

Sex Sells!

Now that I have your attention, I want to get a few things off my chest. Over the years, I have been amazed at the amount we all are willing to spend to do someone else's advertising for them. You have only to count the number of embroidered outfits with Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, etc., to see what I mean. They don't come cheap, yet they somehow are all the rage. And I am no less a participant in this stupidity.

Porsche AG has for years been the unwitting recipient of my walking billboard status, between my jacket and shirts emblazoned with Zone 1 48 Hours tags and the Porsche crest, to my infamous shirt printing which even got noted in Christophorus (the factory magazine - and a special demerit for those who didn't know!).

Now I suppose it has been a cultural icon for most of you dear readers to follow suit. In one sense it evokes bragging rights, or some such, as it states to the world that we have the good sense (to say nothing of the good cents, if you get my drift) to drive the finest automobile on earth. And, taken in that context, I suppose I can't really be too critical of those who wish to shine their own status beacon with the designer labels, as a counterpoint to my typical blue-light special brand clothes from "If it fits, wear it".

My travels in the Midwest, however, have opened my eyes to a profoundly disturbing reality, which I only recognize from CNY in retrospect. I suppose that is as great an indictment of my powers of observation as anything, but better late than never. You see, I have had the opportunity to work in a number of manufacturing plants where typical wage levels were not much more than the minimum required by law. Most of the employees in these jobs are people who have limited education at best; it is pretty much a given that few truly skilled people actively seek out or last in unskilled minimum wage jobs.

Yet, one of the strangest observances is the number of people wearing outfits proclaiming their affection for you pick it. In CNY it is most often "The Orangemen", in Tennessee, it is "The Volunteers", etc. People spend a fortune on flags, clothes, and assorted garbage with the logo of the associated SPORT from their respective university. So tell me; have you ever seen anyone with a sweat shirt which proclaimed "The Colloidalists" of Clarkson University? Neither have I, although they have done more for xerography than most anyone you ever heard of. At best, you might periodically see a shirt with merely the name of the school, for example "Harvard" or "Yale". But more often you will see "The Golden Knights" splashed across the chest, or worse, of a loyal fan.

What strikes me as sad, however, is the thought that these people could have applied that money instead toward tuition, and ATTENDED said institution of higher LEARNING, so they might have both better economic prospects, and a broader horizon. College is, after all, less about WHAT you learn than about forcing you to think in ways totally new to you.

My choice of Clarkson above was not by any mere chance, as you probably guessed. When I attended, it was simply a College, which has now been exalted to a University. But at my time, it's claim to fame was the preparation of technical geeks. You know; Engineers. Dilbert. What "Ing." in "Prof. Dr. Ing. H.C.F Porsche AG" stands for. Have you ever looked at the Board and Management of Porsche? It looks like a typical yearbook at Clarkson. But while I was there, The Golden Knights was a hockey team, mostly comprised of Canadians because they could still move in the cold. Sort of like the Russian tanks in WWII. Anyway, the funny thing was that there were a number of them (hockey players, not tanks) who were on scholarship (remember the meaning of that word? Think SCHOLAR...), yet I remember only a single one who was actually studying engineering. Like the sports programs at most schools who

purport to be nationally ranked in their respective sport, the educational benefit for the players of said sport was always dubious at best.

It is no secret that the likes of Michael Jordan can afford Porsches, nor that celebrity like that of Jerry Seinfeld is perceived as value for the Porsche Works to assure he gets the last air-cooled 930. But what exactly do these people do to warrant the adulation? Absolutely NONE of us gives the slightest thought as we blast along at the typical 75 mph how much we EXPECT perfection from engineers, yet Dilbert demonstrates we hold them mostly in contempt. But if engineers had results like the typical batting average for a \$3 million per year man, NOTHING would work worth a crap, and you wouldn't DARE to set a cruise control at 75 while you shot the bull with your cell phone and zipped across bridges and between traffic lights. Certainly, none of US would pay what it costs to buy a Porsche. Because it would be a TRABANT! Bridges would look like the one in Ohio which collapsed with the first windstorm, airplanes would fall from the sky like they did in 1914, roads would look like Brazil, and on and on and on.

So what is it that makes people so supportive of the most useless output from an institute of higher EDUCATION, even while both they and the players lack the very education the institution purports to provide? How have we as a society degenerated to this, where entertainment is the only thing we seem to value highly? At one point in Rome, the high priests were the architects. The ones who built the roads and water systems which allowed Rome to be the world's first Superpower. Anybody remember what happened to Rome, and WHY? It wasn't the roads - most of them are still operable TODAY! And the aqueducts fell apart from disrepair because nobody BOTHERED to learn how to fix them right. But the SYSTEM failed because it became clogged with bureaucrats and corruption, and excellence took a far back seat to glitz.

I don't know that Porsche has yet fallen so far, but I do wonder sometimes at the seeming substitution of style for substance. At its heart the new 996 is a very competent machine indeed. But the mere fact that it has so many systems which will cover for all but the most self-destructive actions possible also strikes fear into my heart. Every time I hear of some government genius planning to improve traffic flow by removing the role of driver from the idiot with the wheel, the closer I feel we have gotten to the point when there won't be enough competence around to overcome the idiocy. I think the sport shirts are the first sign.

What followed the fall of Rome was the dark ages.