

**BUSINESS FEATURE**

# Sobers Rides Into Auto Dealership

By **HERB WHITE**  
Post Staff Writer

Wayne Sobers has been a part of the business world for many years, but running his own brings a new set of challenges.

Sobers, the owner of Sobers Chevrolet in Mooresville, said taking over the dealership was a gamble, but an investment worth risking.

"I've had a few in my life and this is probably the biggest, at least in terms of investments and my time," he said. "The one thing that's not new to me is running a profitable business. The only real big difference now is I have a bigger stake in it financially."

After 15 years as an executive vice president at Earl G. Graves Ltd., the parent company of Black Enterprise magazine, Sobers entered General Motors' dealer development program in 1987. After training in GM's Dealer Development Academy in Detroit and a Yonkers, N.Y. dealership, Sobers was ready to take on his own dealership.

Selling cars is different, but only slightly, from a business standpoint.

"I don't look at it so much as being a dealership as it is running a business that happens to be a dealership," he said.

Retail businesses like Sobers' are the first to be affected by the economy, he said. If consumers feel secure with the future, they are more likely to buy big-ticket items like cars.

"When you're in the retail business, you feel it first-hand," he said. "In most cases, (a car) is the first or second-largest pur-

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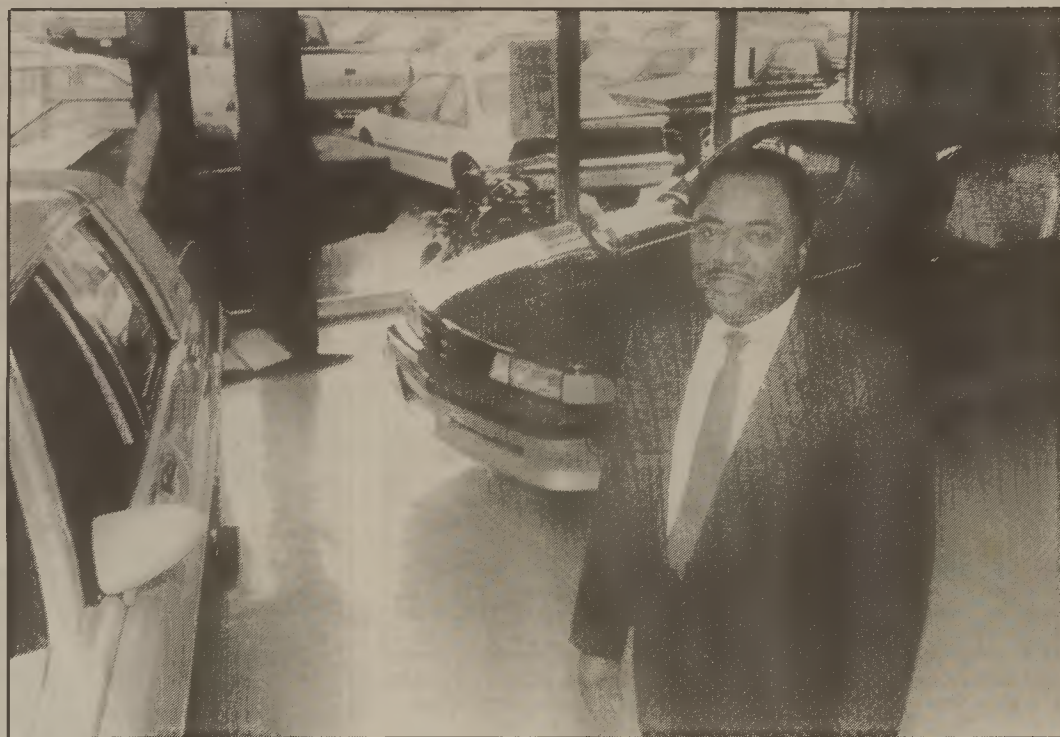


Hill

sure by the Insurance Institute of America.

Earning the certificate requires completion of three national examinations covering insurance principals, contract analysis techniques and a wide range of insurance policies.

Ms. Hill is a Property Rater in the Commercial Insurance Division at Aetna Life and Casualty Insurance Company. She is a graduate of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.



Photo/CALVIN FERGUSON

Owner Wayne Sobers stands in the showroom of his dealership, Sobers Chevrolet, in Mooresville.

chase after a house. You're selling a product that has a significant impact on their lives."

There is more to a dealership than selling new cars, however, Sobers said.

There are separate departments, interdependent of each other, but with distinct features of their own.

"I think it's a very exciting business. In the automobile business, you have new cars, used cars, rentals, body shop, repairs," he said. "I have six or seven departments under my purveyance as an auto dealer."

Since taking over the dealership in January, Sobers has taken on the task of building each department into a viable piece of the business, which numbers 17 full-time employees.

"Every business has its periods of volatility," he said. "You need to build a structure that allows you to do what Job told people to do in the Bible: build during the seven prosperous years to be able to care for the

seven lean years.

"You want to put it together well enough that when sales are down, the rest will pick up the slack."

Although sales have been slow since Sobers took over, he is confident the situation will turn around.

"Any business you first start is going to be lean," he said, adding that January and February are traditionally slow months for car sales. "You can't ever be up when you're starting."

Sobers said local reaction to his moving from Chappaqua, N.Y., a New York suburb, has been warm. Sobers' wife Yvonne, and their three children are still in New York, but will relocate when the school year ends.

Mooresville residents, he said, are more receptive to change in order to help the general community.

"In many ways, you'll find people (in Chappaqua) more resistant to change than in Moores-

ville," he said.

There hasn't been a culture shock in moving south, Sobers said, although "accents are a little different in Mooresville than in Chappaqua."

Sobers harbors hope that one day his company can make Black Enterprise's list of 100 top black-owned businesses. As one of the people who helped start the list, it would be a nice touch to make it.

"I was there for the first one," he said. "To me, it would be very nice to make that list. It would be a sign of achievement. But I don't blur the picture. If it's going to come, it's going to come because I do the other things right."

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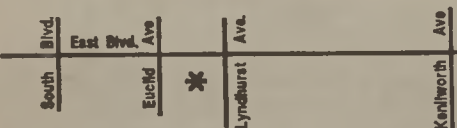
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