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By MP Hannigan

### **Drive Western and Drive Healthy**

The automobile enhanced the appeal of the West, and the West enhanced the appeal of the automobile. Car ads in magazines and on TV, in their own odd way, recognize this point: spiffy new cars pose for their pictures on Southwestern mesas, or barrel down open Western roads. The result is a motor vehicle arms race.

The West's love of scale and size seems to be at work in recent motor vehicle design. The 'my car is bigger than yours' mentality, with the flattering assumption that the size of the car says something about the stature of its owner, has made some among us, choose "big" strictly for safety. The thought of getting rear-ended by an Excursion makes a consumer think twice about purchasing the new Honda Insight.

Consider the West-evoking names chosen for SUVs: the Dodge Durango, the Chevrolet Tahoe, the Hyundai Santa Fe, the Chevrolet Trailblazer, the Nissan Pathfinder, the Mercury Mountaineer, the Jeep Wrangler, and the Isuzu Rodeo. **From the days of the Ford Mustang**, the association of powerful cars with the image of the free and open American West has been one of the less subtle dimensions in the enthusiastic marketing of fossil fuel.

The marketing works. Currently, we drive for power. We drive for freedom. But aren't there other, more appealing values that could leave both ourselves and our cars less driven?

Why not drive for health?

A mechanical engineer venturing out into the world of advertising is, no doubt, a lamb among wolves. But here's my idea: Let's learn from the success of the slogan "Eat Healthy." **Guided by that goal**, we are beginning to make wiser choices **both** at the grocery store **and among grocery stores**, and these choices are influencing the agricultural industry. We are paying more to eat healthy. We are starting to realize that more food isn't better. Healthy food is better.

Healthier may mean several things here. I may mean free-range beef. You may mean fat-free soup. I may mean butter, and you, not having read the absolutely most current reports, may mean margarine. Whatever our preference, some of us are paying more for quality. We are making thoughtful choices. And the industry has followed us. The consumer, contrary to defeatist folklore, does have some power.

So, why not drive healthy? Let's take a closer look at what the opposite plan, driving unhealthy, means in our world today.

So far, most cars run on fossil fuel. We put it in our car at the gas station, our car eats it, it gives our car its power, and our car belches out the remnants. Those remnants include carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, water, nitrogen oxide, some unburned gas, and teeny, tiny particles of smoke and soot.

- Emissions of carbon dioxide do not improve the world. Global warming is only one possible dimension of this **big** problem
- Carbon monoxide causes suffocation. It fights oxygen for a parking place on your hemoglobin, and when it wins, You lose oxygen flow, which means you lose big.
- Water is the best news of fossil fuels emissions. Unfortunately, the manmade emissions of water can also have climate change repercussions, so we need to temper our enthusiasm here.

- Nitrogen oxide gets converted to other forms of nitrogen and oxygen. These other forms react with lung cells, causing lung damage. And, these chemicals eagerly react with other chemicals as well. For instance, they react with the unburned gasoline and form ozone. Ozone also reacts adversely with your lung cells.
- Unburned gasoline helps form ozone. It also contains chemicals like benzene that are bad for you (a.k.a, carcinogenic).
- Teeny, tiny particles are a new concern. **What we lump into the term, “smoke and soot,” is actually composed of** about one thousand substances. Scientists are beginning to piece together the fact that these particles are linked with health **problems**, from asthma to heart attacks. Using the results from a recent article in the Journal of American Medicine about the health effects of these particles, we determined that they could be killing 3700 people a year in the Interior American West

The solution is obvious. Let’s drive healthy. Let’s choose cars that belch less of these remnants.

There are two ways to achieve this. First, drive a car that eats less gas per mile you drive. Second, drive your car fewer miles.

It is true that engineers who work for automakers are designing devices to reduce the amount of remnants that your car belches without reducing the amount of gas your car consumes. With improved catalyst technology, automobiles will reduce their emissions.

But we have to think about the full process here. What materials and how much energy are needed to produce these new catalyst technologies? What happens when the catalyst is full? What will your automobile then emit, and what will become of this spent catalyst?

‘Eat healthy’ has caught on because we had to stop and think about the impact of diet and agricultural practices on our lives, our children’s lives, and their children’s lives. We have started to influence the food industry, and eating healthy has begun to cost less at the grocery store – even though we had already realized that the true savings were indirect quality of life issues.

We can do the same thing with the auto industry. The automakers are neither evil nor stupid. They want and need to show a profit. If they see an increase in sales of fuel-efficient cars and/or hybrid cars, then they will invest in that line of technology.

Time to wake up, Westerners. We can’t let our image get tangled up with the size and power of our cars. No more badge of honor for driving the most miles per year. No more bragging to our neighbors about the size of our engines. Choosing a car to feel powerful or free buys you neither power nor freedom. You don’t have to be a doctor to know that health is the precondition of virility.

For the moment, we remain captive to the motor vehicle arms race. If we realize that real personal power means choosing a car for health reasons, then we could exercise the freedom that counts by making informed, wise choices.

Small steps, even though they don’t seem like much, could lay the foundation for a new marketplace. **When consumers act wisely**, industry will follow, with government **trailing behind, no doubt at some distance**. **Westerners deserve to breathe deeply and safely; they have the power to award each other this privilege, or maybe even right.**