

AUTO BRIEFS



THE VOICE BEHIND THE VEHICLE

The voice of Barry White is behind Chrysler's "Buy Your Own" 1996 Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited ad. The company hopes that 25-to-50 year olds will pay attention. Black music and musicians have become a popular way for auto companies to sell cars to African Americans. The ad, produced by Don Coleman & Associates, is part of Chrysler's ongoing marketing campaign to grab a greater share of the African-American carbuying market. Chrysler also sponsored Barry White's Icon World Tour to more than 40 U.S. cities last year. In 1994, Lena Horne, was the voice behind the Neon commercial, while a redo of the Isley Brother's "Caravan of Love" song backs the new Dodge Caravan ad. Last year, Chrysler's share of the African-American market increased by 14%, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*.

REPORT CITES SHABBY SERVICE REPAIR

Many of the dollars consumers spend on auto repairs are spent unnecessarily, according to a 139-page "Auto Repair Task Force Report," by the National Association of Attorneys General. Its research shows that technician error and incompetence, as well as a lack of communication between shops and consumers, significantly contribute to the problem. The report cites U.S. Department of Commerce estimates that in 1994 consumers spent \$75 billion on auto repairs and \$15 billion on parts and accessories. The report does not say how much of that amount was due to fraudulent practices. The task force recommends that states require repair shops to: 1) Provide comprehensive pre-repair estimates that include all amounts to be paid; 2) Obtain consumer consent for charges that exceed estimates; 3) Advise consumers before repairs of their right to receive replacement parts; 4) Provide detailed post-repair invoices that itemize parts and labor and cite any applicable warranty and 5) Post

a sign in a conspicuous place notifying consumers of their rights. The best bet is to take your car to a dealership where there are trained mechanics who won't nickel and dime you. Dealers have an incentive to treat customers fairly, since they want you to come back and buy a car from them.

AUTO TECHNICIANS IN SHORT SUPPLY

There is a critical shortage of skilled automotive technicians across the country that has left auto dealers and repair shops competing for a small pool of workers. Because of the demand, skilled technicians are earning upwards of \$75,000 annually. U.S. Labor Dept. data shows that more than one third of those working in dealerships are earning more than \$40,000 a year. Even with such attractive salaries, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that there is a shortfall of 60,000 skilled auto technicians.

CHRYSLER RETURNS TO SOUTH AFRICA

Chrysler plans to sell vehicles in South Africa after nearly a 13-year absence. Chrysler pulled out of South Africa in 1983, along with all of its international markets, after nearly going bankrupt. The company which once manufactured vehicles in South Africa plans to establish a dealer network throughout the country. Initially, it plans to sell approximately 3,000 units, and grow to nearly 10,000 vehicles by the end of the decade. The first vehicles available for sale in South Africa will be the Jeep Cherokee and Jeep Grand Cherokee.



U.S. AUTOMAKERS GET CUSTOMERS 'THUMBS UP'

According to the new American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), U.S. automakers experienced an increase in customer satisfaction during the past year, while Japanese automakers lost ground. The average score for American auto companies is 80.4, a 1.5 percent improvement over last October and well above the 73.7 ACSI score for the economy as a whole. Japan's autos are down by about one percent, but with an average score of 81.6, still slightly ahead of the Big Three. European vehicles are on top, rising 1.2 percent to a score of 81.8. Customer satisfaction with cars and vans in general is among the highest of all consumer products and services, while satisfaction with computers and household appliances is declining. The Index is the nation's only cross-industry measure of the quality of economic output. It is co-sponsored by the American Society for Quality Control (ASQC) and the University of Michigan Business School.

WIN THE NEW MERCEDES E320

The Women's Committee for the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) is raffling off an all-new Mercedes-Benz E320 at \$100 a ticket. Only 2500 tickets will be sold and all entries must be received by March 20, 1996, said Juanita Wallace Jackson, the group's first African-American president. Currently, the most technologically-advanced luxury car in America, the new Benz was donated to the NSO by Mercedes-Benz of North America and several Washington area dealers. To enter, call the NSO Women's Committee at (202) 416-8151.

