



ROB O'FLANAGAN, GUELPH MERCURY

Future car buyers Rick Danciu and Indre Volkaite, seen near a vehicle on display this week at the North American International Auto Show, have vastly different tastes in cars. Both acknowledge they will have to change their expectations and priorities for what their dream car will be.

# Desire and need for cars have not evaporated

► **AUTO** FROM PAGE A1

But while merciless criticism of the Detroit Three has created the perception that they are passé, insular, out of touch with global market realities and building cars that no one wants to buy, company leaders seem convinced they're doing what needs to be done to fight the infection and respond to contemporary consumer demands. And they are defending themselves, in strong terms, against an onslaught of criticism they say is not entirely deserved.

There can be no doubt that the relationship we have with the automobile is changing. The superficial lusts for muscle, shapeliness, size and speed — while still deeply embedded in the psyche of many car buyers — is being overtaken by more practical concerns like reliability, fuel economy, safety and sustainability. Industry leaders appear to genuinely acknowledge this shift, and seem sincere in their willingness to respond.

What we want in a car has changed fundamentally, they say, and the industry is scrambling to give today's motorists what they are demanding, while struggling to respond to the most unpredictable and devastating economic conditions of a lifetime. That struggle may end in utter failure or it could lead to a renewal of the Detroit-based automotive industry.

One thing remains relatively certain: Our love and need for cars has not suddenly evaporated, nor will it any time soon.

Some may long for an end to humanity's dependence on the automobile, but it is a most unlikely scenario for generations to come. North Americans have enjoyed relatively easy access to cars for several generations. People in the developing world want the same privilege. There are currently about 600 million cars worldwide,

and about 6.76 billion inhabitants.

Judging by what drew crowds at the Detroit Auto Show earlier this week, style remains the single most attractive feature of an automobile — its shape, lines and colour. Young and old oglers swarmed the Mercedes-Benz SLR, the Audi R8 FSI, the Lamborghini Gallardo and the Hummer H2 — all works of design art in their own ways.



Most can only dream of owning such a vehicle, and most are beginning to understand there are other, more important priorities than style and image when it comes to buying a car.

Fantasies, dreams and lofty ambitions are an important part of life. They give us reasons to get out of bed in the morning. But when it comes to cars, our fantasies, dreams and lofty ambitions have been dealt a severe blow by reality. People may fantasize about owning a Hummer and being the recipient of the attention it commands, but when it comes to putting cash on the sales counter, economy has become king.

"Obviously a lot of these cars are out-of-bounds for me," said Rick Danciu, 24, who drove from Chicago to attend the auto show with his friend, Indre Volkaite. "They're just not the kind of vehicles I could afford, so it's more of a fantasy thing for me. Sure, looks are important, but I want a vehicle that is fuel efficient and is not going to break down on me."

Danciu sees North American

motorists going green, sooner rather than later. It was not lost on Danciu that in his inauguration speech Tuesday, U.S. President Barack Obama spoke of harnessing the sun, wind and other forms of alternative energy.

The new president has said he wants to see one million electric vehicles on American roads by 2015.

Environmentalism has arrived at the White House, and environmentalism has permeated the automotive sector.

"I'd buy an electric car today if it was affordable," Danciu said as he stood not far from the new Chevrolet Volt, a plug-in electric vehicle expected on the market in 2010. Those first Volts won't be cheap, however, commanding \$40,000 or more, according to a Chevy official.

Volkaite, 18, showed the brashness of her youth.

"I'm lookin' to get a Bugatti Veyron," she said smugly, speaking of the world's most expensive car, which costs roughly US\$1.5 million. "I'm looking for luxury, and something that stands out on the street."

"Forget reliability. People want their nice luxury cars, and you can't put that in a little hybrid. Even when gas was \$4 a gallon, people were still buying cars that ate so much gas."

True and false.

Demand for trucks and SUVs plummeted in North America when gas reached \$3.50 per gallon. It picked up again when gas prices dropped late in 2008. Yes, some buyers thumbed their noses at fuel prices, but the abandonment of the gas-guzzler was so massive that it threatened to sink the Detroit Three, and might still do so.

*On Monday: While struggling to survive, automakers confidently plan for the future.*

# Manderson expects to apply for legal aid

► **COURT** FROM PAGE A1

"I've been peeling my onion for the exposure of evidence against these individuals for nine years," he said. "And what do you do when you peel an onion? You cry."

He said he has spent his life savings on legal expenses and will probably apply for legal aid in connection with this matter.

"I've spent all my money . . . I have a fixed income, a pension."

One of Manderson's outstanding questions concerning the lawsuit is who is suing him. Although only two names were listed as plaintiffs, Manderson's comments address the entire corporation and Wellington County council.

When asked whether the decision to move forward with the lawsuit was something voted on by council, Erin mayor and county councillor Rod Finnie said he couldn't comment because the matter was addressed "in camera." That means it was handled during a legally closed session of county council.

Coun. Lou Maieron said Man-

“ I've been peeling my onion for the exposure of evidence against these individuals for nine years. And what do you do when you peel an onion? You cry.

Bill Manderson

derson attends many meetings and every county stakeholder is aware of Manderson's website.

"I've never seen him be disruptive," he said.

Calls for comments this week to Doug Thomson, the lawyer listed in the lawsuit for Whitcombe and Wilson, were not returned.

Wilson said he could not comment.

The matter is to go before court Tuesday.

# Man pulled from burning car

**Mercury staff**

editor@guelphmercury.com

Firefighters arriving on the scene extinguished the blaze.

**GUELPH** — A man was taken to hospital with unknown injuries yesterday after his vehicle caught fire, police said.

The Guelph man was driving in the parking lot of the Guelph Athletic Club on Stone Road at 3:15 p.m. when he struck a parked vehicle, police said.

Club staff and passersby pulled him from the burning wreckage.

Details were unclear yesterday, but the crash may have involved a second parked vehicle at the club, located at 80 Stone Rd. W.

The club is near the intersection with Gordon Street on the city's south side.

Witnesses are asked to contact Guelph Police Constable Matt Jotham.

He can be reached at 519-824-1212, ext. 7434.

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# Cool cat still up for grabs

**Mercury staff**

editor@guelphmercury.com

**GUELPH** — Wanted: a warm, welcoming home for a friendly tabby

Wrong Way Jay, who's staying at the Guelph Humane Society after being rescued from a tree last week by Humane Wildlife Control, hasn't been claimed by his unknown owners.

It appears the cat was stuck in a tree on Eliot Place for two days, suffering through sometimes bitterly cold winter temperatures.

Jay's nose was beet red when he was brought down Jan. 13. Humane Wildlife Control officer Jason Boles said at the time it meant the animal was "in a deep freeze."

Staff at the humane society were concerned for his welfare amid -23 C overnight temperatures with the wind chill, but said yesterday that he is recovering well.

"No one came to claim him, which is really too bad," humane society executive director Elizabeth Bonkink said yesterday.

Jay was neutered and put up for adoption Wednesday.

"There's been interest, but no one's put in an application," she said.

She described the grey-and-white cat as a "big, gentle giant. He's friendly; he loves people."



GUELPH MERCURY

This tabby, named Wrong Way Jay by workers at the Guelph Humane Society shelter, has not been claimed.

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