

Gutless Cutlass a scary ride

A friend's recent apartment hunt has clued me in to the fact that I have been suffering a silent discrimination, a prejudice against junky cars.

My friend, who shall remain nameless so that she may find an apartment, informed me that several apartment complexes around Lincoln will not rent to you if you drive an old junky car.

Thankfully, my apartment complex has yet to have such a thought or I'd be living on the street.

You see, I drive the equivalent of rust on wheels. There, I've admitted it. After several 12-step programs, I'm able to admit my problem, my secret. I drive a 1982 Oldsmobile Cutlass, a.k.a. the "Gutless Cutlass."

You may have seen me, or rather, heard me, driving down the street. The loud noise coming from the hole in the exhaust should clue you in that it's me. The various lesions of rust and scratches that cover the Gutless' flat, painted exterior are other hints to get out of the way.

But you will never really appreciate junk until you have to drive it. Driving a liability on wheels brings about deep spirituality.

When you're driving along and suddenly lose your brakes (as I recently did) and then are lucky enough to coast to a stop, you really learn the value of life.

Or when you're turning a corner and your car's tie rod breaks, leaving you with no steering, but you are able to avoid hitting anything — you know there is a God.

Or when you're driving your car down the highway and it suddenly begins smoking and showing signs of spontaneous combustion, but you get out before a fire erupts — you begin to believe in angels.

Or when you get carsick just



Heather Lampe

driving to the grocery store, because the car hasn't had new shocks in five years — you learn the cleansing power of prayer.

Laugh as you may, but all of these things have happened to me in my five years of driving the Gutless. I have learned more about the internal design of a car than I care to know. When a different piece begins to fall off or break every week and when every fluid in the car begins leaking, you must become knowledgeable.

Many people wonder why I don't just buy a new car or fix the Gutless. Other than the fact that I have no money, my father and his obsession with becoming the Jiffy Lube/Midas/Phillips 66/House of Mufflers and Brakes man has hindered me on the road toward a new car.

My father doesn't believe in mechanics or car specialists of any sort. He is convinced he can fix anything, and he is willing to risk my life to prove it. After my brush with death by loss of brakes, I began to wonder if my father was trying to off me.

This column is actually a plea to my dad to let me live. Please dad, buy me something different. I don't need a brand-new car. I'd settle for something that wasn't built when Olivia Newton-John was still popular.

This column is also a plea to the masses. Don't judge a book by its

cover or a people by the number of dents in their cars. Until you've walked a mile in my shoes or driven a mile in my car, you will never know my pain. You will never know what it's like to sit at a stoplight when your car is vibrating and shaking. You will never know the shame of driving over railroad tracks and hearing your muffler fall off.

People who drive junky cars risk their lives every day and have enough to deal with without being discriminated against when looking for housing. I beg of you! Let them live!! Let them live in your apartments!

Excuse me for foaming at the mouth, but I think I'm fated and doomed to always drive the Gutless. The electric seats have been broken for three years, and only someone exactly my height and build could ever drive my car. If nothing else, I am safe from short, fat carjackers.

And if someday I am lucky enough to bid a fond farewell to the rust baby, I want to send her out with style. I want to take her somewhere that is cultured and refined. I want to take her to a place where the beer nuts and tobacco spit flow freely, a place where if your car bursts into flames or your tire flies off, you receive applause — a place where driving backwards is an art.

I want to take her to the demolition derby.

It will be a last hurrah for the Gutless, a chance for her to shine, a chance for her smoky exhaust to rise above the rest.

Now, if I could only get her into reverse.

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Public are guppies businesses reel in

I received some interesting junk mail the other day. It didn't tell me that I could be a millionaire soon, or that I could buy 12 compact discs for a penny, but it was interesting nonetheless.

It was a magazine from some sort of entrepreneurial group that apparently wanted to make me filthy rich and successful beyond my wildest dreams. Also, these people wanted me to subscribe to their magazine.

The complimentary issue of this magazine that I'll call "Get Fat Monthly," tells the rags-to-riches stories of many former do-nothings and go-nowheres just like myself who, with the help of "Get Fat," have become, well, fat.

Many were ordinary jerks just like me. Some, according to the magazine, were seemingly dimmer than most small kitchen appliance light bulbs. But they made it. They made it big (or fat) because of three important things.

First of all, according to "Get Fat Monthly," this is America, the land of the free, home of the brave and world leader of phone-sex hot lines. So anything is possible, even for dimwits like me.

Second, ordinary jerks just like me occasionally have ideas that can be turned into barrels and barrels of cash.

Third, and most important, these new safari leaders in the capitalistic jungle all have their very own subscriptions to "Get Fat Monthly," from which they draw daily inspiration.

I have to say that although I appreciate the nice offer from the people at "GF," I really don't need their magazine to get inspiration for wonderful money-making ideas.

My inspiration comes from the obvious gullibility of the American spending public. It seems that we, as blue-blooded American shoppers, will buy almost anything.

I really believe that if Kmart has a blue-light special on bags of cat innards and it's a special that will last for a limited time only, people will be driving home with bags of cat innards right next to their toaster strudels.

One famous American, who knew this sickness and also drew inspiration from it as I have, was the creator of the Slinky. I am not sure what the guy's name was (I was told it was Alberto Slinkenstein), but I'd take a wild guess that the first time he saw the scrap-metal spring laying on the factory floor, he thought two things.

"Hey," he thought to himself, "this scrap-metal spring I found on the factory floor appears as



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though it would walk downstairs, alone or in pairs, and gosh, it makes a slinkety sound."

And then, "And people will actually pay for this crap. I just hope I can come up with a catchy jingle for it..."

Our history is full of entrepreneurs who knew of the shopping sickness. Look at Silly Putty. I mean, really, what the hell is that? And why did I buy more than one plastic egg full of it?

And do we need a machine that rewinds video tapes? No, it's not the VCR, it's a machine whose only function is to rewind tapes. Is there a need in this country for electronic letter openers?

The list goes on and on.

I know the sickness of the American shopper, and I will be fat. This I vow.

My first idea is not actually a lame new product, or even a bag of cat innards, but a new business idea.

How many times have you been reluctant to buy that blow-up sex doll you've always wanted because it's too expensive? Plenty, I'm betting. Or how about that special vibrating plastic toy? Just a bit out of budget?

Fear not, Americans: Todd's Used Sexual Device Emporium is here. All of the intimate toys you've always wanted to play with will be here, and they are all "previously owned" for that great price reduction.

I hear the moans of disgust already. I may have pushed the envelope of the free-market system with that business idea, I'll admit, but it may work in the right location.

If a used sexual-device store wouldn't make me big and fat, I still have the option of inventing a completely worthless product.

The Slinky has already been invented. Silly Putty is out, as is the Chia Pet and slime.

How much would you pay for a gallon of "Wipe 4 Fun?," an all-new liquid that cleans, disinfects and deodorizes sexual devices. I'll even come up with a catchy jingle.

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Hide the trash this Earth day

I am personally responsible for no less than three major ecological disasters.

Their names are Justin, Anna and Joseph.

Yep, my children are walking, talking, over-consuming Environmental Protection Agency Superfund sites — typical middle-class American kids.

Not only do they use up much more than their fair share of the Earth's resources — we have enough plastic McDonald's Happy Meal figurines to start our own Toys 'R' Us store — but at least one of them is extremely environmentally incorrect.

My oldest son, Justin, will spend tomorrow — the 25th Anniversary of Earth Day — in Memorial Stadium watching a football game.

He thinks nature stinks. The kid never met a tree he liked. Of course, in his defense, Mother Nature has never been particularly kind to him.

When we take him on nature hikes, he runs into nettles. On prairie walks, he is accosted by bees. And standing too close to oak trees gives him hives.

To add insult to injury, his attitude toward the breathtaking wonders of this planet we call home is sadly lacking.

The sandhill cranes were boring; the Grand Canyon monotonous. (I knew we should have hit Arizona BEFORE we went to Disneyland.) The majestic Rockies made his ears pop. And when we make our annual pilgrimage to the Black Hills, what does he want to do? Climb Harney Peak? Explore the woods? No, Justin would rather hide behind the boulders next to the mountain road in front of our cabin and yell at passing cars: "Do you have any Grey Poupon?"

It's not my fault. I have done my darndest to teach my offspring about ecosystems and sustainability, recycling and reusing, food chains



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and endangered species. We've planted trees and gardens, taken moonlit wildlife walks and observed solstice celebrations.

I've done everything but strip naked and romp through the backyard compost pile to demonstrate my love for the earth.

OK. Sure. I'll admit it, I'm not a purist. I have committed sins against the planet.

Once my daughter ran upstairs to tell me about a family she had just seen on television. Seems these people were so frugal, conserving and prudent that they only created enough waste to fill a single garbage can in a year. (I bet it was a big ol' dumpster.)

In a year? Doesn't Pizza Hut ever deliver to these people? What do they do with their old copies of National Geographic? And what about the plastic liners from cereal boxes? Surely those went into the trash can?

Nope, Anna said. These people really knew how to step lightly on the earth.

I wanted to go hide in my own 50-gallon Rubbermaid trash can out of shame. Unfortunately, it was full.

We have eaten more than our fair share of take-out pizza, the kind that comes in big honkin' cardboard boxes that you can't recycle because they're covered with grease and cheese.

Ditto on McDonald's-to-go. I personally quit eating there years ago, but it seems to be a childhood rite I can't deny my kids.

Sometimes when the grocery store clerk asks, "Plastic or paper?" I go for plastic so I'll have something to wrap the dog doo-doo in when I take Higgins for a walk.

And occasionally I'll throw out a glass jar, but only if it has been sitting in the fridge for too long and has something particularly moldy and disgusting growing in it.

And the car. Oh, my goodness. It's not that I don't encourage my children to walk, bike or ride the bus. In fact, last summer I attempted to convince them of the virtues of mass transit. Unfortunately, on this particular August day the Arapahoe bus was on its last legs. And the driver kept crying and saying, "I think I'm going to pass out." I rode the whole way downtown with my hand on the emergency exit cord.

Somehow the system seems biased against us. On any given day a StarTran driver (or any of us) can have a minor crisis, but when the bus only comes once an hour and blocks from home, it seems so effortless to just get out the car keys.

It's so easy to order cardboard-covered pizzas, crank up the air conditioning and keep right on consuming.

Personally, I'm heading for the park tomorrow. And I have hope for my son, I truly do. Somewhere in the corners of his mind are memories of his mother rinsing out used plastic bags, lecturing about waste and digging in the earth to plant perennials and peas.

Someday he's going to outgrow that allergy to oak trees. The pilgrimage of the sandhill cranes will give him hope and the Grand Canyon will make him cry with its beauty.

Just give him some time.

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