

A VENT WINDOW VIEW – **DEBS FROM DETROIT**

2012 B. K. Showalter – January

By the first day of January many cars designated as that year's model are already 3 to 6 months old. Manufacturers, at least those in the US, often have the next year's units headed for dealership showrooms by mid-September.

This means that a buyer has some important factors to consider in regard to the purchase of a "new" car in mid-2012. His selection may, conceivably, have been built in July of 2011; can it be considered "new" in July of 2012?

It is unlikely the dealership folk will mention that the tires and other soft goods on the "new" car will already have aged one full year. In fact, it is entirely possible that such vehicles might be equipped with tires made back in 2010. I may be overly cautious, but in my book that equals a third of the tire's useable life expectancy, assuming the car at times will travel at highway speeds.

Seals, paint, and upholstery also suffer when exposed to sun, cold, and heat over time. Wise dealers these days try to unload their mature new cars as quickly as possible by advertising a need for trade-ins or marking such aging vehicles with a large-lettered "blow-out" price tag. Those cars are then parked in prominent locations.

In days of yore, there were many more reasons a car sometimes lived too long on dealers' lots. One of the most common can be blamed on car makers who sometimes stuck their dealers with highly optioned units priced out of the economic reach of those who might normally buy that make. And, of course, there were styling mistakes (think Edsel), safety issues (think Corvair or Pinto), and, not infrequently, cars that arrived in a paint color so ugly they became a neighborhood blight even as they rolled off their respective car-haulers.

Nonetheless, once the prices on these eyesores were reduced, people ended up buying and driving cars that should have been restricted for use only after sunset. That may be unfair of me; it is also possible those buyers were simply colorblind. A large number of Galaxies and Impalas manufactured in the late sixties and early seventies arrived from the factory wearing coats of green that matched the color of mold found in the back of a refrigerator. Had Cinderella gone to the ball in a dress that color she'd still be scrubbing floors for her stepmother and mean sisters, for it is unlikely that the prince would have given her a chance to slide her dainty foot into the mislaid slipper.

In the end, my overall interest in this subject goes back to the mid-20th century, especially the Fifties and Sixties. In those days, most Midwestern towns with a population in excess of 700 inhabitants had at least one car dealership. (Typically, the firms sold a make that also produced trucks.) Ads announcing the date when the first new models were to arrive were placed in all the papers. Those "shows" attracted every guy in the community. In fact, when new models began arriving in Ford, Chevy, and the occasional Dodge/Plymouth showrooms, it was almost a national holiday.

A large number of those small town dealerships have disappeared due, largely, to the greater number of choices at dealerships in larger towns. Big-windowed showrooms still exist in many small towns around the Midwest, but most have been converted to uses far removed from the glory days when those 4-wheelers from Detroit first rolled into view. Some new cars reaped oohs and ahhs; others--well, some folks viewed the new cars and decided against seeing the USA in Chevrolet while others decided there was no Ford in their Future. And, let's face it, at first glance the bullet-nosed Studebakers were a bit too much for a farmer satisfied with the modern looks of his Farmall tractor.