

High Tech

Efficiency a key in auto fashions

By PAT CLARK

You just don't see car manufacturers pushing rumble seats and tailfins onto the buying public anymore. The magic words these days are "aerodynamic design," "front-wheel drive," and "emerging technology," a representative of Ford Motor Co. said.

"That's not a fashion thing or a style thing," said Bill Peacock, public relations manager for Ford. "The auto industry is light-years away from the big fashion gambit we did in the '50s and '60s. Cars are approached on a driver-oriented basis today."

Peacock said the auto industry is becoming interested in aerodynamics. Ford tests new cars for aerodynamic design at the Lockheed Aircraft wind tunnel in Marietta, Ga. Air moving the car can waste fuel, he said. Better aerodynamic design means better mileage.

What all of this means in practical terms is that the chrome-laden, tailfinned turquoise ragtop land barges from the gas-rich '50s are not about to make a roaring comeback. It does mean, however, that we will start seeing cars break out of the box-shaped design that was especially prevalent with European imports in the '70s.

"Foreign cars, especially the Volvo and BMW, basically had a three-box design," Peacock said. "It was very inefficient for managing air. The trick is to make the environment comfortable for passengers and still round the car off for aerodynamic design. You never saw a square airplane."

The prototype of the new aerodynamic Ford retains an old, romantic gas-hog name: Thunderbird. Another "new, efficient" design feature, front-wheel drive, is neither new nor necessarily efficient, Peacock said.

"There were front-wheel drive cars in the '20s," Peacock said. "The distinct advantage of them is that it is package-efficient. You don't have the drive line down the middle of the car. The disadvantage is that they are not as good for acceleration and high-speed driving." Peacock said front-wheel drive cars also handle better in bad weather than rear-wheel drive cars, at least in smaller car lines.

"At about the midpoint of the auto size spectrum, front-wheel drive does not offer appreciable advantages, except from the marketing standpoint. So you may see car companies do front-wheel drive cars even if rear-wheel drive would do as well or better," Peacock said.

Car colors have changed with car designs. Popular car colors are a regional matter, Peacock said. "Light colors predominate in the Sun Belt. Conservative colors, like the earth tones, tend to be popular in the East. Silver is popular everywhere, especially the West Coast, where Mercedes sells well."

In any case, Peacock said, you can forget about robin's-egg blue and pink. "The light, primary colors of the '50s and early '60s have pretty well disap-



Shelley Sperry/Daily Nebraskan

peared, and two tones have too. Some cars this year will have a darker shade of the same color on the lower panel." He said this gives the car a sleeker, more well-proportioned look.

While car exteriors conform to new aerodynamic ideals, you are not without options for interior design. Custom-designed interiors are common with luxury cars, he said.

Cloth has replaced vinyl as the interior fabric of choice. Peacock said cloth interiors are popular for three reasons: its improved durability, its resistance to heat ("you know how uncomfortable it is to get in a car after it sits in the sun all day") and its reassuring texture, which "helps to hold you in the car."

For both interior and exteriors, Peacock expects high-tech wizardry to continue as the rage in the auto industry for the foreseeable future. "We're getting ready to go into major changes in the auto industry with what I call 'emerging technologies.'"

Most of the breakthroughs Peacock described will not be noticeable as style changes, but as driving changes.

One such improvement is an electronically controlled air suspension spring. "It's a rubber-type air cylinder, constantly changing air pressure, monitored by sensors that in turn send signals to a com-

puter. It keeps the car in best balance under all kinds of load-bearing conditions. The steel spring in cars now is calibrated for the average use, not any one single use," Peacock said.

Peacock also expects electronic power steering to come into vogue in the next few years. "Electronic power steering gives you the correct amount of power steering boost for every road speed. You get the same power boost now no matter what speed you are going and degree of turn. The electronic power steering means you will get the same feel coming through the steering wheel at all speeds."

The drawback to the new electronic equipment in cars is the need for a reliable, low-cost computer, Peacock said. "The market will only pay so much for this kind of equipment," he said. "As prices of electronic computers go down, these changes will become more possible."

Even the traditional Oct. 1 to Sept. 30 model year for cars is falling by the wayside, Peacock said.

"The industry has gotten into a frantic period of bringing out new cars and light trucks as soon as they can." He said the advantages of abandoning the old format were that they could stagger the new model introductions and balance the workload through the year in design and production plants.

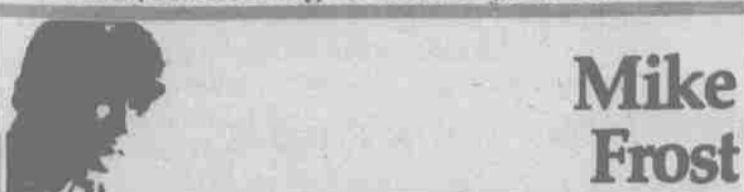
High-Tech Hour — the last word in radio

"You're listening to KLAT radio. Remember, we mean back talk. It's time for the *High-Tech Hour*, with your host, Alan J. Bluto. Now, here's Alan."

Thanks very much. Time for another fun-filled hour in which we answer all your questions about high tech. Let's go to our first caller. Hello?

"Hi Alan?"

Ma'am, I'm hearing an echo. Is your radio on.



Mike Frost

"Why yes."

Well, please, turn your radio down. Thanks very much. Go ahead with your question.

"We're having several friends over for dinner tonight and I was wondering what kind of software to set.

What are you serving for supper?"

"Tuna casserole."

Yucko. If you're going to serve that mush, I'd suggest something that's going to divert their attention. Maybe a good video game like Popeye or Kickman.

"My husband thought maybe we should while away the hours with conversation."

Why bother talking when you could play a good video game? Take my advice, stick with Popeye and your evening will be a success. Next caller, please.

"Hello, Alan?"

Ma'am, I'm hearing a radio in the background.

"Oh, I guess it is on."

Please, turn your radio down. Thanks very much. What's your question?

"Well, our son has tampered with our cable television box. We are not getting a pornographic television station from De! Rio, Texas. What should I do?"

Ma'am, what your lad has done is a federal offense. If you don't want to see the little slime bucket rot behind bars, send me the tampered cable box, and I'll make sure it's viewed, er, disposed of properly. Really. You can trust me. Next call.

"Hello, Alan?"

Sir, I hear the screeching of tires in the background.

"Yeah, that's because I'm calling you on the portable in our station wagon."

Well, please, turn your radials down. Thanks very much. OK, what's your question?

"It's not a question *per se*. I thought I'd share a high-tech joke with your listening audience."

Go right ahead. Because it is such a new field, there are very few high-tech jokes. It's not because high-techers don't have a good sense of humor.

"OK. See, I went to a computer store, and I asked the clerk if he had a computer with 60 bytes. He said, 'I haven't had 60 bytes for more than a week.' So, I bit him 60 times!"

Good one, sir. Thanks for calling. Hello, you're on the air.

"Hello, Alan?"

Sir, I'm hearing steam heat in the background.

"Yes, my apartment is heated that way."

Well, please turn your radiator down. Thanks very much. Go ahead with your high-tech question.

"It's kind of personal. I've always used an Apple Home Computer. I'm engaged to Darla, and I just found out she uses an IBM personal computer. Can this liaison work?"

Listen, you know I'm an open-minded guy and everything. But, I just don't approve a mixed-data. I mean, I use an Apple, like you. People who use IBM's aren't like you and me. They have an entirely different, well you know, video display terminal. It'll never work. Dump her. Hello, you're on the air.

"Hello, Alan?"

Ma'am, I'm hearing a high level of radiation in the background.

"It's my son. He's building an atomic reactor."

Well, please, have your son turn uranium down.

"I can't and that's my whole problem. Little Adolf has gone hightech crazy. He's got seven atomic reactors in the back yard. He's got his home computer tapped into SAC. He says he's going to destroy us all if we don't treat him with respect. I'm scared, Alan."

Treat him with respect, eh? Ma'am, your son's a mealy-mouthed little liar. No individual has that kind of capability. It's technologically im—