

This is my two cents worth, so pay up. Or pay attention, at least. Or line a birdcage; your choice.

Autoweek ran their Sep 20 issue with AutoFile covering three upscale wagons, from BMW, Volvo and Saab. They also had a poll whether “anyone out there see(s) station wagons as a viable alternative to (SUV’s)”.

My response is printed below, assuming it doesn’t make the cut at AW:

>> Imagine the ad...

An Audi A4 T or A6 Avant quattro starts at the back of a pack of all the other suburban useless vehemoths which will never drive further off-road than my 993 Cabrio.

Only the Subaru Forester or Outback Wagon will stand a chance, and the winner will be anyone in another SUV who can still SEE the Avant after two laps of the long course at Watkins Glen, 'cause the Boot is gonna separate the cars from the crap.

And if it is in the wet, or better; in snow, you'll start to understand even more. Now imagine an A8 Avant!

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Fact is, almost none of the typical SUV pigs will ever be driven anywhere that Bill Noroski wouldn’t take Heidi. They have been sold as life preservers, but are nothing but Titanics waiting for an iceberg. If they can save someone’s life, it is only because that someone was so pre-occupied with their cell phone conversation that they had no idea what was happening around them on the road. And that violates every rule of life I’ve heard of since Charles Darwin. But of course that was inevitable; because substance has long since been replaced by image as the basis for our economy. If you doubt that, I refer you back to my earlier diatribes on engineer vs. entertainer compensation.

And make no mistake; as a Libertarian, I see no justification for anyone else deciding these people can’t buy these things, because I can see the same law being used to limit my access to Porsches. Who, after all, NEEDS a Porsche?

Well, for one; ME! It is part of how I measure whether I have reached career objectives, and whether I’ve developed driving skill, and a whole host of other justifications. And I’m sure the vast number of purchasers of these SUV’s share those sentiments at least in part.

So what is it that I really dislike so much? It is NOT the seemingly wasteful nature of these vehicles, nor the risk to everyone else they pose, though I am not happy about that. But the “liberal” press has always insisted that we minions should be riding mass-transit conveyances, while they somehow managed to get the chauffer-driven limo ride. Until Honda ran the numbers, and discovered that the fuel consumption per person mile travelled on a city bus was HIGHER than that of a personally owned Lincoln Town Car! The reasons are not obvious, because we generally think of a standing-room only mass-transit vehicle during rush-hour. But the only way a mass-transit system can work is to provide almost equivalent flexibility of transport vs. the common automobile. That requires around-the-clock service, which must run whether there are riders or not, and it is very unlikely that any one bus will go from their desired start to their desired finish point directly, thereby at least doubling the number of busses running required, and adding 50% to the travel time. Add to that the cost for the driver salaries, vs the freebie of your labor, and the costs as well exceed those for the car.

A red herring has suggested that we taxpayers, including those in the cities, subsidize the car by paying for highways and the sprawl of Suburbia with its concomittant decay of the inner city. I'm sorry, but I just don't see it. I've been to Rio in Brazil, where they have favellas that make Harlem look like a Victorian Mansion, and there simply aren't any suburbs. It does follow the thought that better roads might ALLOW them, but it is precisely the lack of roads which prevents this sixth largest world economy from becoming a first world country; they can't get the products they make to the people who want to buy them. And because their taxes have NOT been wisely invested in that transportation infrastructure, they have no way to create jobs for people in making all the components etc. which become cars, or the repair services and parts which create economies in the surrounding countryside.

So I see the road building "subsidy" as an investment in our economy, and all data surely shows that doing so has made us the marketplace for the world. And remember that those busses need someplace to run as well, and could never pay for the roadbeds on their own. If you doubt that, ask where Amtrak got theirs.

Fact of the matter is; we all pay for a lot of things we all benefit from. Those who drive the miserly Ford Aspire can smugly say they get to use the highways which are being disproportionately paid for by the SUV crowd, due to gas taxes and their use. But they better pay attention, because the SUV drivers seem to be asleep, and if they meet head-on, there won't be much they can Aspire to.

Some communities are creating bans on cellular usage while driving, but I see that as simply another Double-Nickle or Prohibition. The former created two generations of incompetent drivers, and the latter created Organized Crime. Anyone want to guess what the War on Drugs will begat?

Maybe sometime we could get a little pragmatic here. Have you ever driven a SUV at triple digit speed? WILL you ever again? Yet 100 on an interstate in any of the aforementioned wagons feels like no more than brisk cruising, unless you are weaving through traffic. With one exception; I can't imagine anyone being so comfortable at that speed that they would start dialing the phone. Or anything else but DRIVING.

So be honest; if your tow vehicle needs to be as big as a Suburban, buy a Motorhome and tow a car. Then you can DRIVE it and get a good nite's rest between.