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# AUTO SHOWCASE

## Air bags save lives, also injure

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Nearly two-thirds of drivers in crashes of air bag-equipped cars were injured by the deploying bag, according to an analysis by University of Michigan researchers.

Most of the injuries were minor scrapes and bruises, but 3 percent of the drivers — or 18 — suffered broken bones in the forearm or hand, according to the university's Transportation Research Institute, where researchers studied 540 crashes.

The fractures were caused by the deploying air bag, the air bag cover, or the air bag flinging drivers' arms and hands into the instrument panel or windshield, Donald F. Huelke, a lead researcher, said in a telephone interview.

Several of the breaks happened during a left-hand turn when a driver's right hand was over the steering wheel, where the air bag deploys, Huelke said.

Nearly two-thirds of the drivers had injuries to the arms, hands, face or upper body and most injuries were minor scrapes, bruises or cuts, Huelke said. "They are primarily scuffs and scrapes to the forearm or face," he said.

Air bags have saved more than 1,700 lives, according to government estimates, but have been blamed for the deaths of 38 children and 24 adults.

The researchers found that 38 percent of the drivers suffered forearm and hand injuries while one in three drivers sustained a facial injury, according to papers they published this year.

Huelke and other researchers at the institute in Ann Arbor, Mich., looked at 540 crashes involving the deployment of driver-side air bags in a variety of vehicles through mid-1996. Most of the crashes were in Michigan; about one-fifth were in other states, mostly the Great Lakes states.

About 2 percent — or 11 drivers — sustained eye injuries from air bag deployment, primarily scuffs on the eyeball or some blood in the eye, Huelke said. "In almost all the cases, the driver recovered from the injury and there were no long-term effects," he said.

However, a report published in March that reviewed five



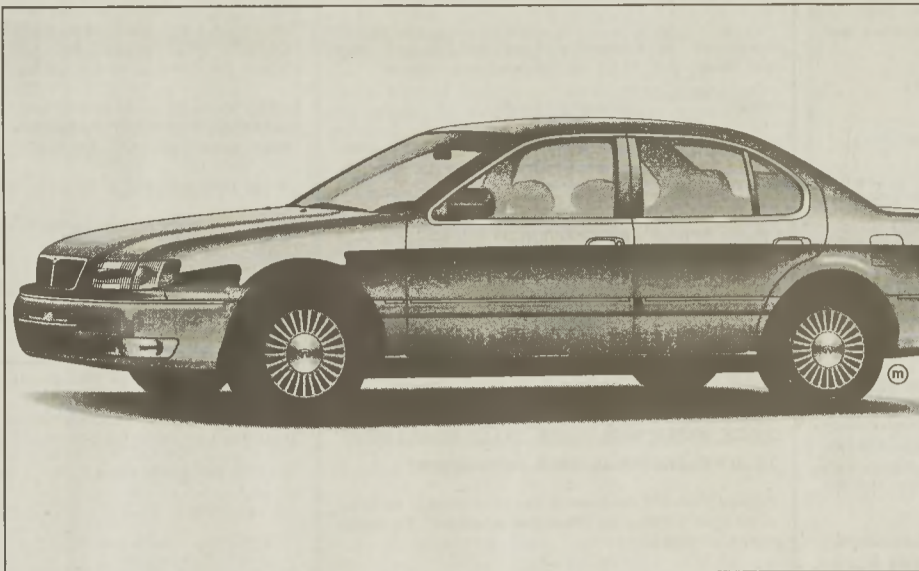
Winfred B. Cross

**T**he near-luxury market, or entry level as we stubborn folks like to call it, is one of the most crowded segments in today's car industry.

Why? It's the segment that makes the most sense. Why pay up to \$90,000 for comfort when its available for \$30,000 or less? Because money is no object for some.

To those whose pockets are not bottomless, might I suggest Infiniti's I30 sedan. It has a few touches found on the top-notch Q45, but at a much more reasonable price.

The I30 is based heavily on the Nissan Maxima. For those who don't know, Nissan is parent company to Infiniti. Hey, Lexus does the same thing with its excellent ES 300 which is based on Toyota's Camry. The I30 is slightly better looking than the Maxima. The I30's grill is large and chrome plated, but not gaudy. Its rear end also more tastefully rounded. The Maxima's trunk looks chopped to short



1997 Infiniti I30

## Infiniti I30 is solid near-luxury sedan

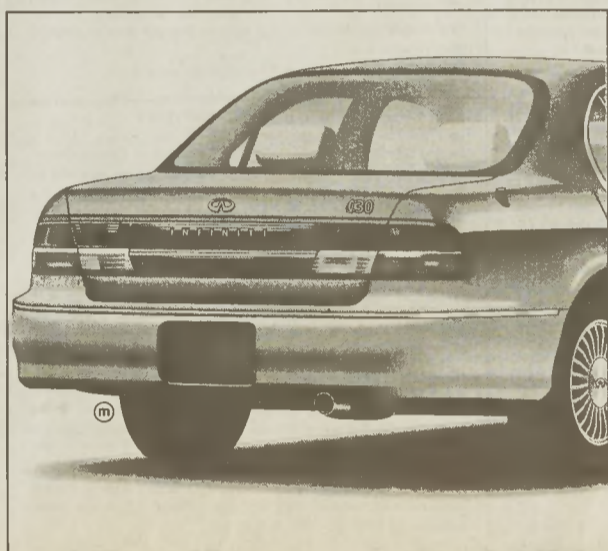
me.

The I30's interior is a very comfortable place to be. The front bucket seats are power operated: the driver's can be adjusted eight different ways, the passenger's four. The rear seat is wide and spacious. It can accommodate three adults in great comfort. The head and leg room approach the best in class.

The interior has lots of nice touches, especially the soft leather which is about what you expect in a luxury sedan these days. I am not a fan of the fake wood trim which resides on the dash. It's too shiny and too, well, fake.

The gauge cluster is done well. All instruments are in clear view and are easy to read.

The I30 draws its power from a 190-horsepower V6 which makes 205 pounds-feet of torque. It can be mated to either a five-speed manual (unusual for a car in this class)



1997 Infiniti I30

or a four-speed automatic.

The leather model comes standard with an automatic, unless you opt for the "t" version which gives you a stiffer

suspension, more aggressive tires and unobtrusive spoiler. My test car wasn't a touring model so I had to make do with the automatic. It works well.

Shifts are barely perceptible, even when you get aggressive and lay on the gas. Kick down comes quickly and unobtrusively.

The V6 is nearly jewel-like in its execution. It has a raspy growl under hard acceleration but once it hits top gear it purrs.

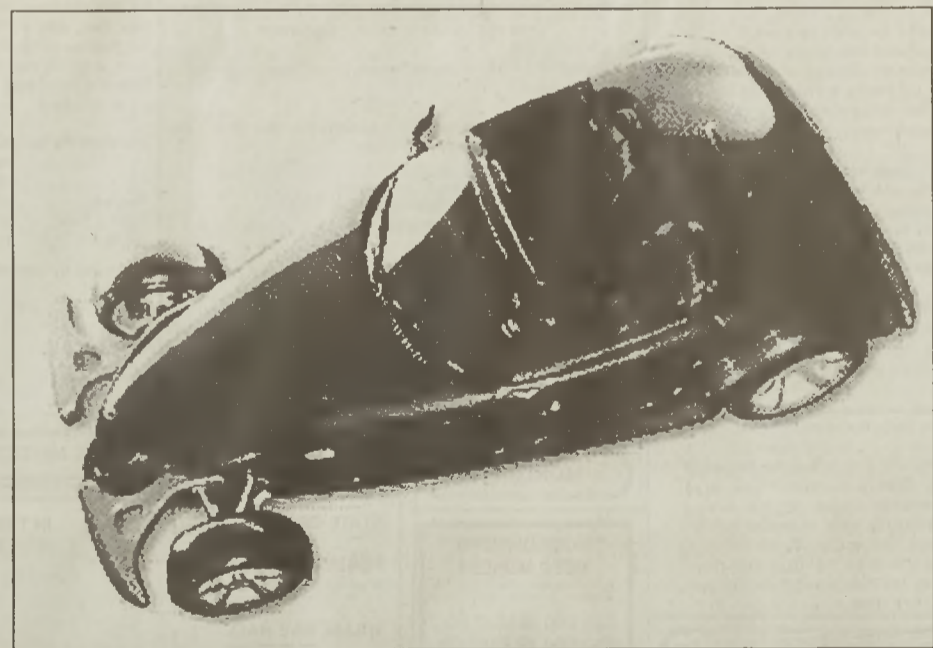
The engine propels the car to 60 mph in about 8 seconds, darn good for an automatic. It's hard to notice when you reach 60 because the cabin is very quiet. Very little noise creeps inside, even at speeds of 80. The car whisks along like a rolling museum.

The handling is great, but there is a noticeable amount of body roll in tight corners. It doesn't really lose composure, but it feels like it may. Ride comfort is exceptional. The long 106-inch wheelbase and independent suspension does an excellent job of filtering out small road imperfections. Big bumps don't bother it much, either.

The leather-appointed I30 comes with every convenient feature needed to make life grand: power seats, windows, door locks and mirrors; anti-lock brakes, fog lamps, automatic transmission, auto temperature control, power antenna, tilt steering, cruise control, dual air bags, 200 watt, six-speaker Bose cassette deck with single CD player and pre-wiring for an Infiniti cellular phone. That comes at a price of \$29,900. With destination, the as-tested price came to \$30,395.

You could buy a comparably-equipped Nissan Maxima for a little less. So why buy the Infiniti? How about a six-year, 60,000-mile basic warranty. That's nearly twice what the Maxima offers. Throw in 24-hour road assistance, good looks and a pleasant dealer network and you have a winner. Yep, a winner.

## Plymouth Prowler nearly ready to roam



Plymouth Prowler

By Brian S. Akre  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT — One of the most audacious cars ever to roll off a Detroit assembly line, the Plymouth Prowler roadster, goes into full production at the end of the month, Chrysler Corp. said Friday.

Barring problems, the purple, wedged-shaped hot rod should begin arriving in showrooms by early July. The suggested price tag of \$39,000 will be more than 10 percent above Chrysler's initial estimates.

The start of production was delayed several weeks as engineers worked out bugs with the Prowler's all-aluminum body panels. The car is in the test-production phase now at an assembly plant that also makes the Dodge Viper sports

car. "Things are moving smoothly," Chrysler spokesman Chris Preuss said.

The Prowler's list price, which includes the destination charge, is \$4,000 more than Chrysler's earlier estimate of around \$35,000. It will be fully equipped; there will be no options.

Chrysler has asked its dealers not to markup the price. But even if you can afford a Prowler, it may be difficult to find one.

Chrysler will offer only 2,000 of the retro-styled roadsters for sale in the United States and Canada this year. Fewer than 30 percent of U.S. Chrysler-Plymouth dealerships will get one. No dealer will get more than five, and each will probably hold one as

a showroom draw.

Starting next year, Chrysler plans to make 4,700 to 5,000 Prowlers annually.

The 250 pre-production Prowlers now being made will be used for promotional purposes. That is, after all, the primary objective of the model: to update Plymouth's stodgy image and give the brand a more youthful appeal. The Prowler is the first U.S.-built vehicle that is Plymouth's exclusively since the 1969 Barracuda.

"The Prowler is definitely unusual," said George Peterson, an industry analyst with AutoPacific Inc. in Santa Ana, Calif. "It's a product that's worth its weight in gold in terms of public relations and media value, even if they

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## Ford looking to create its own auto mall concept dealerships

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



INDIANAPOLIS — Ford Motor Co. wants to buy out local independent dealerships and create Ford-owned megadealerships in a bid to compete with the emerging phenomenon of auto superstores.

"It's a big change for Ford," Ford vice president for marketing and sales Bob Rewey told The Indianapolis Star in Friday's editions. "It's a customer-driven thing."

Under the plan, Ford would purchase 18 privately-owned Ford and Lincoln-Mercury dealerships in the region and replace them with four or five megadealers operating under an organization owned by Ford.

Ford says some dealers might become partners in the venture. One dealer would be designated to manage the Indianapolis-area sales operations. Ford also would set up six or seven service-only sites.

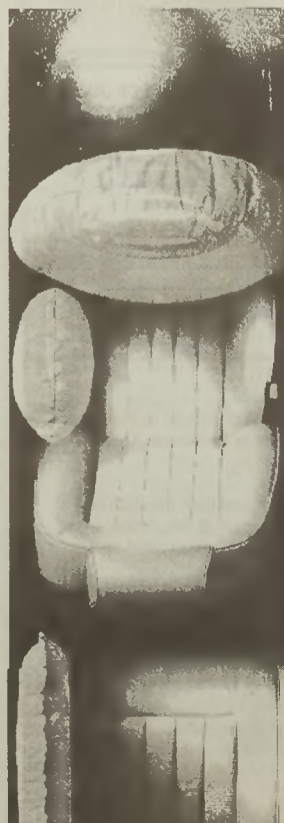
That would be a major change in how automakers handle their retail networks. Most new cars are sold today by independent dealers who hold franchises granted by the automakers.

The restructuring plan is aimed at competing with a new phenomenon that is shaking up automotive retailing: the emergence of megadealer chains and used-car superstores such as AutoNation and CarMax.

Republic Industries Inc., the Florida-based chain owned by billionaire H. Wayne Huizenga, has been on a dealership buying spree that has made it the largest dealer chain in the nation. Huizenga expects to use the dealers to feed his AutoNation chain of used-car superstores.

While some automakers are wary of Huizenga, Ford has been cooperating with him.

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