



SPIED! *The Coolest Cars of the Next Twelve Months, and Beyond*

With a slew of mouthwatering new cars, six groundbreaking innovations, five crazy ideas, and one really, really big truck, the year 2005 will become known as the year you finally got your ass down to the dealership. Here, everything you need to know before you get there.





It's built like a brick house and could probably tow one, too. Who on earth would need a truck this big? This guy. By Barry Sonnenfeld

The Ford Super Duty

A decade ago, I drove up to the Honest Diner in East Hampton, where I saw Martha Stewart getting out of a perfect vintage pickup truck. I waited until she went into the diner and I looked in the truck's bed: a little bit of hay and just the right amount of horse manure. Jeez, she's good. I need a truck, too, I thought. I went to my local dealer and told him I wanted the top-of-the-line V-10 Dodge Ram. "We've got fifty V-8's on the lot, and the wait for the V-10 is three months. What are you hauling around that you need that big an engine?" he asked. "My ego," I replied.

Ten years and three pickups later, I was thrilled to test-drive Ford's new F-250 Super Duty Lariat 4x4 King Ranch edition four-door truck. The Super Duty weighs three tons and has a Power Stroke 6.0-liter diesel that puts out 325 horsepower and an insane amount of torque. It can tow 12,500 pounds of something, although I don't own anything that weighs that much, except maybe the bag of chargers for my computers and cell phones. Ford dropped off the copper-colored beast just in time for me to drive to the various screenings at the East Hampton film festival.

The sound of the diesel engine made me look back on the Dodge trucks like I'd been driving my Prius—this thing could haul my ego and Michael Bay's. On the other hand, the two-tone leather bucket seats both in front and in back made it seem like a kid's dream truck. The King Ranch came with excellent seat heaters, an in-dash six-CD player, and the various other amenities of a decent Japanese sedan. In fact, Chloe, my eleven-year-old daughter, wanted me to buy the truck on the spot. She also loved that the King Ranch emblem was stitched onto almost every flat surface.

I didn't try out what are surely its fine off-road capabilities. I once drove a truck onto my local East Hampton beach, and when I called AAA to tell them to send a tow truck to pull me out of the sand as quickly as possible, the lady on the other end of the phone couldn't hear me due to the huge waves beating against the side of my truck. (As it turns out, if you're going to drive on the sand, take a bunch of air out of your tires.) But I am pretty sure I did impress the guests at the big New Line Cinema party at Nick & Toni's restaurant

during the festival. Between the sound of the diesel's arrival and my fine 24X beaver cowboy hat ("Custom made for Barry Sonnenfeld by the Bounty Hunter," the inside band reads), how could anyone at the festival not assume a pretty darn important player in the biz had arrived?

Saturday afternoon, before the New Line party, I drove out to Montauk to view *Mail Order Wife*, a film produced by the same fine folks who are going to produce my next film, Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. For twenty miles, mine was the manliest vehicle in the Hamptons. You might not think that's saying much, but the truth is, there are nothing but pickup trucks in the Hamptons: For every homeowner, there's a plumber, electrician, tile guy, floor guy, painter, central-vac guy, AV, HVAC, and contractor. Every morning, Route 27, where the road into the Hamptons shrinks from four lanes to two, looks like Madison Avenue at lunchtime, only instead of cabs, it's

Dollars needed to fill up (29-gallon tank): 56	Under the hood: Power Stroke diesel V-8 325 · 6.0 · 570 HORSEPOWER LITER FT.-LBS. OF TORQUE	Square footage needed in the garage: 138 Price: \$50,495
At a height of 6'7" it's taller than: Michael Jordan	Arrives: Out now	No. of Toyota Priuses it can tow all at once: 4

pickups. They call it the trade parade.

I was impressed with the way the Ford drove. I was even able to pass a Porsche 911, driven, I suspect, by a dentist. I have nothing against dentists, except that at the age of five, my dentist had a heart attack and died on me. I didn't go to another dentist until I was a teenager, at which point I had fourteen cavities. Anyway, given that the truck is designed to carry a whole bunch of weight, it isn't sprung so tight as to make every seam in the road rattle my fillings, nor are you overwhelmed by road noise.

Although the F-250 Super Duty might be a stupid vehicle to drive unless you have a superduty need, I wouldn't mind driving this thing cross-country. I like sitting up high, and its ride is surprisingly supple for something this large and powerful. Also, Lucky, my Rhodesian Ridgeback, would look very cool in it. Sweetie, however, had a slightly different impression of the truck. As a native of Fort Worth, Texas—I'm a big believer that urban Jewish men should marry Texan women—she looked around at the truck, gave a shrug, and said, "No gun rack? No six-pack? You can't call this a King Ranch."



TOW SIX TONS!

GO ANYWHERE! NO ONE WILL STOP YOU!

WHO NEEDS A HUMMER?

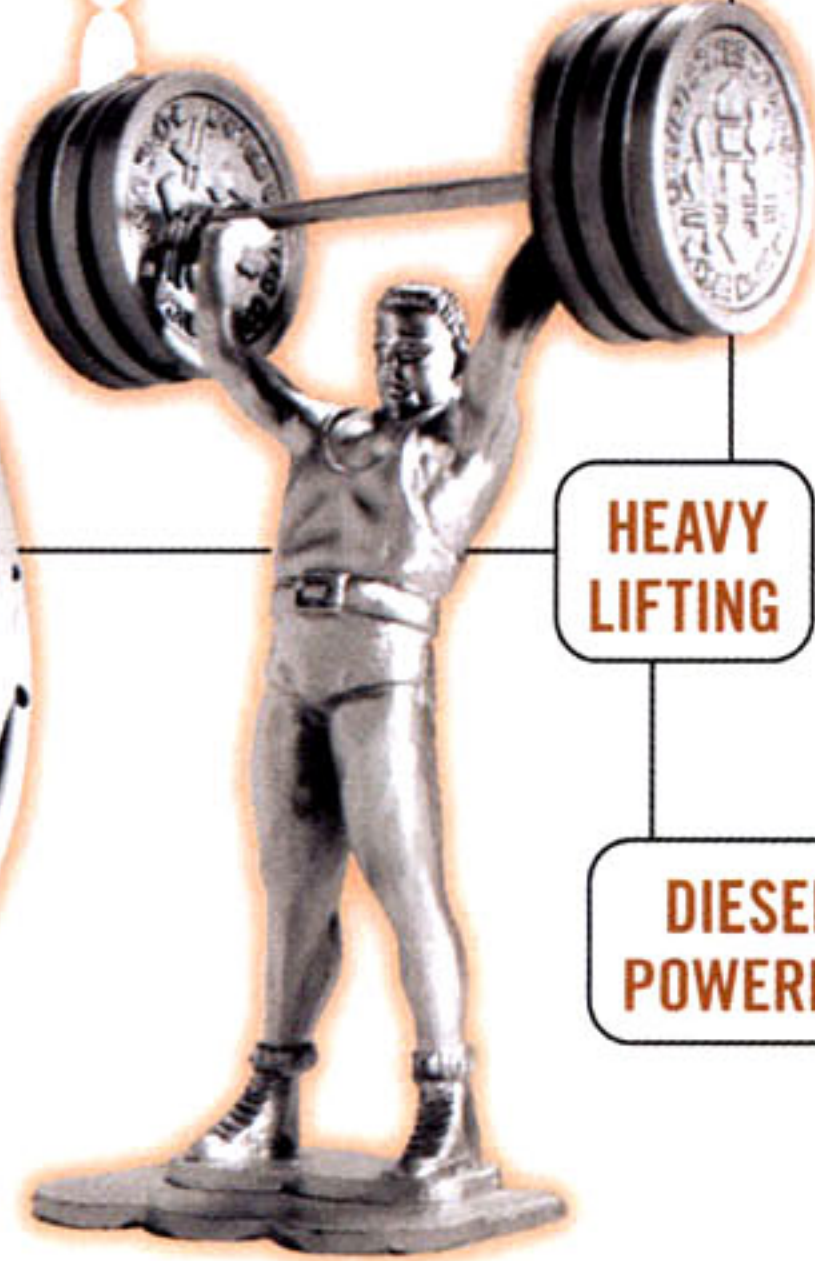
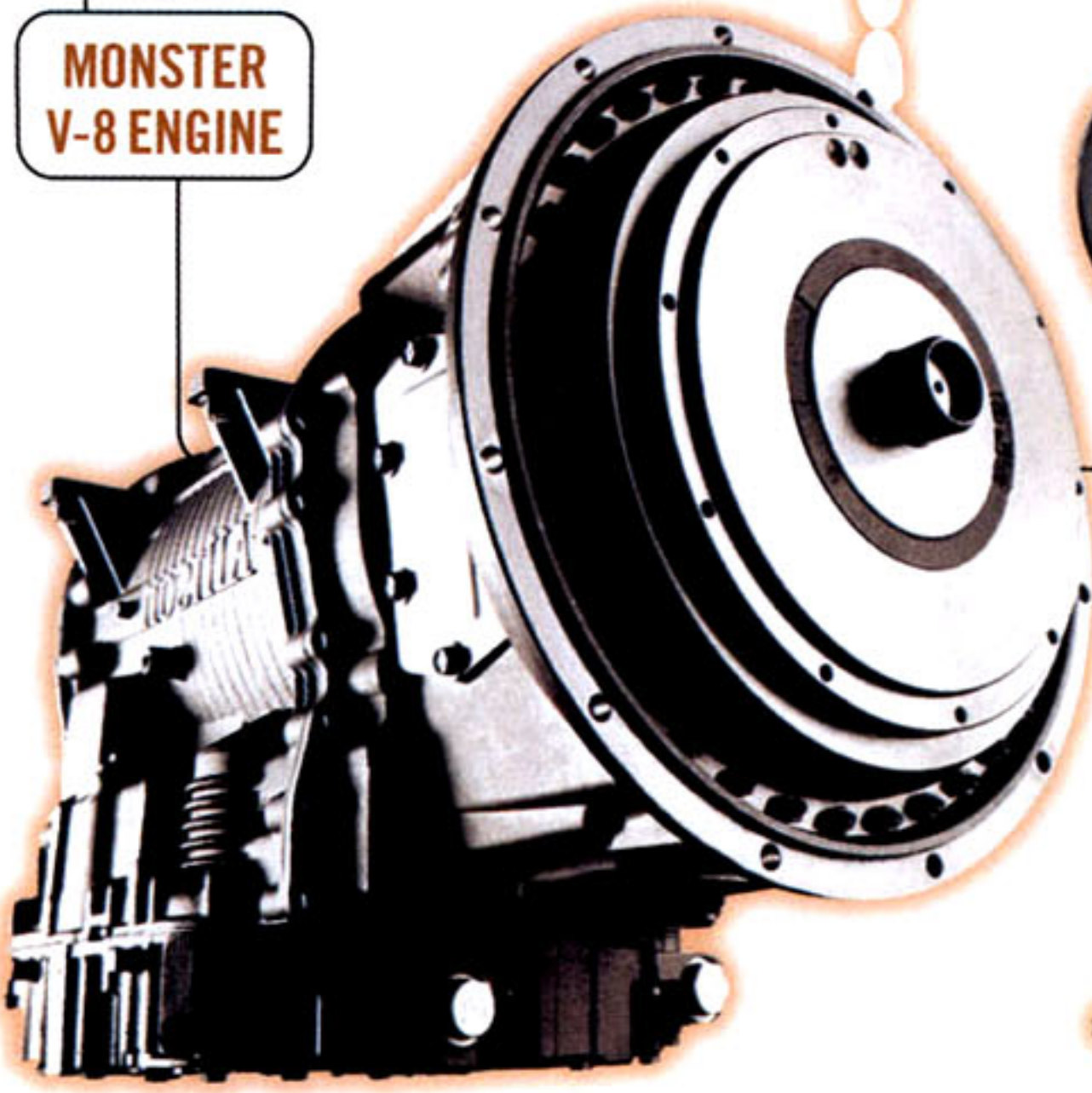


ROOM FOR FOUR AND YOUR HOLLYWOOD EGO

YEEEE-HAW!



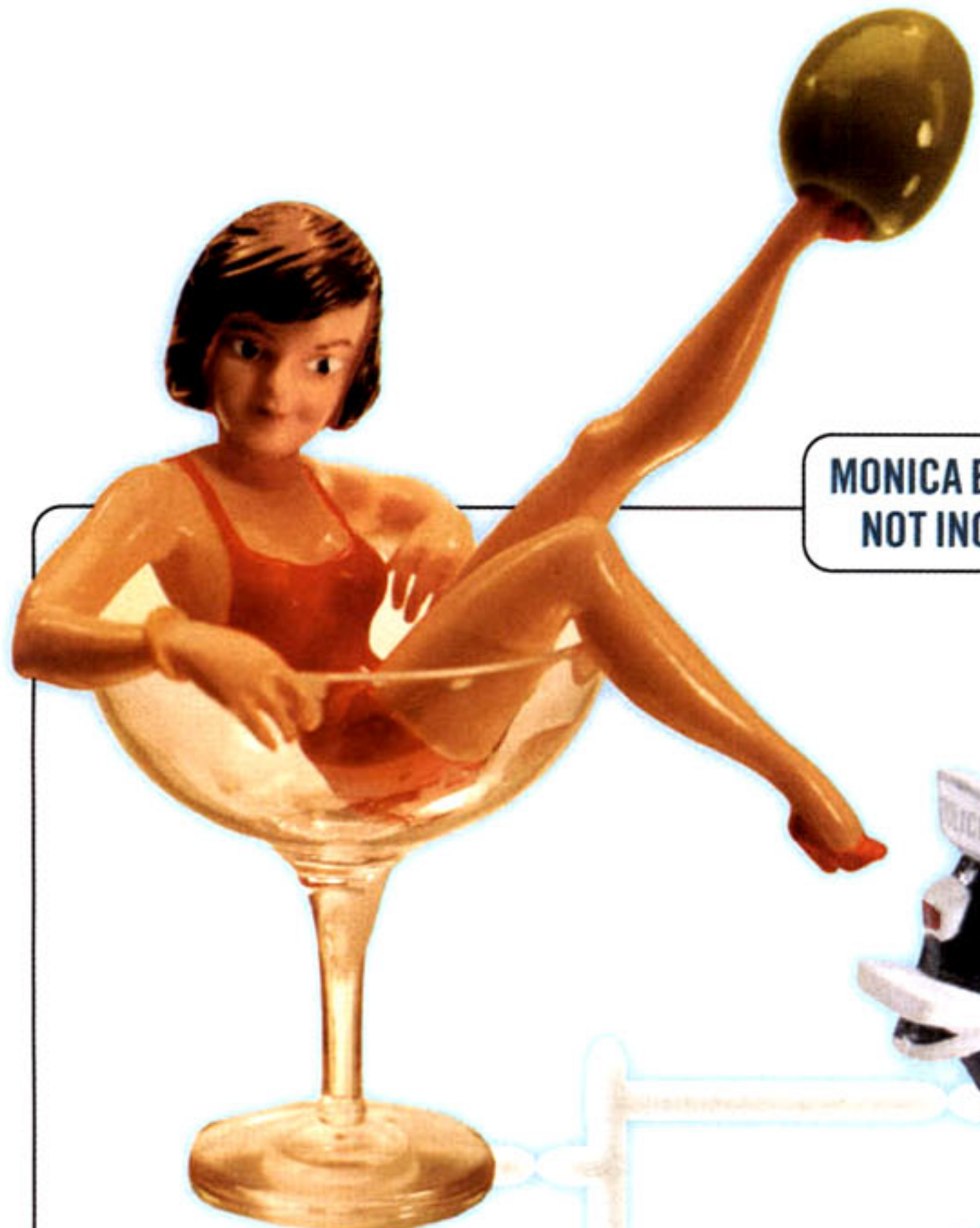
MONSTER V-8 ENGINE



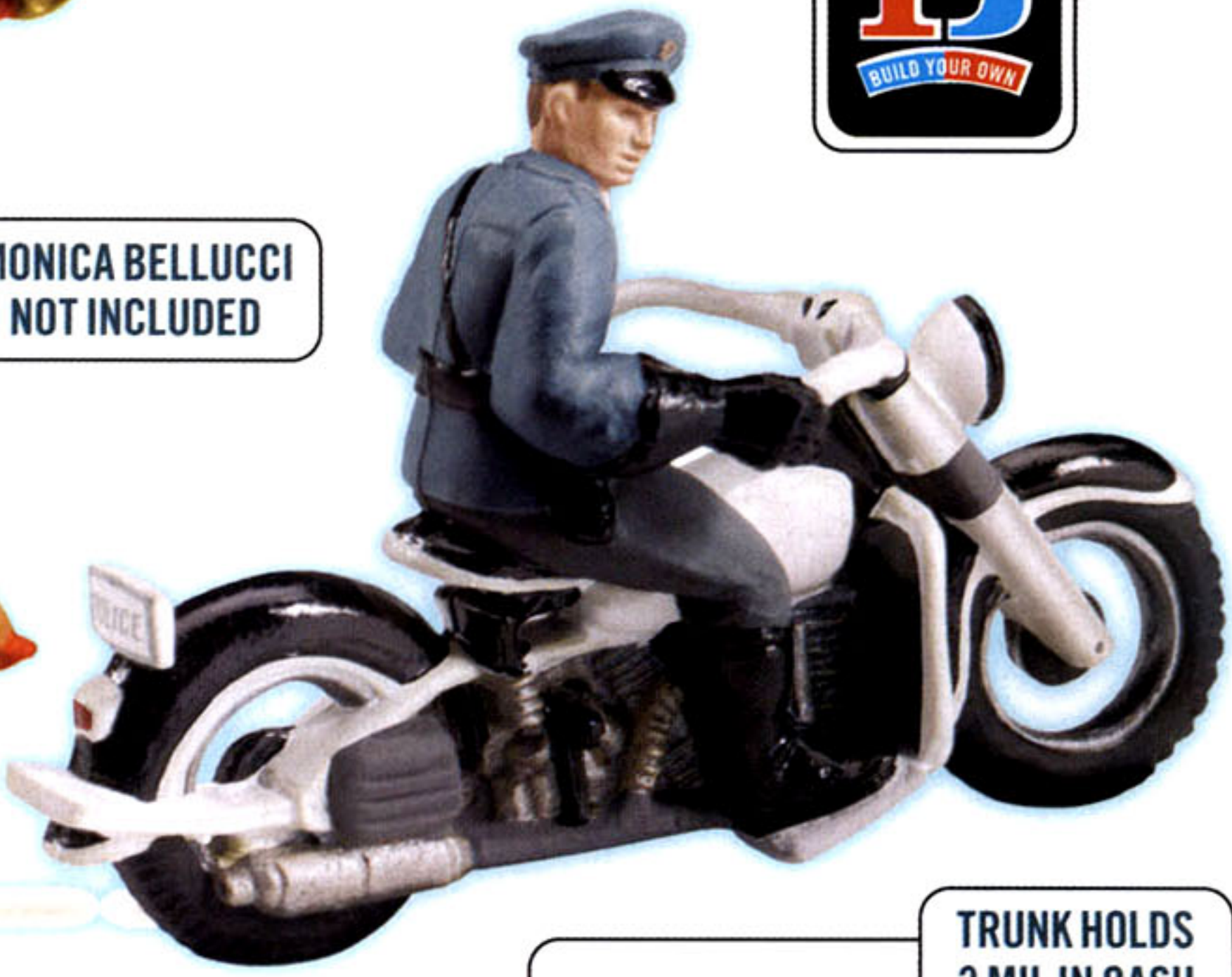
HEAVY LIFTING

DIESEL POWERED





MONICA BELLUCCI
NOT INCLUDED



TRUNK HOLDS
3 MIL IN CASH



GUARANTEED TO
MAKE YOU SEXIER

KING OF THE
COUPES



C'MON, YOU'VE
EARNED IT





If you're going to get pulled over, do it in this, one of Italy's finest luxury machines. Just make sure you have your story straight. **By Christopher Berend**

The Maserati GranSport

This was supposed to be like filming my very own car commercial. The slick, expensive thirty-second spot with the slick, expensive European car weaving up and over brand-new blacktop, freshly hosed down by production assistants to give it that “just after the rain” look. Fall’s yellow leaves blow across the road, making way for the driver—me—and this car, the undulating and powerful 2005 Maserati GranSport. The tagline: “The GranSport. \$111,337. Because you deserve it.”

That was the daydream, anyway. Maserati had been kind enough to loan out the highly anticipated GranSport ahead of its debut early this year, which is how I found myself in its cockpit three hours north of Manhattan on a mid-autumn Sunday afternoon. The GranSport was behaving beautifully. Its 400 horses and a Cambiocorsa transmission, which enables you to switch gears on the steering wheel without a clutch, were making hamburger of the backwoods Catskills tar-macs. This was luxury. Refined luxury. The kind that

This car’s not actually mine, I offered up stupidly. “Well, then, whose car is it?”

I told the smokey the deal, that it belonged to Maserati and that I was test-driving it. I’m a journalist. I work at Esquire in New York. Perhaps you’ve heard of it. Anyway, I’m not all that familiar with the car, so you could see how I might have accidentally gone over the speed limit.

“You were going fast enough that I could have this vehicle impounded,” he replied. Gulp. “And what type of car is this?”

It’s a 2005 GranSport. It’s not even out yet, so I don’t know if you’ll find it on your computer. Boy, that sounded shady.

“And the expiration date on your driver’s license says May 2004. That was six months ago. And you said you live in New York City, but this is a Texas driver’s license.”

You’re right about that, sir, I said, my voice cracking. That’s not my current address. And yes, that license expired a while back. But I have a new one at home.

My hands were sweating. The fuzz just stood there, poker-faced. “Stay here,” he said.

While he looked up my driving record, I had plenty of time to pore over the GranSport’s controls: a charming gearshift that requires only a few fingers to move, a blue “start” button for the ignition, bucket seats, plenty of leather, and just the right amount of carbon fiber. Primo. The stereo ain’t half bad, either.

In fact, the thunder of Coldplay’s *Live 2003* had been partially responsible for getting me into this mess. Is it a \$100,000 cabin? It looked like one.

The county mountie returned. “This is a citation for exceeding the speed limit and for driving with an expired license.” He paused, soaking up the moment, scanning the car. “You know, this is a fifty-five-mile-an-hour zone. I’m not sure whose car this really is, but you’d be well off to keep it under control around here. The roads are pretty curvy.”

I checked the ticket. Seventy-five in a fifty-five. He’d been generous. I’d have hugged him, but I couldn’t peel my hand off the inside of the door. How much is this going to cost?

“You’ll have to appear in front of the judge in Middletown just down the road to figure that out,” he replied. “May I suggest, though, that when you come back to appear that you come in something a little slower.” Yes, sir. And with that, I pressed the blue start button and was off—slowly—again.

doesn’t scream wealth so much as sing an aria in praise of it. The throaty V-8 sounded awesome. The steering was dead-on.

And then it happened. At some point, I’m not exactly sure when, the speedometer hit the century mark. And as it did, outside of tiny Margaretville, New York (population 662), eastbound on state road 28, sat a New York state trooper. I imagine what he saw coming down that two-lane road must have looked pretty exciting: a sculpted, definitely-not-from-around-here greenish-silver blur eclipsing one hundred miles per hour. Johnny Law might have heard the screaming V-8, seen the chrome mesh grille, or, if he was awake enough, even made out the fancy cursive on the back. I doubt he was quick enough to spot the double twin tailpipes, though. Either way, this guy had just bagged his trophy fish.

“License and registration please.” He looked pumped.

Arrives: Out

Now

Under the hood:

400-horsepower V-8 made of steel-and-aluminum alloy

Acceleration: Zero to 60 miles per hour in 4.8 seconds; top speed: 180 miles per hour

Price:

\$111,337

Gears:

6
MANUAL

Most thrilling feature: The jolt you feel after downshifting with the paddles on the steering wheel

It is the most feverishly rumored-about new muscle car in America. The world's most innovative automotive designers are hard at work on it inside the world's most advanced design center. But don't tell anyone. **By Mike Sager**

The Nissan Skyline GT-R

On a sunny morning in San Diego, I enter the front portal of a futuristic, low-slung glass-and-concrete building.

I am searching for a car. A very special car.

It may be here, somewhere inside Nissan's California design center.

Or it may not be.

It may not even exist.

According to speculation, the car will be called the Nissan Skyline GT-R. Or possibly it will carry an Infiniti badge. Or possibly Nissan will drop the Skyline name altogether. . . .

Whatever they decide to call it, the point is this: It will be a left-hand-drive version of a car so dominant in Japanese auto racing that a new circuit was created for it—no other cars ever won. With blistering speed and a menacing road presence, the Skyline rewrote the Japanese high-performance rule book and became the benchmark production supercar against which the RX-7, the Supra, and even the NSX were judged. Nickname: Godzilla.

Seen only rarely on American roads, the Skyline has nevertheless attained cult status in this country, featured in

Six hours later, the building spits me out.

I have seen a gravity racer and a meditation cube, an Air-stream trailer with a putting green inside.

But no Skyline.

Back home, I hit the Web. One site has a picture of what it says is an Infiniti GT-R. Another has a review and photos of something called the GT-R concept car. The author writes of a vehicle that appears "pleasing, but still aggressive," with distinctive front-wheel arches, narrow flanking headlights, a vast air-intake opening in the bumper assembly, a high waistline, real wheel arches reminiscent of those seen on the Aston Martin Vanquish, and a sexy hind end dominated by round taillights and wide dual exhaust pipes—the Skyline trademark, reminiscent of a 1968 Corvette Stingray.

In a chat room, emotions run high: "Once the skyline comes here," says one enthusiast, "everybody and their momma is gonna wanna have one, and then the skyline will be the new mustang. That would just make me sick."

"F*ck that!" came the reply. "Why would you let the prospect of a few ricers spoil your hope of getting the car directly sold in the US?"

"I hope it never comes to the US," retorts the first. "If you want a skyline, you need to do like everyone else and go to motorex and get one."

Motorex?

In an industrial park south of Los Angeles, I come face-to-face with Godzilla—a 1997 R33 GT-R, to be exact, zero to 60 in 5.3 seconds, redline 8,000 rpm. Asking price: \$60k, including EPA conversion, which runs around \$20,000, according to the guys at Motorex, the only dealer authorized to sell it in America.

It's a bitchin' machine, all right, bringing to mind a Mustang on steroids, a Shelby Cobra with an airfoil. A young guy named Hiroki, sporting a mod haircut and tight trousers, opens the left-side passenger door for me.

He turns the key; the engine emits a throaty purr. Out of the parking lot we go, onto a wide, deserted street.

"So what's the best thing about the Skyline?" I ask.

Hiroki cuts his eyes in my direction. The corners of his mouth turn up; a strange light seems to inhabit his face.

And then he punches it.

Projected price:

**\$60k
to 70k**

Will probably look like:

A close cousin to the 2001 GT-R concept vehicle (shown opposite)

Arrives:

2007

Under the hood:

A rumored 450-horsepower twin-turbo V-8

Gears:

**6
MANUAL**

One more reason to get excited: The steering, suspension, and drivetrain are being designed by engineers from Lotus

the video game *Gran Turismo* and in the auto-erotic movie *2 Fast 2 Furious*. The American version was introduced as a concept car at the Tokyo Motor Show in 2001. According to reports on the Web, it will be available to the public in 2005. The experts I consulted say 2006 or 2007.

One thing is clear: The American Skyline intends to rival Porsche—450-horsepower twin-turbo V-8 (the Japanese version is limited by law to a 280-horsepower V-6), computer-controlled all-wheel drive, six-speed gearbox, racing bucket seats, a harness in lieu of conventional seat belts. Not to mention digital GPS and full music hookup, all of it wearing a sleek, undulating shell, some of it possibly aluminum, designed by the same people who designed the sexy new Nissan Z car.

The people, I am told, who work in this building.



Two seats, five speeds, 170 horses, twenty grand. The convertible Solstice is Bob Lutz's bid to revive Pontiac. And in the process, the very idea of American quality. By Cal Fussman

The Pontiac Solstice

"Would you like to wear these?"

"Oh, no," Bob tells the technician, waving off a pair of racing helmets. "We're not going to go that fast."

Bob is Bob Lutz. Vice-chairman of General Motors. He's a seventy-two-year-old, martini-loving, cigar-smoking Swiss-American maverick who pilots his own helicopter to work. In other words, I trust him.

The car we're about to test-drive is a two-seat roadster that you'll soon be hearing a lot about: the Pontiac Solstice. It's as much sculpture as machine—a convertible whose skin was formed before its vital organs were filled in. Most cars come into this world the other way around. Designers are handed specs determined by engineers. The mold was not merely broken for the Solstice; a new one was cast.

This is Lutz's baby—the first car that didn't exist on paper when he took the job in August 2001. Four months later, the Solstice concept garnered Best in Show honors from *AutoWeek* at the Detroit Auto Show. So when it arrives on lots this summer, the stakes will be high.

"The great percentage of Americans," Bob says, "have grown up with the notion that if it's imported, it's good. If it's Japanese, it's superb. If it's American, you don't want to buy it. That perception can only be overcome with exciting products. You can't suddenly improve the quality of something that looks the same and tell everybody to come back because they'll like it. It takes some shocks."

Oh, there were shocks. Boot camp began each day at 6:30 A.M. for designers and engineers. Normal production time—about fifty months—was cut in half. The Solstice was built on inspiration and adrenaline, and the rest of Pontiac will be built around the Solstice. So it *must* bring into Pontiac dealerships people who've never visited one before.

When you approach the car, your first instinct is to caress the "blisters" behind each headrest. These two smooth waves over the trunk are what best transmit the Solstice's sense of passion. In the past, the blisters would've disappeared from the concept during production because they occupy space usually reserved for storing the convertible top. This time, the engineers had to be creative to fit the top.

Lutz gets into the driver's seat. He's a big guy—about six foot two—but there's room for his long limbs. In front of him are

gauges that look as if they've been plucked off a motorcycle to give the aura of speed. There's also a grab handle on the passenger door for the same effect, and it comes in quite handy once Bob pulls out onto the track at GM's proving grounds.

I'm hanging on for sweet life . . . and he's still in second.

"The idea is to give a wonderful interactive driving experience," he says. "A sense of oneness with the car."

I'm about as connected to this car as a man can possibly be as Bob YEEEEEEEEEEEEOOOOOMS toward a hundred on a straightaway. We veer into a bank and my stomach does a triple gainer from the double-pike position. Bob smiles. "G forces," he says. "What you're getting is the pleasure of having an instrument in your hands that obeys your every command. That's fun to drive. It becomes like an extension of your body."

Now he's downshifting into a curve and—ERRRRR-RRRRRR!—the back end of the car starts to whip out on us, but with a quick nudge of the wheel Bob straight-

<p>Arrives:</p> <p>June</p> <p>Price:</p> <p>\$20,000</p>	<p>At a height of 4'2", it's shorter than: Gary Coleman</p>	<p>Under the hood:</p> <p>170 · 2.4 · 4</p> <p>HORSEPOWER · LITER · CYLINDER</p> <p>Average time it takes to develop a car, from sketch to reality: 4 years Time it took to develop the Solstice: 2 years</p>	<p>Gears:</p> <p>5</p> <p>MANUAL</p>
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ens her out. His brow furrows. The next time he reaches the same curve, he seems to *increase* our speed and—ERRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!—again the back end slides out. "A slick spot," he concludes. The next time around, he slows down enough to see that, yes, indeed, there's a puddle on the track.

Time for another straightaway. There go those 170 horses again. . . .

Ten minutes later, we slow down. "It competes very nicely with the BMW Z4," Lutz says. "But that's a \$35,000 to \$40,000 car. This is going to be less than \$20,000. Some of our financial folks have asked to raise the price. If it's going to sell out, they say, why not charge more? But this has got to send a signal to the world that GM is serious about doing really high-value cars."

We stop in front of the guy who offered the helmets. "How was it?" the tech asks.

"I hereby pronounce the ride and handling to be extremely sanitary," Lutz says. "But he"—he nods in my direction—"is going to need a change of underpants."



THE COOLEST THING
TO COME OUT OF DETROIT
IN, LIKE, EVER!



LOOK, MA,
NO TOP!

GET THE
GIRL!



CHEAPER THAN A DIVORCE!
AND A LOT MORE FUN!



PAPARAZZI NOT
INCLUDED!



Breakthroughs

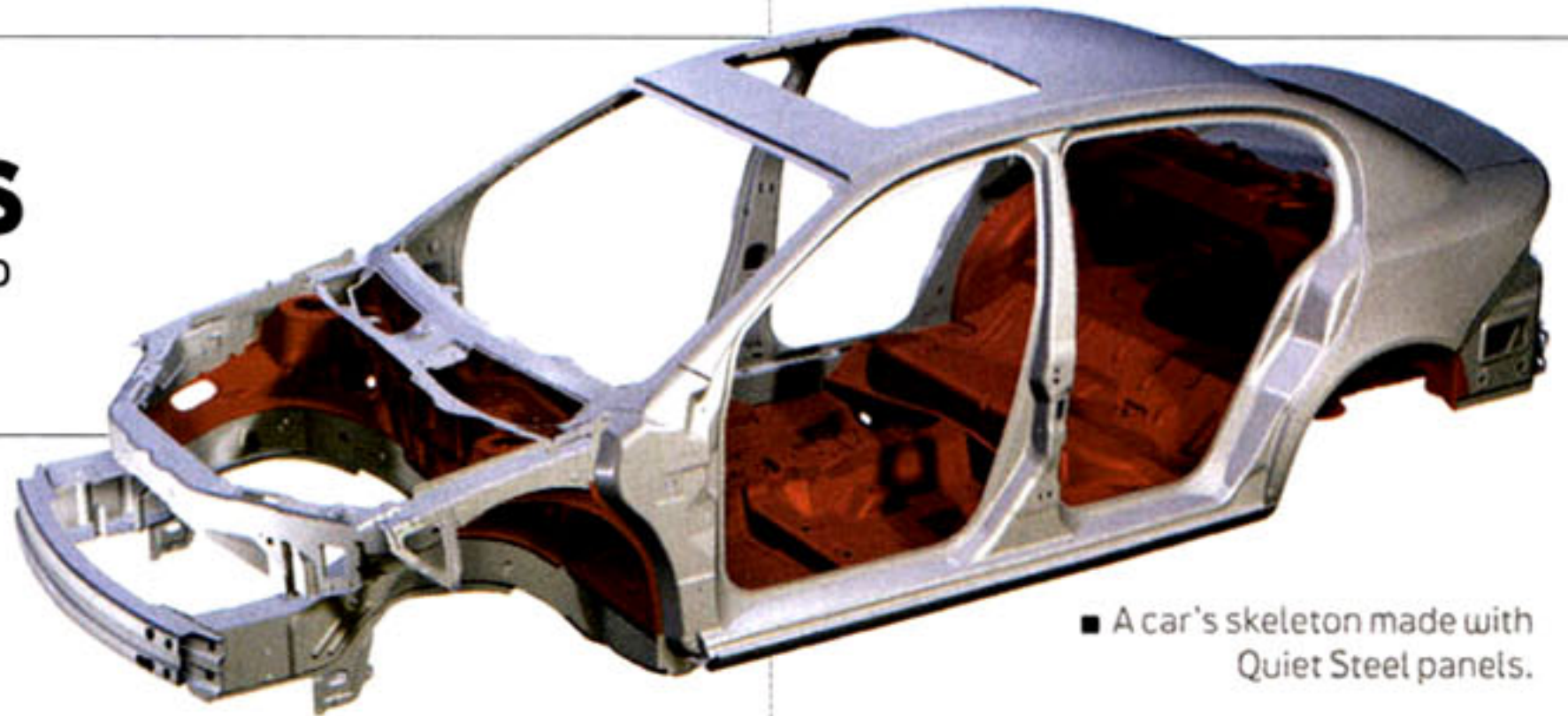
These six new inventions are about to change the way you drive

✓ A Magic Carpet Ride

The invention: Bose Project Sound suspension system

How it works: It took them twenty-four years of research, but they finally figured it out. In place of the standard shock-and-spring system we've become accustomed to, Bose engineers have designed an electromagnetic motor and a series of control algorithms that extend and retract your car's wheels in a matter of milliseconds, effectively negating the bumps underneath your tires. Although there's no actual sound involved (as the name implies), we're satisfied with just this: Bose has come up with by far the smoothest, most controlled ride in the history of automobiles. **Where to find it:** Right now, Bose honchos are shopping among the major auto manufacturers for a deal that will have Project Sound in cars in the next few years.

■ By way of an electromagnetic motor, the Bose Project Sound suspension system creates the smoothest ride in the history of cars.



■ A car's skeleton made with Quiet Steel panels.

⤴ The Quiet Car

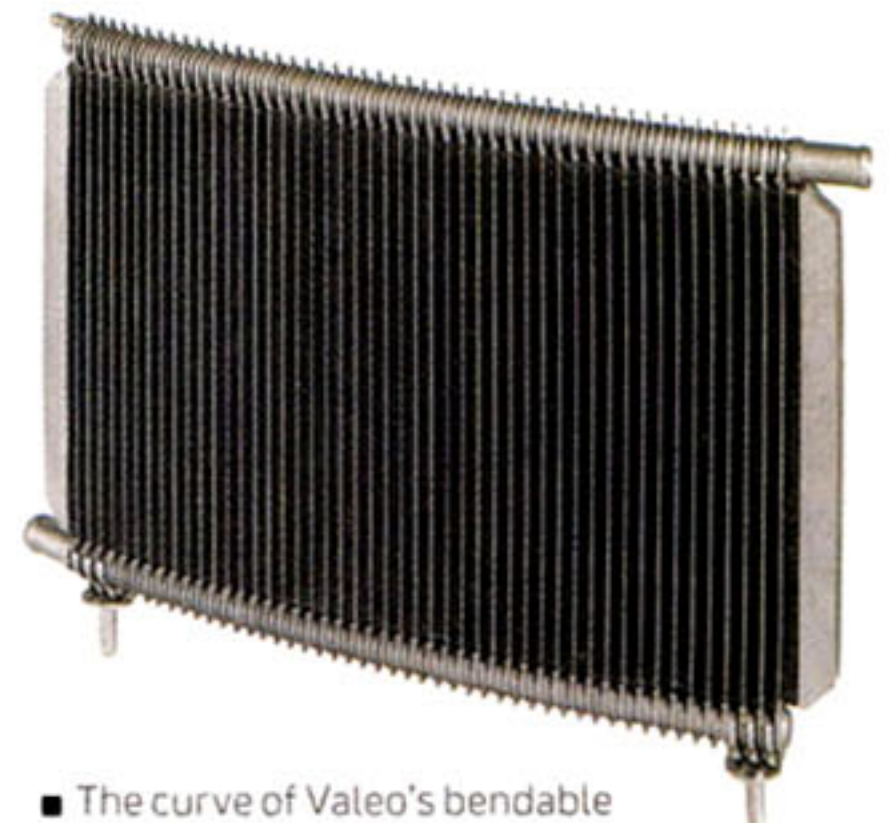
The invention: Quiet Steel

How it works: The best way to battle road noise? Never let it in. That's where Quiet Steel comes in. Made by Material Sciences Corporation, Quiet Steel is the combination of a microthin laminate sandwiched between layers of steel. The resulting material saves manufacturers money and is exponentially more vibration absorbent than normal steel. Less vibration equals less noise. Which is to say that Quiet Steel has become the newest and cheapest way for carmakers to build a quieter car. During a recent test in the Esquire office, a sample was dropped on a concrete floor from a height of eight feet. While we expected the loud *clang* of a frying pan, all we got was the quiet *thunk* you'd get from a plastic pen. Silence never sounded so brilliant.

Where to find it: In a GM, Ford, or Chrysler. All three automakers are currently using it in the skeletons of their vehicles.

✓ A New Tool for a New Shape

The invention: Valeo's curved radiator
How it works: The new curved radiator by European company Valeo is about to change the way the guts of your car are arranged, making the automobile's traditional flat nose a look of the past. The flexible spine that binds together the gills of the Valeo radiator allows it to be bent along the sides of your car's engine compartment, freeing up the space at the nose, where



■ The curve of Valeo's bendable radiator means it doesn't have to sit at the front of your car.

a radiator traditionally sits. Without a radiator to impede them, car designers are now free to create more rounded, complex front ends. **Where to find it:** At the Geneva Auto Show last year, Renault debuted its Wind concept car, which had twin radiators wrapped along the sides of the engine, making way for a rounded, sloping nose. Rumor has it the curved radiator will start showing up in stateside designs within the next three years. Look for new automotive faces to follow.



■ The revolutionary Bosch wiper, perched upright.



» Finally, a Better Wiper

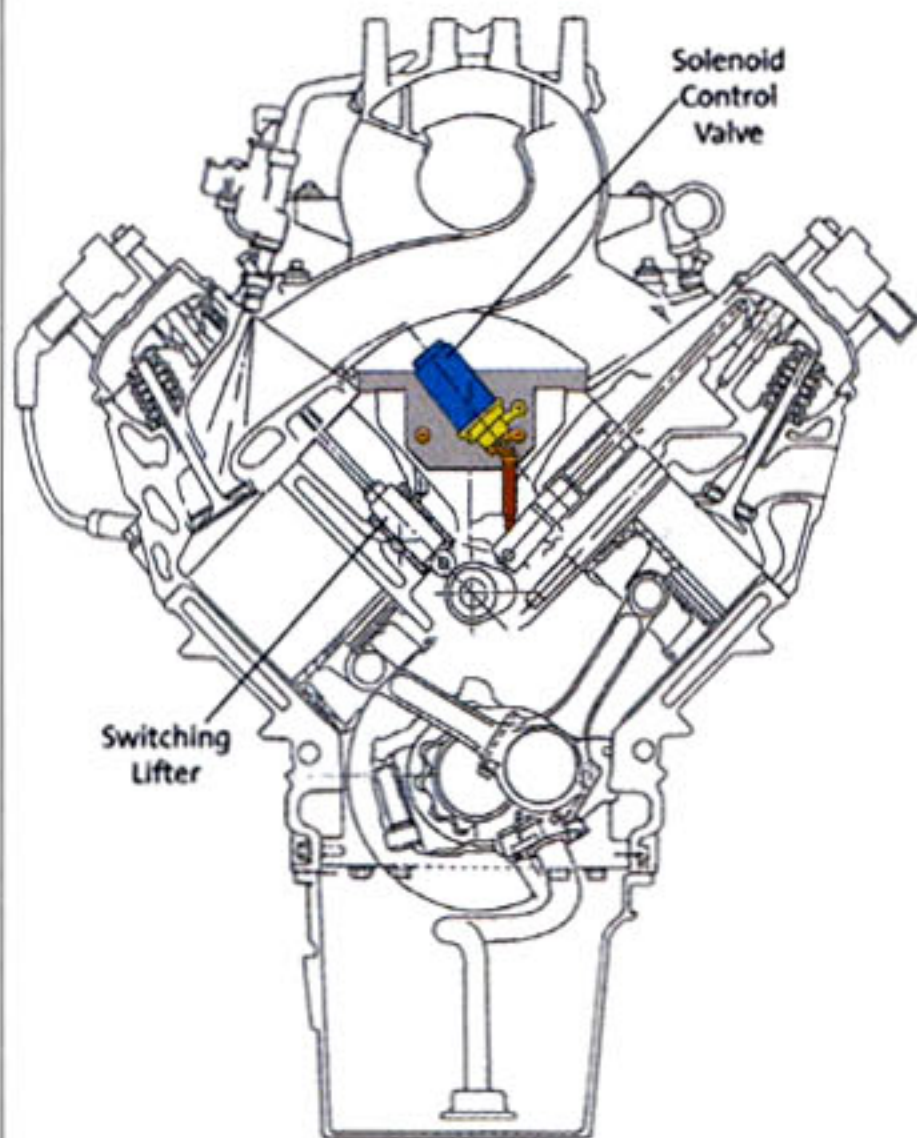
The invention: Bosch's upright windshield wipers
How it works: What if your windshield wipers gave you better visibility on a sunny afternoon? And what if those same wipers actually made your car look better? Bosch's Aerotwin wiper system does both. Because of the Aerotwin's slim profile and joint-free design, the wipers can fit easily into a vertical nook up the side of the windshield. With the wipers out of the way, the driver has less to interfere with his view, and auto designers can continue a hood's design all the way to the windshield without stopping short. Everybody wins. **Where to find it:** Spanish automaker Seat is already using upright Aerotwins on its new Altea sedan (above), while Bosch expects more than 80 percent of European carmakers to use the technology in the next six years.

» The Heads-up on Traffic

The invention: Real-Time Traffic Navigation
How it works: Satellite radio and navigation are neat tricks, but the ability to steer you away from the rush-hour bumper-to-bumper now makes them indispensable. This year, XM Satellite Radio unveils its NavTraffic feature, which links real-time traffic data from its satellites directly to your car's navigation system. The driver is alerted to traffic jams before he's in them, and a new route to his destination is suggested. It's the killer app that will make satellite radio ubiquitous. As if the hundred-plus commercial-free music channels weren't bait enough. **Where to find it:** XM expects to roll it out to all cars in which its radios are factory installed within the next couple years. In the meantime, you can try it out for yourself on the new Acura RL, out now.

» Saving Gas, Without a Battery

The invention: GM and Chrysler's displacement systems
How it works: Scientists and engineers are looking high and low for fuel-saving technologies these days. But maybe the answer is right under their noses. Instead of electrifying our cars or filling them with natural gas, what if we just used only the fuel we needed? No waste. That's the idea behind Chrysler's multidisplacement system



and GM's displacement on demand, which open the cylinders of a car's engine only when they are needed. Cruising along at thirty-five in a V-8? Why open all eight cylinders to chug gas when you need only four? An engine computer senses how much power is needed and opens and closes valves accordingly, saving you between 8 and 12 percent of your gas. So simple. Why didn't we think of that? **Where to find it:** Dodge Magnum, Chrysler 300C, and GMC Envoy.



■ XM's NavTraffic display sees the pileup before you do.

4 Trends for 2005

Or, knowledge to drop when your neighbor's least expecting it

BETTER-SMELLING CARS

Prolonged exposure to sun will make your car stink. So Volvo, Toyota, and others are now altering plastics and other materials in their interiors and AC systems to make the air you breathe odor and allergy free. We predict that soon you'll be able to tailor the smell of your car to your olfactory tastes. For starters, may we suggest the sweet scent of a crisp hundred-dollar bill?

COOLER LIGHTS: LEDs

Advancements in technology and plastics mean that LEDs (Light Emitting Diodes) will be springing up everywhere this year on the taillights of Nissans, Caddies, Fords, and Audis. LED brake lights illuminate 200 milliseconds faster than traditional incandescent bulbs, meaning that at seventy miles per hour, they provide an extra twenty feet of warning to the driver behind you. And they give even junkers an aura of cool.

HIGHER-TECH GLASS

The new auto glass of 2005 will be virtually impenetrable, shed water all on its own, and provide you with a heads-up display that is the clearest it's ever been. Originally designed to hurricane-proof buildings, thin double-paned glass with a high-tech film in between has become the shatterproof, thiefproof alternative for BMW. Cadillac is also utilizing a laminate windshield that eliminates "ghosting," making its revolutionary heads-up displays even better. And Volvo is introducing side windows and mirrors that shed water the moment they come into contact with it, allowing you to see out your windows better, even in a downpour.

YELLOW

According to color specialists at DuPont, while warm and cool silvers will dominate 2005's on-road color wheel, yellow will be the exterior color to make the greatest gains. The smaller the car, the more vivid and bright the yellow. Sadly, the inoffensive hues of dark brown and green will all but disappear. The bet here is that mauve is years away from a comeback. Damn.

Concept Cars: Handicapped

They're showcases of innovation, palettes for risky design, and by far the coolest automobiles on the planet. Too bad they'll never see the light of day. Or will they? **By Christopher Berend**

❖ The Ford Bronco

What is it? More like the Broncos of the sixties than the behemoths of the nineties, the new Bronco concept, which debuted last year at the Detroit Auto Show,



Odds:
7 to 1

borrowing the skinny build and round headlights of the past. With a turbo-diesel engine and a little nitrous oxide (sweet!), it favors old-school muscle and a utilitarian approach.

Esquire odds on concept becoming reality: 7 to 1

There is a slight chance that Ford will introduce a Bronco sometime in the next few years, depending on the success of its other SUVs. But we're not holding our breath for styling this cool.

❖ The Land Rover Range Stormer

What is it? Land Rover's first shot at a performance SUV to compete with Porsche's 450-horsepower Cayenne Turbo and Infiniti's FX45. It wowed critics at last year's Detroit Auto Show with its scissor doors and fat, low-slung stance as well as its promise

to pack more horsepower under the hood than Rover is known for.

Esquire odds on concept becoming reality: 1,000 to 1

Though the Range Stormer as it appears below will never see the road, many of its attributes (all-terrain technology and bulky Jaguar-derived V-8) show up in the Range Rover Sport, debuting later this year.

❖ The Dodge Sling Shot

What is it? The next piece in the Detroit renaissance? Maybe. Does it look cooler than anything currently parked in the Esquire garage? Absolutely. The cab-rearward design is a growing trend in the DaimlerChrysler kingdom. Its interior controls remind us a lot of the simplicity of the Mini interior; they exist for pure driving. Which is what this car will be about—pure,

unadulterated pavement scraping.

Esquire odds on concept becoming reality: 2 to 1

It may take a couple years, but the bet here is that once DaimlerChrysler gets the pint-sized Smart car (one of Dodge's Europe-



Odds:
2 to 1

an cousins) off the ground in the States, we'll see the Sling Shot begin to crown from the womb. It looks remarkably like a more mas-

culine Smart roadster, already one of the sharpest cars in Europe.

❖ The Lexus LF-C

What is it? When the LF-C was unveiled at auto shows last year, onlookers gushed



Odds:
5 to 1

over the retractable roof that folds itself into one of four different positions and the transparent, crystal-like material that covers all its interior controls. The sculpted exterior manages to look futuristic without being too far-fetched.

Esquire odds on concept becoming reality: 5 to 1

Elements of the LF-C, especially the retractable roof, will undoubtedly trickle down to Lexus's existing IS 300 sports sedan over the next two to three years. While a Lexus with the name LF-C won't ever see a road, the IS 300 will look damn close.

❖ The Ford Shelby GR-1

What is it? The GR-1, along with a new Cobra concept, is a strong signal that auto legend Carroll Shelby is back in the muscle-car game. The GR-1 boasts a 605-horsepower V-10 engine and a skeleton based on the Ford supercar, the GT. When it debuted



Odds:
3 to 1

at the exotic-car mecca Pebble Beach last year, gearheads swooned.

Esquire odds on concept becoming reality: 3 to 1

This much is known to be true: There will be a Ford Shelby vehicle coming in the next few years, whether it's the Cobra, the GR-1, or a compromise between the two. We think the GR-1 will take the place of the Ford GT when its current cycle is done, probably around 2007.



Odds:
1,000 to 1

The Eight Other Cars You Need to Know

These eight cars will be the talk of the next twelve months. Here's the inside track on each. **By Jean Jennings**

Jean Jennings is the editor in chief of Automobile Magazine.

1



Saab 9-7X SUV, \$38,000 to \$45,000 In a world where BMW is rumored to be considering a minivan, you wonder why Saab (under GM management) took so long to roll out a sport-ute. But if there is such a thing as sport-ute cool, this could be it. GMC Envoy-based but Saabified in its ride and handling, the 9-7X is all luxu-Saab inside, is packed with air bags, and bears the strong facial features of the 9-3 convertible. There is, however, no such thing as sport-ute fuel economy. Expect a sniveling fifteen mpg with the 275-horsepower in-line six-cylinder engine and fourteen mpg with the much-preferred 300-horsepower eight.

Dodge Charger, \$26,000 to \$30,000 Dodge would like you to forget all about the General Lee and that fake-ola Charger of 1981. They want you to remember the old badass, Hemi-engined Charger with the sort of fondness that will have you in the showroom when the reborn hot rod arrives later this year. The new-age Charger will race at Daytona before it finds the street. Skip the merely adequate 250-horsepower 3.5-liter V-6; the 340-horsepower 5.7 V-8 Hemi is the only engine to have until a truly high-performance SRT V-8 eventually roars down the pike.



2

3



Aston Martin V8 Vantage, \$100,000 Those wacky Germans running Aston Martin for Ford these past couple of years have done what the Brits couldn't do before them: muscled Aston smack into Ferrari's red face by making real cars really fast and really gorgeous. In the case of the V8 Vantage, you can now add really cheap (for Aston, anyway). What do we know? That Aston will be using this platform for all its future cars. What do we think? That the V8 Vantage's engine will be a fire-breathing, 385-horsepower 4.3-liter V-8. Maybe now Ford will leave Aston Martin boss Ulrich Bez alone.

BMW 3 Series, \$30,000 to \$40,000 Thanks to some loose lips in Slovenia (no lie), we've got the inside poop on the new 3 Series far in advance of its fall 2005 U.S. launch. And we can breathe easy. Not only will BMW's most desirable driving machine get only a teensy version of the protruding fanny-pack trunk so reviled on the rest of the line, it will treat the equally loathsome iDrive-system joystick as an option. Coupe, wagon, and convertible versions dribble out over the next two years, and industry moles whisper that the next M3 will get a 400-horsepower V-8.



4

5



Lotus Elise, \$40,930 If your ass is small, your heart is big, and your driver's license is open to a few extra points, the most exciting car for sale in America is surely this tiny terror, the first all-new Lotus in the U.S. in fifteen years. To put its four-cylinder Toyota engine's 190 horsepower into perspective, the Elise weighs a trifling 1,975 pounds, a *quarter ton* less than a 174-horsepower Mazdaspeed Miata. Buy it for pure, unadulterated sport and own a little slice of racing heritage and engineering perfection. The sheer enjoyment of driving it is worth twice the price.

Mercedes-Benz CLS500, \$65,000 Hey! What happened? Benz got cool rolling out this swoopy four-door sedan it calls the CLS. And get this, it's a Benz that someone might actually drool over, and not because he's too old to keep his lips shut. The U.S. version will have a 302-horsepower 5.0-liter V-8 mated to a brand-new seven-speed manu-matic transmission, among other high-tech gizmos like brakes that squeegee themselves dry on rainy days. You might want to wait for the truly nutball, 469-horsepower AMG version headed our way in March for around \$82,000.



6

7



Jeep Commander, \$35,000 to \$40,000 Supersize the middling Grand Cherokee and you get the Jeep Commander, a mongo sport-ute that will take you and your six closest friends boonie-busting in high style. While info is slow to trickle forth on the menu of available engines, we know that you'll be able to Hemi-ize this spiritual successor to the mighty Grand Wagoneer. Alas, we can't help but wax nostalgic for that Wagoneer nameplate, that cushy couch on wheels. Wouldn't it be sweet if they brought back wood-grain sides, too? We can all dream.

Volkswagen GTI, \$23,000 If you're old enough to remember the term "pocket rocket," you're old enough to remember that two decades ago Volkswagen made the first one ever, the GTI. It was a front-drive buzz bomb that sang arias in top gear and lifted its leg on the competition. And then it got old and flabby. Ugh. Nothing like bad times to inspire a comeback. After ten years of plush-bottom GTIs, get ready for the triumphant return of the true two-door hatchback killer GTI late this fall, led by a high-tech turbocharged 2.0-liter four that packs plenty of horsepower (200) and nonstop torque. The Mini ought to watch its back. **FR**



8