

Women & Cars

Women, if overseas statistics are to be believed, directly affect 80% of all car purchases. Knowing this, you'll probably wonder why the entire motor trade seems to almost ignore the fact that women exist.

Jan Mooney, associate editor of *The National Automobile Dealers Association of America* magazine, had the following experience when she walked onto a car sales lot to select a new vehicle:

"I had called ahead to one dealership to find out whether the car I wanted was in stock. I was assured over the phone that two or three cars that fitted my description were on the lot.

Soon after arriving I began to get the run-around. I might as well have not made my phone call; the cars I asked about seemed to have vanished – as if they never existed.

I was pressured to buy a different car and buy it that day; I was made to wait for the manager, who could not explain where the promised cars had gone. Both the salesperson and the manager seemed to resent that I had information about the dealer invoice cost of the model I wanted. To make it



worse, most of their remarks were addressed to my older, male friend even though my name would be the only one on the contract. We finally left in disgust."

Many women could tell a similar story, or worse. A successful young woman we know bought herself a Mercedes convertible. When she pulled up at the gas station, the attendants would say things like "Got dad's car for the day, then?"

Women are major users of cars and affect most car sales, and yet the fact of the matter is, the motor trade is run by and virtually totally for men. If women are featured at all, it is as pinups in the workshop lunchroom, or as blondes in bathing suits draped over the latest Ford.

What can women do? Basically, there are two things. The first is not to go in unprepared.

Women often get treated like stereotypes because they act like stereotypes – they want to avoid the whole issue of cars for 99% of the time, and then they complain that they feel like fools when they deal with the motor trade.

The more you know about the car-buying decision, the less vulnerable you feel when you go out shopping – do your homework.

The other is to use your purchasing power to influence the behaviour of the men who try and sell you a car. If you don't like the way someone is treating you, tell him. If he persists, walk away. When it happens to enough salesmen, they'll change their ways •

