

CAR CRAZY CULTURE

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[Assignment: Choose an area of popular culture you know about, and make a point about it in a short essay. Draw a conclusion about your subject which will be of interest to your readers.]

(1) A revealing aspect of American culture is its fascination with automobiles. This fascination can be seen almost anywhere. Car buffs gather around the magazine racks to look over issues of a variety of auto magazines in drug stores. Americans always turn their heads when a sleek red Porsche zips past them on the freeway. Even on many game shows, the most valued prize to win is "A NEW CAR!" Why do Americans cherish cars so much? There are three reasons for this obsession: desire for individual freedom, the aesthetic appeal of the car, and the fact that cars can become valuable vehicles for crafting a self-image.

(2) Few would dispute that cars provide people with greater freedom. In a culture where individual freedom is so highly cherished, it seems only natural that one would want the ability to travel nearly anywhere and at anytime. Car owners no longer need to rely on car pools or bus schedules to get to where they want to go. Relying on a car pool necessitates being ready and waiting for the car to arrive, having no choice on what music is played in the car, having no control over the temperature in the car, and going only to the place where the driver takes you. Similarly, relying on a bus involves allowing for much longer travel time, being forced to sit, sometimes, next to "creepy looking" strangers, and only traveling to places covered by the bus route. Cars are very appealing because they eliminate all of these problems encountered with car pools and buses; granted, the driver of a car must find a parking place and must keep up on maintenance, insurance, and fuel costs for a car, but the American public considers these small sacrifices for freedom. Even the advertising industry has picked up on this yearning for freedom of mobility. A car known as the Yugo has a television ad which says, "Buy a little freedom; buy a Yugo."

(3) Another factor which causes Americans to love cars so much is that cars possess a certain aesthetic beauty which appeals to people. The lines and curves of a hot red sports car excite the American populace. Those who lust after these cars as they are driven down the street seem enthralled by a car's potential for tremendous speed. Another testimony to the aesthetic value of cars is the number of adults who are constantly washing and grooming their prized possessions. These people take utmost care in preserving their cars whether the price tag is five thousand or fifty thousand dollars. These "auto-epicureans" wax their cars twice a year, wash

them every week with mild, detergent-free cleaners (so as not to dull the paint), change the oil every three months or three thousand miles (whichever comes first), and absolutely always park their cars in the most remote section of a public parking lot to reduce the chances of their darlings being scratched by the opening of other car doors. Furthermore, the auto-epicureans are ceaselessly looking at, looking inside, and examining the numerous other cars (parked at shopping malls, churches, on the street, or in private driveways) which interest them.

(4) The final reason for American fascination with cars is that our cars can be used as tools to express our personalities. One person may drive a sports car to convey the image that she is "cool;" another may drive a monstrous 4X4 to show that he is a gutsy outdoorsman rather than a wimp. A white-collar worker might want to drive a nice Mercedes to display his success. Or, people may want a car that is not characteristic of their actual personality, but rather signifies a character or ambition that they have dreamed about. For instance, a garbage collector may buy a sports car because he has always wished he were an Indy 500 racer. And people can use the manner of their driving to reflect their own images of themselves. Accelerating quickly, driving slowly, or driving competitively with other cars on the road are all ways to reflect the public or the private personality of the driver.

(5) The reasons offered above may not be the only source for this peculiar passion among Americans. But no matter what the reasons, one thing is certain: for Americans, their cars will always remain prized possessions.