

FROM THE PUBLISHER

The Bottom Line

I like clichés. Though considered philosophical, they often describe the truth behind some thought-provoking realities. Here's one I'm particularly fond of, (I made it up myself): "If there was never a policy of exclusion, there wouldn't be a need for inclusion." It came to me recently as I pondered why so-called minorities are still fighting for inclusion in America's lucrative automobile industry. For far too long we have been excluded from management positions, dealership franchises, and new-vehicle marketing campaigns.

Believe it or not, at one time some executives at major car companies refused to believe that women bought cars, even though the reality of female purchasing power was staring them in the face. Now, African-American car buyers are confronted with the same struggle for recognition and respect. Although we spend billions yearly on new vehicles, the industry remains strangely hesitant to acknowledge the magnitude of our buying power.

Today, African Americans make up 13 percent of the U.S. population, yet own only 1 percent of the 22,750 new-car dealerships. What can be done about this distressing figure? We offer some ideas. Warren Brown suggests a new approach in his column, while Blair Walker gives an overview of the challenges facing the National Association of Minority Automobile Dealers (NAMAD).

Black auto dealers face a challenging situation: increasing representation in a changing retail environment. Minorities want to be included in all areas of the auto industry, says Sheila Vaden-Williams, executive director of NAMAD, and her organization plans to focus its efforts on reaching that goal.

Indeed, companies that have excluded minorities in the past, ought to take notice -- African Americans want to fully participate in all areas of the auto industry, including owning dealer franchises. To their credit, they know that as they cut back on dealerships to remain competitive, they must also become representative of America's diverse culture. That's the bottom line.

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Member of

International Motor Press Association
Washington Automotive Press Association
National Association of Black Journalists
Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce

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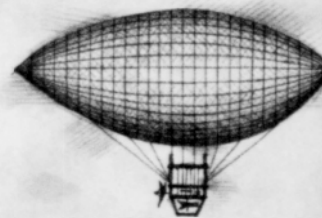
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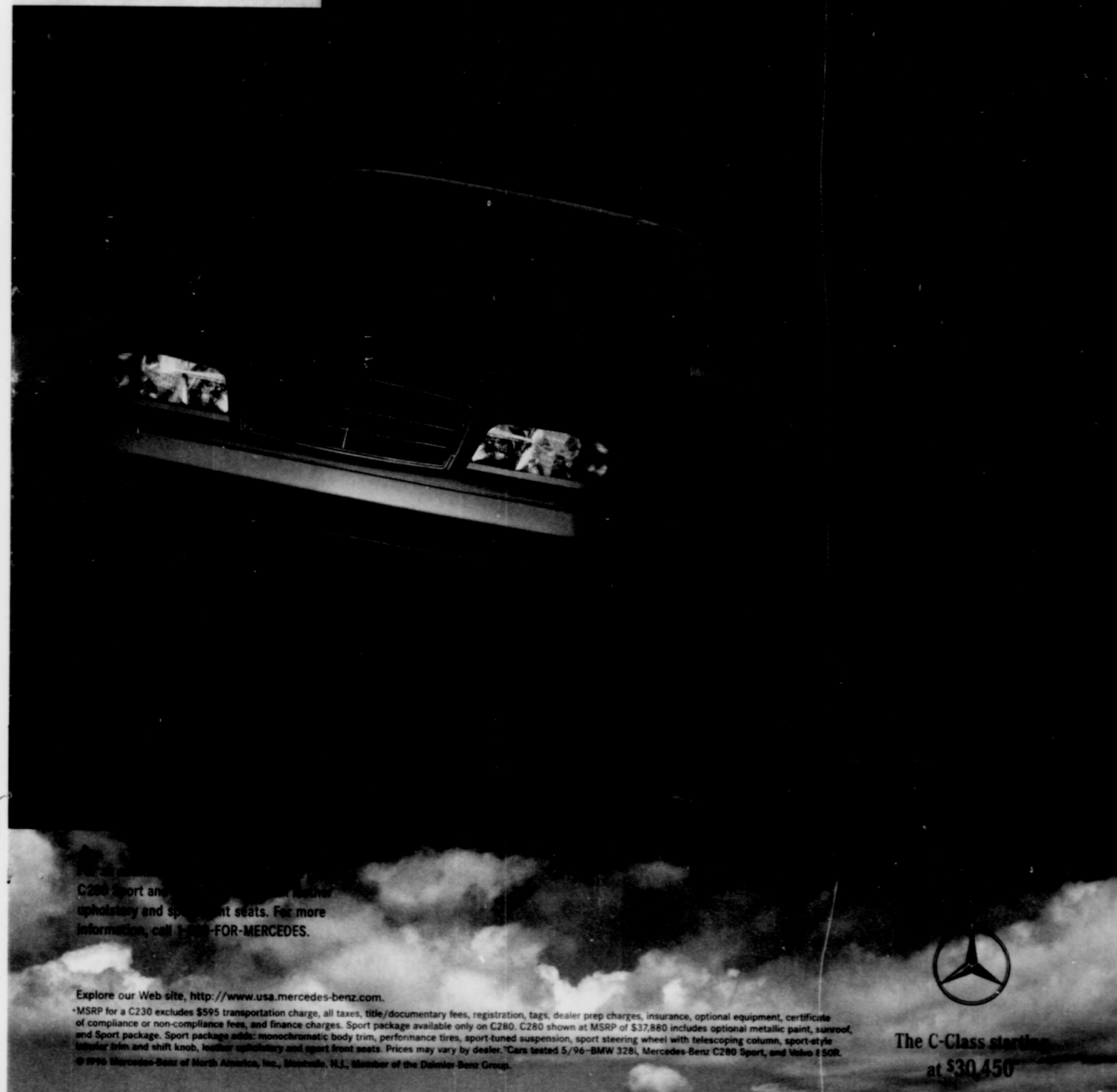
ABC Audit pending

African American On Wheels,
©1997, is published quarterly as a
supplement to newspapers by On
Wheels, Inc. AAOW can be
found on the Internet at
<http://www.automag.com>. Our e-mail
address is AAOW@AOL.com.



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