

Contest from page 1C

and how electric vehicle will affect them."

For gas stations of the future, a handful of pumps will be devoted to electric vehicles, with new technology needed to charge cars in a few minutes instead of overnight. The charging system must also prove safe to use in any weather, especially for someone standing in the rain or leaning against a vehicle's metal frame.

What's more, drivers may need additional warning devices, as silent engines can pose problems for children and the blind.

While the auto makers have been experimenting with a number of alternative fuels to comply with the legislation, electric remains the most viable means of zero-emission travel to date.

"We've had electric vehicles in our fleet before, and they have proven to be fairly reliable, but I think legislation is starting to drive the industry," said John Olson, electric vehicle program manager for Detroit Edison in Detroit, and a Troy resident.

"In the spring, we'll take delivery of 10 Ford (electric) Ecotars for use in our fleet. They'll be used for servicing meters, mail routes and general pick-up/delivery. They'll represent the most advanced product to date."

Olsen added some of the challenges for participants of the competition include developing longer lasting batteries, maintenance procedures, training programs, the make-up of service stations and identifying cultural changes.

According to the latest performance figures, prototype electric vehicles can travel over 100 miles at speeds of 60 mph between charges, while the typical urban commuter drives less than 45 miles a day. Within such parameters, a driver would have to charge a vehicle three or four times a week.

Entries for the competition are due by April 15. Teams will compete for \$100,000 in prize money to be divided among several categories. Anyone interested in participating in the competition can phone Detroit Edison at (313) 237-8910 or (617) 267-9035.

Does car alarm lock thief out or us in?

AUTO TALK

DAN MCCOSH

The last time I managed to get locked out of a car, the locksmith took roughly three minutes to pick the lock on a new Lincoln Mark VIII, which he apologized for, since the new all-electronic, theft-proof door locks were new to him.

This is OK when you locked your keys in the car, but no comfort when you think about getting your car stolen. In fact, the average car thief is a pretty good locksmith, but even if he isn't, a phone number and disable the car after you find it missing. You still don't have the car, of course, but at least you have the satisfaction that somewhere out there, the guy is walking.

Then there are the tracking systems, like the Teletac system being offered by Pactel Teletac in Farmington Hills. These are the type that theoretically let the police locate your car by tracking a signal after it is stolen. The signal is silent, which means that when you get to work and are surrounded by police with their guns drawn, it is probably because you tripped it by accident that morning.

In fact, there is a growing movement to monitor the location of all cars, allegedly in the interest of traffic control. A \$70 million system is being installed in Oakland County that will provide interactive monitoring, which means that traffic can be monitored and directed to improve traffic congestion. A similar network already is collecting tolls on highways out East. Both tracking systems could just as easily locate your stolen car, or even turn the guy in when he gets to a toll booth.

We are, of course, locking ourselves in against the crooks with these devices, instead of locking the crooks up, just like party store owners have to.

The high-tech devices work, but are expensive, and require dollars and manpower to operate.

The irony is that being expensive makes them worth more to the people who steal them — just like the car radio or cellular phone. Then again, someone out there is already working on a new high-tech system to prevent the theft of burglar alarms.

Something to think about the next time you lock your keys in the car.

Dan McCosh is automotive editor of Popular Science magazine. If you have a comment, question, or suggestion concerning Auto Talk, write to Dan McCosh, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36261 Schoolcraft, Livonia, 48150, or you can call him directly by dialing 953-2047, mail box number, 1870, on a touch-tone phone.

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to get them to perform greater than their expectations.

"To manage people, you've got to be fair, consistent, demanding and understanding," Farr said.

Owning a car dealership with vehicle sales, parts, service and the body shop is like running several businesses, he said. "If you have one that's not functioning, you're going to be marginally profitable."

Several years ago Farr established Triple M Financing, using his own money to seed the operation, so customers with credit problems could buy used cars at his dealerships.

That has brought more buyers into his fold.

"One thing Mel Farr does as well as anyone in the country is dealing with marginal credit customers," he said.

Farr currently serves on the board of directors of the Better Business Bureau of Detroit and Southeast Michigan and the Metropolitan Detroit YMCA. He's chairman of the National Association of Minority Auto Dealers and chairman of the Minority Ford-Lincoln Mercury Dealers Association.

He's a life member of the NAACP and is a member of the NFL Players Advisory Board.

"Everyone we looked at had great business credentials," said Jeffrey Kazmarek, manager of economic development for Oakland County and an executive-of-the-year judge.

"I think what we were looking for was contribution back to the community where they do business. Mel Farr certainly had that."

Look toward future

"My greatest success is still out there," Farr said. "I haven't attained that yet. I'm most proud of my kids. Mel Jr. is general manager of my Ohio dealership, Michael plays for the Lions and my daughter Monet is in college. She wants to be an actress."

"My wife for 26 years, Mae, has been very supportive. She's done an excellent job raising the kids while I've spent a lot of time working."

"I've said to my wife on many occasions, 'When they bury me, I want them to put on the tombstone, a man who gave everything. I used all my energy, all my knowledge.'"

But he doesn't use all of his energies at work. Farr's hobbies include swimming, deep-sea fishing, scuba diving and tennis.

His biggest regret?

"I would have put more emphasis on being a better student," he said.

Farr prefers to look ahead rather than back.

"I think my business life now is just starting," he said. "I think I'm just now coming of age. I wanted to be the best football player I could be. I want to be the best businessman I can be."

"I'll let people measure. I don't know what's good enough. They say success is a journey, not a destination."

Ross considers federal job

Farmington Hills resident Doug Ross, the director of Michigan Future, Inc., has been offered a high-level job in the administration of President Bill Clinton.

The Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday, and Ross' associate Lisa Dunlop confirmed, that Ross has been offered a job heading the Employment and Training Administration under Secretary of Labor Robert Reich.

Dunlop, the project coordinator for Michigan Future, said Ross has spoken with Reich and Vice President Al Gore, and is considering the offer.

Ross is in Washington D.C. this week, but Dunlop doesn't know if it's to negotiate about this job, or what.

Ross, a former Michigan commerce department director under James Blanchard, hasn't said anything to the Michigan Future board of directors about the job yet, Dunlop said, and "barring his wife, they'd be the first ones to know" if he accepts the job. Ross has already turned down a different job in the Clinton administration, Dunlop said.

Michigan Future is a non-government organization dedicated to educating people about how all aspects of society have to change in order to have a modern and competitive economy in Michigan.

Ross is scheduled to make a presentation about these ideas March 30 at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus.



Doug Ross

Kmart promotes 4 to key management spots

Kmart Corp. of Troy made a series of executive moves in its specialty retail and U.S. Kmart store divisions.

Charles J. Miller of West Bloomfield was promoted to group vice president, real estate-specialty retailing in the specialty retail division. Miller oversees real estate, construction and overall development of new retail stores for the seven subsidiary specialty companies.

Edward W. Wilhelm was promoted to divisional vice president, general controller in the U.S. store division. Wilhelm is responsible for corporate and U.S. financial reporting and planning functions, and U.S. accounting.

James L. Mispelon of Troy was promoted to divisional vice president, corporate taxes, also in the U.S. store division. Mispelon is responsible for all aspects of tax compliance requirements, research projects and tax planning.

Richard Brunner of Bloomfield Hills was promoted to divisional vice president, store planning, also in the U.S. store division. Brunner will facilitate, coordinate and control various aspects of the store renewal program which includes modernizing, expanding and opening new stores.

Tax talk on tap

Bingham Farms accountant Leonard Grey will give a free talk about taxes 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, March 31, in The Skyline Club, 2000 Town Center, Southfield. Grey will talk about tax advantages, last minute tax tips and the impact of President Bill Clinton's tax proposals.

Reservations are requested; For more information, call 799-8498.

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