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# CAReport



Neon making its  
mark with tough  
twentysomething  
crowd

Chrysler Corp. President Robert Lutz borrowed an adage from ex-Chairman Lee Iacocca to introduce the carmaker's first all-new subcompact since 1978: "If this car doesn't excite you, you had better check your pulse because you're dead."

Chrysler is aiming the "no sacrifices" 1995 Neon at the twentysomething crowd, betting value for the dollar is more important than the price tag.

To make a point, Lutz reminds: "Value is more important than price. Yugo proved that."

The new-for-'95 Dodge and Plymouth-badged Neons, which can go up to 125 mph at top speed, come with an \$8,975 price tag. But the carmaker's real goal is to penetrate the lucrative overseas market, so Chrysler-badged Neons are being exported to 18 European markets via the carmaker's 18,000 European dealers.

Theodor R. Cunningham, executive vice president of



Road Test  
By Anne  
Fracassa

sales and marketing, says Neon sales are booming. In April, a record 17,941 Neons were bought nationwide.

And last month in New York, Chrysler accepted the American Marketing Association's 1994 Grand Edison New Product Marketer of the Year award for innovative excellence for its work on the Neon and Chrysler Cirrus. The two cars won individual Gold Edison Best New

## Product awards

The awards were established eight years ago to recognize American marketing excellence and innovation.

Hours after Lutz introduced the new cab-forward-designed Neon to thousands of auto executives and journalists in Frankfurt, Germany, last year, he and Chairman Robert Eaton conducted what amounted to live fireside chats via satellite with U.S. journalists in eight major cities, including Detroit and Washington.

It marked the first time a member of the Big Three automakers had introduced a U.S.-made car abroad.

Eaton was candid about the importance of the Neon to Chrysler's future.

"It is important to make a

profit" with the Neon, said Eaton, who took over as Chrysler chairman when Iacocca retired. "We do not expect to lose money on this car."

"The Neon will dispel the myth that America can't build exciting cars," added Lutz, whose 700-member platform team brought the Neon to market in 31 months at a development cost of \$1.3 billion — about half what it cost to develop the 1995 minivans. "Even though the Neon is being built in North America, it is designed for markets around the world."

"The Neon is a different kind of American small car. It will not be a car of sacrifices. It'll have performance, be environmentally responsible, fuel efficient, stylish ... a car

with personality and character. We want it to be a car people want to own, not a car they buy because that's all they can afford. It's a car that goes beyond expectations. It's more than just transportation."

Lutz expects a good response to the Neon in Europe.

"Chrysler is showing a commitment to the European market," he said. "When we returned to Europe in 1987, some people said American carmakers couldn't innovate without a Japanese or European partner. ... For too many years, American companies were behind the curve. But Chrysler wants to prove with the Neon that it's a whole new game."

Four-door Neons are made in Belvidere, Ill. Coupes are manufactured in Toluca, Mexico. Belvidere can make up to 300,000 Neons a year and Toluca another 75,000.

The 2,320-pound Neon offers a 2.0-liter, 16-valve, single overhead cam 4-cylinder engine and is available in 5-speed manual transaxle or 3-speed automatic transaxle. It comes equipped with dual front-seat air bags, available anti-lock brakes and an integrated child safety seat.

Lutz said the Neon's flashy look could make all the difference to the discerning buyer.

"The young Germans I've met here are particularly taken with the two-door coupe," he said. "They really like the different headlights."

If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVAN-TI1054. Avanti's America Online mailbox. Or comment through the Internet at AVAN-TI1054@aol.com.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

## Winter Is Over, but Don't Neglect Your Wiper Blades

The passing of another cold, dreary winter means that you, as a driver, no longer have to contend with icy driving conditions that can make roads dangerous.

However, you're not in the clear yet. The effects of all that winter driving have probably taken their toll on the rubber edge of your car's wiper blades, says Lee Reighart of ANCO Wiper Blades, a division of Cooper Automotive.

Do you remember those times when you waited impatiently for the wipers to clear the frost from your windshield while the car was warming up? Imagine scraping your knuckles across that same frosted windshield, and you can understand the abuse your wiper blades sustained.

"Road film, dirt, salt, petroleum products and the additional pollution in the air all contribute to the deterioration of the rubber wiping edge of wiper blades," Reighart says.

Here are some wiper-blade tips from the experts at ANCO:

- Windshields contaminated with wax and oils will not allow windshield wipers to perform properly, causing poor visibility.

- Many types of windshield wipers actually will lift off the windshield at highway speeds. Use wipers designed with aerodynamic features to improve performance at high speeds for clearer driving vision.

- Improperly performing windshield wipers that skip across windshields create annoyances and distractions that interfere with safe driving conditions.

- Inspect wiper blades every six months. Replace when worn, damaged or malformed.

- Ninety percent of all driving decisions behind the wheel are based on vision. Properly operating windshield wipers can improve driving vision for safer vehicle operation.

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