, consumer demands have shifted ever so slightly, giving rise to the not-so-cute and somewhat macabre objects.

Window dressing From fur to fannies for you car

A terrific example of this is PACO the Pit Bull. PACO consists of the darn near life-size head of a growling pit bull, two front paws and suction cups to hold them in place.

"When placed properly," state the instructions, "he will appear to be attacking the window glass." Nice.

"WE BOUGHT six last week, and now we're down to two," said Stacey Muran, temporary assistant at A.J. Cheers in Troy's Oakland Mall. "We just can't keep them in stock."

At 35 bucks a pop, Muran said PACO may soon replace another recent car accessory that has captured the market since its release — Mr. C. Moore Bunz, a moonie.

Make no mistake, this is not a religious object, rather a doll that sticks to a window and drops its

drawers on command, via an air pump the driver controls.

"We've had him for three or four months, and he's sold extremely well," said Martha Lawrence, part owner of the gift store "Things" in Rochester's Winchester Mall. The last one left in stock had a price tag of \$27.99.

"We have to order it constantly," she said.

"What we find is that these items reflect the personality of the customer," Muran said. "Some people get embarrassed trying to describe a certain item that they want."

Another suctioned-up car doll capturing the public's dollar is called "Fido Dido." A strange name for a strange doll. Fido, also found in Muran's store, is a black and white stuffed figurine that claims no gender, no age and no purpose in life.

Most importantly Fido has no prejudices.

"Fido is against no one," says the sales tag. Fido also sees everything, judges nothing, is powerful, comes from the past and is the future, in case you're interested.

ALTHOUGH DOLLS are making headway in the car accessory market, animals are still the favored object of manufacturers. And cats are the heading the pack.

Taking off on the Garfield character, is the "Crushed Kitty." This creature, or actually half a creature, is composed of a Garfield-like rear-end and tail. It sticks on one's trunk near the door crack to make it look as though the cat is sticking halfway out of the trunk. Also nice.

It is presumed the makers of this item were sick of seeing Garfield's

cute face peering at them from passing car windows. This is so popular that Thingz was currently out of them.

Included in the cat lineup is "Lil' Earl the Dead Cat," which is a gray stuffed, although flattened cat. Earl's sales tag reads: "The last cat you'll ever be stuck with." It sells for \$19.99, also at Thingz.

Earl comes equipped with his own death certificate, listing such important data as name, age (???), sex (too young) and cause of death (curiosity).

So much for gross.

Now if your taste runs more along the cutesie and not-so-gross line, you'll be happy to know there are a number of things to choose from. Most gift, card and novelty shops sell nice stuffed animals of all sorts —

rabbits, pigs, dogs, etc., with suction cups for the car.

ONE SUCH PLACE is Memory Lane in the Oakland Mall. There you can find University of Michigan teddy bears, bearing the appropriate lettered sweaters, of course. There are also other bears with various words printed on their sweaters for sale.

Moving away from the animal arena, let us not forget the hanging signs. After all, it could have been the "Baby on Board" diamond-shaped sign that started it all.

Now days expect to find mostly "Batman" signs.

"A lot of them are based on what movie is out," said Mary Keenmon, assistant manager of Southfield's Kids R Us, a subsidiary of the Toys R Us stores.

The Batman collection includes such signs as "This Car Protected by the Joker," "My Other Car is the Batmobile," and just the plain black Batman sign on a yellow background.

And what besides the fuzzy dice is out of style for cars this fall?

"The California Raisins," said Keenmon. "They hung over the mirror, but they're not popular any more."

When you need a classic, rent a classic

Love of old cars fosters business

By Chris Rizk
special writer

If Batman were in town, he'd probably find a set of "wheels" on Phil Nicholas' car lot.

That is, if the famous comic book character's own Batmobile was out of commission.

"If he were here he'd rent this one," said the part-owner of Antique & Classic Car Rental.

Nicholas, 31, pointed to a '59 Cadillac with the hallmark Cadillac tailfins. It was not exactly a Batmobile, but then not all Nicholas' and 45-year-old co-owner Frank Jacobs' customers need cars to match their capes.

Their customers are, however, not satisfied with run-of-the-mill rides. That's where the partners, who once worked separate jobs, but were pulled together by the love of classic cars, come in.

Their Westland business, opened in April, offers a variety of oldies but goodies, the kind of cars that turn heads on streets.

You could say they are in the catering business. They cater cars. A customer comes in wanting a classic '57 Chevy. They have one. Another comes in and wants a stretch limo with brass trim. They have one for rent.

IN JUST FIVE months the pair have launched what promises to be a successful bid for an essentially untapped market. Nicholas said only two other businesses serve car lovers like he does. One is in Florida and the other on Rodeo Drive in California.

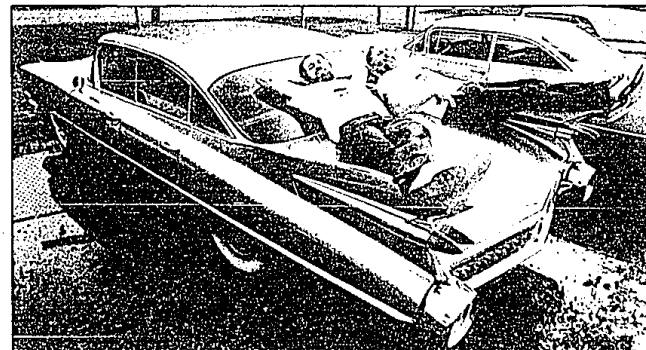
Barring a trip to Disney World or a sudden inheritance, chances are slim you'll get to drive a genuine classic any other way. It's easy to find Nicholas' and Jacobs' lot in Westland, after discerning an unassuming sign.

At first glance, it looks like a graveyard for dead cars. A closer look, behind the cyclone fence next to Nicholas' dad's tool and die shop, shows it is really a resurrection yard, where cars wait to be restored to original condition.

Nicholas said he doesn't expect much from his customers — to be a loving touch while driving the restored autos.

"We get people in here from 21 years up to 45 years and older," he said. "They're so excited because they've never driven (a classic) before."

The two men plus one employee, spend months of "hard labor" restoring cars found in junkyards or bought at auctions. Parts are kept as original as possible, right down to



Phil Nicholas (left) and partner Frank Jacobs soak up some sun on the trunk of a classic Cadillac, one of several classic cars they feature in their classic car rental business.

Bacallite steering wheels or a metal handle.

An uncanny love of autos comes not without its price. When the first car went out to the first renter, Nicholas was worried. After he got used to others "borrowing" his pride-and-joys, it was all right, he said. Customers return them in good shape.

Usually, he said, the cars are rented as gifts for someone, especially those who have everything.

"ALMOST ALL men are interested in cars but don't have the time or the money to do what it takes," he said. "So we usually get girlfriends in here to pick one up for their boyfriends."

For \$75 to \$125 a day, they can have their pick of Rolls Royces, Cadillacs or a Mercury Monclair with original tires. Or, there are always the Chevs.

Nicholas said they hope to have

one of each kind of classic car someday.

Opening the shop was a dream come true for both men. Like the boy who's head was always under the hood of some auto, Nicholas remembers when his fascination with cars began.

It isn't hard. He's been at it a long time, he said. When he was younger, he remembers walking through junkyards.

"Can you imagine," he said,

"walking through junkyards and liking it?"

He remembers, too, a family trip to Nebraska when he was 8 years old. Standing by his family and staring at an old MG its driver had driven up next to him, Nicholas remarked what a nice car it was.

The next thing he knew, he was seated next to its driver (with his parents in tow in the family vehicle) heading for the man's barn filled with classic autos, he said.

"I've loved cars since I was little," said Nicholas, almost an understatement.

Others, with perhaps a less intense love of autos, at least admire his efforts.

One mother came into the lot with her daughter who was due to be married soon, he said. After spotting a 1952 sky blue Cadillac, she said excitedly, "That's the car I was married in."

IT'S THE CAR her daughter will be married in as well, Nicholas said. She immediately rented it for her daughter's wedding.

Another customer rented a 1957 Chevy for a class reunion. For fun, they all climbed into its trunk to see how many people would fit inside, a feat reminiscent of the '50s.

Nicholas, who also rents limousines, answers his business phone with a simple, "Hi, can I help you?" To spell out all the auto available for rent, or to simply recite one of their services would be misleading, he said.

The name of the game is trying to figure out what you want before you run out of money, said Nicholas.