



Seattle Post-Intelligencer

# WHEELS

SECTION G

## CAR THEFT

### Las Vegas tops in '06, group says:

Las Vegas led the U.S. in the rate of vehicles stolen in 2006, bumping Modesto, Calif., from the top spot, an insurance trade group said. There were 1,312 thefts per 100,000 people in the Las Vegas metropolitan area last year, a decline of 3.7 percent from 2005, the National Insurance Crime Bureau said in a statement this week. The rate fell 29.2 percent in the Modesto area to 1,005 vehicles per 100,000, the group said. Nationwide, vehicle thefts declined 2.3 percent in the first six months of 2006, compared with the prior-year period.

## LEXUS

### New chief to push personal touch:

Jim Farley, the new U.S. head of Toyota Motor Corp.'s Lexus division, said he wants to take customer service to the next level by focusing more on personalization, which is something he learned about at the youth-oriented Scion brand. Farley, who was group vice president of Toyota marketing, added that his focus at Lexus will be on product execution, customer service and dealer profitability. "The next stage for Lexus is more than just plasma screens at dealerships," Farley said. "I'm really interested in personalized service."

## INSIDE THIS SECTION

Sequels will heat up the summer movie season with "Spider-Man," "Harry Potter" and more.



## AC myth needs to hit the highway

TOM AND RAY MAGLIOZZI

### CAR TALK



**Dear Tom and Ray:** On a recent cross-country trip (South Carolina to Nevada) with my boyfriend, we had an air-conditioning issue, which I'm hoping you can help us with. I wanted to make a cell-phone call, so I put the windows up (for quiet) and turned the AC on. We were cruising at approximately 80 mph. At the next stop for gas, the car was making a funny noise, which said boyfriend decided was the compressor. Then the AC did not work any longer. Plus, the car was smoking. So he took it in for service the next day – and \$1,000 later, we have another compressor, among other AC parts. The man at the repair center said you should never turn your AC on going faster than 50 mph. Everyone I've talked with says they've never heard of such a thing, and they've all done it. And I have done it myself, with no repercussions. So is the repairman right? Is this true? We were driving a 1998 Jeep Wagoneer. It has had AC problems anyway – could it have been an existing problem? Or did my turning the AC on at 80 mph cause this? I am going to pay for it, because I feel so bad, but I would like to know for future knowledge. Thank you! – Julie

**Tom:** Don't pay for it! It wasn't your fault, Julie.

**Ray:** No, the timing was pure coincidence. The air-conditioning compressor was already on its last legs before this incident. It just happened to kick the bucket after you used it. No doubt about it, you are completely blameless.

**Tom:** We've heard this myth before, about not turning on the air conditioner at highway speeds. The purveyors of this myth explain that, with the car going that fast, the belt is turning at high speed. And if you then switch on the AC, it will be "jolted" into action at a very high speed, and that will cause some damage.

**Ray:** This, as we say in the garage, is bullfeathers. Here's why. When the AC is running, it cycles on and off by itself, anyway. So it's already turning itself on and off all the time, regardless of how fast you're driving.

**Tom:** Right. So if what the repairman said was true, you would never be able to use your AC on the highway. And we know that's not true. Otherwise, everybody you passed on the interstate would be dripping sweat, with their hair plastered to their forehead.

**Ray:** Plus, the major accessories are all shut off every time you accelerate hard, so that all of the engine's power can go to the wheels. When you back off the gas pedal, the AC comes right back on. The engine is always turning fast at that moment. I'm not saying that's great for the AC, but the compressor has its own clutch, and it's engineered and designed to be used that way.

**Tom:** So you can turn the air conditioning on and off whenever you want, Julie. And if you want to contribute to your boyfriend's new compressor, feel free. But we call this a pre-existing condition. Therefore, you're off the hook.

Write to Car Talk, c/o the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, P.O. Box 1909, Seattle, 98111. "Car Talk" is heard at 9 a.m. Saturdays on KUOW radio, 94.9 FM, and at 11 a.m. Saturdays on KPLU radio, 88.5 FM. The "Car Talk" Web site is cartalk.com.

## BANGKOK INTERNATIONAL MOTOR SHOW



Mercedes-Benz went all out to highlight new models and safety technology at the recent auto show in Bangkok. The carmaker's presentation included dancers and acrobats.

# 'Green' cars grab limelight

## Automakers put focus on hybrids, alternative fuels

BY EVAN McMULLEN  
Special to the P-1

BANGKOK, Thailand – The 28th annual Bangkok International Motor Show was certainly glitzy enough.

Limousines jammed the entry drive. Uniformed caterers bustled about to a fanfare of specially scored theme music. And Miss Motor Show 2007 and runners-up one through four scurried after dignitaries as they toured titanic exhibits, including a multimillion-dollar reader board by Chevrolet and Daimler-Benz's electronic waterfall-like display that cascaded an unending stream of words in English and Thai.

But the lasting impression was not glitz but green.

Themed "Driving Through Nature" and set against the backdrop of the Thai royal family's long-standing commitment to environmental concerns as well as development, the show earlier this month was a carefully calibrated convergence of regional and international greening trends.

The world's major automakers definitely rose to the occasion, unveiling alternative fuel cars and high-tech interactive displays focusing on fuel efficiency and alternatives to petroleum.

Volvo's emphasis was on its vaunted safety; its new sporty cars, especially the C-30; and its alternative-fuel capabilities (its diesel lineup, for example, is biodiesel-capable).

Toyota offered a display promoting "Inspired Innovation for Smart Living" and featuring a radical hybrid concept car. Toyota's regular line now offers not only the Prius, but also Camry and Highlander hybrid models.

Lexus, Toyota's cousin, presented a performance depicting a chrysalis pupa becoming a butterfly with skilled acrobats, suspended from the ceiling by cables, to promote the world premiere of the Lexus RX 400H, the world's first production hybrid luxury car. The price tag for the Lexus was spendy, even by luxury standards: more than \$175,000 by current currency conversion.

Honda presented a program concentrating on its history, featuring the 1965 Richie Ginther Mexican Grand Prix winning car as well as the recent Jensen Boulton Hungarian Grand Prix '06 first-prize winner. The brand also touted its robot technology and a new "personal"-size production corporate jet, claimed to be the fastest, most fuel-efficient plane in its class.

Daimler-Benz, despite its struggles with Chrysler, showed no signs of weakness in Thailand. For many years, the luxury brand of choice among the Thai affluent, the marque has been losing ground of late to BMW.

Their presentation was well



MAZDA OF THAILAND

Despite the overall "green" theme of the show, Mazda exhibited its sporty MX-5 two-seater, which features a retractable hardtop.

over the top with dozens of dancers superlatively choreographed and an outrageous pair of acrobats intermingling with each other as they hung from a trapeze. The Benz message was about new safety technology, various new models including the S300L, the CL class and its "Active Body Central Suspension System." But it also showcased the natural gas-powered E200 NGT, which the Thai director of sales described as locally manufactured.

Chevrolet unveiled the Captiva, the first diesel-powered Chevrolet sport utility vehicle developed for the European market. Bold, sleek and sporty, it features a 2.4-liter, in-line four-cylinder engine.

Mazda displayed the MX-5 roadster with retractable hardtop.

Ford also echoed the show's theme, presenting its extensive lineup that included "E20 Capable" fuel systems. (E20 refers to the percentage of ethanol that can be used.)

Ford strongly supports Thailand's national gasohol policy and is committed to offering all future flex-fuel models with a minimum of E10 capability. The ASEAN market Focus and Escape models are currently E20-compatible. Dave Alden, Ford's vice president for Asia Pacific and ASEAN markets, said Ford is contemplating a \$1 billion investment in the region, including Thailand, which has the largest automotive market in Southeast Asia and serves as the region's production hub.

Interestingly, the days of intense Bangkok smog, surgeon-masked Tuk-Tuk drivers and

heavily congested roads seem to be passing. Most Thai taxis and many private passenger car owners have opted to spend about \$1,000 per car to convert their vehicles to burn ethanol or compressed natural gas. Despite its recent political turbulence, Thailand's aggressive energy and environmental policies seem to be gaining traction.

Internationally, redoubled attention to global warming is turning up the heat on major automakers to find environmentally responsible alternatives. And this may not be simple posturing.

Coupled with industry and market initiatives, the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling holding the Environmental Protection Agency responsible for development of greenhouse gas emissions regulation can be expected to add some fuel to the U.S. automakers' fire to develop independent standards and road maps – before they're thrust upon them by individual states, the new Congress or the need to compete internationally.

Only time will tell, but this year's Bangkok International Motor Show was encouraging in its bold display of high-tech prowess and eco-friendly vision. Apart from all the frenzied Vegas-style glamour, it may very well come to represent a marketing and manufacturing landmark. It's a high-tech, green-conscious motor-head's dream.

Evan McMullen is proprietor of Cosmopolitan Motors in Seattle.

## AUTO BIOGRAPHY

**OWNER'S NAME:** Patricia Sorensen

**OCCUPATION:** Publishers sales representative

**CAR'S YEAR, MAKE AND MODEL:**  
1968 Oldsmobile Cutlass S convertible

**"I LOVE MY CAR BECAUSE . . .** she looks so sleek. My first car was a 1963 Olds Cutlass F-85 convertible, and I've been hooked since then. She is a real sleeper, not as hot as her big sister the 442, but plenty of power and always a head turner. My Oldsmobiles have never let me down mechanically."

**CONTACT US:** E-mail a photo of you and your car (172-dpi, about 5 by 7 inches) plus all the basic information included above. Send it all to mycar@seattlepi.com, and we'll pick one every Friday. That lucky owner will receive a nifty P-1 mug.



## COMING UP

**Hey, commuters. Do you want to know where the transportation trouble spots will be? Find that information and more in the Seattle P-1's Getting There column. Transportation writers Kery Murakami and Larry Lange also answer your questions.**

MONDAY