

What makes a car HOT?

THAT QUESTION HAS PLAGUED AUTOMAKERS FOR MANY YEARS.

One thing is certain, when African-American motorists decide a car is the one, that car sells big. Look at the phenomenal popularity of Chrysler's 300C and you'll immediately see the fruition of that reality. When the 300C went on sale, you saw more blacks driving them initially than anyone else. Soon after, (in predictable fashion) the mainstream culture jumped on the 300C bandwagon.

The car is now a runaway bestseller.

Then there's Lincoln's Navigator, those of us with a long memory can recall when the Navigator was the only American-made luxury SUV. And African Americans loved it. You had to have a 'Gator, if you were any parts of cool. Then Cadillac's Escalade dropped, blacks shifted to it and overnight, the 'Gator was relegated to singing backup.

As in language, fashion, art and music, we also dictate the automotive tastes of popular culture in this country.

Some car companies try to accelerate this process by engineering the adoption of their vehicle by certain celebrities as a ride of choice. The logic flows that if the public sees so-and-so associated with the car, some of their persona will be transferred to the car, which will then be seen as cool by association.

Our cover story explores this relationship and examines how the automakers try to convince us their cars are stars by surrounding them with celebrities.

By the way, not only do celebrities confer status upon cars, but as our own Warren Brown discovered at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York City, cars can confer celebrity status upon their drivers, too.

Two cars certain to confer status upon their drivers are the Mercedes-Benz S550 and the BMW 750i. But which is the best car between the two? Our editor-in-chief, Lyndon Conrad Bell, and our West Coast contributor, Arv Voss, spent two weeks grappling with that question. You'll find the results of their excruciatingly demanding trials and tribulations in this issue as well. They told me it was very tough duty. I'm not sure I'm buying it, but their resulting report gives you some insight into the personalities of these two highly covetable cars and the brands from which they are issued.

Speaking of issues, this month marks the re-emergence of *AAOW's* sister publication, *Latinos On Wheels*. Under the stewardship of a new editor, Valerie Menard, the new *LOW* reflects many of the things you've come to appreciate about *AAOW*.

Consumer oriented and lifestyle focused, but still with an eye on the diversity practices of the auto industry, the new *Latinos On Wheels* is poised for a tremendous ride. You can get a free copy of it at our website, www.onwheelsinc.com. By the way—if you haven't done so already—while you're there, sign up for a subscription to *AAOW* too.

It's a limited time offer, don't miss out.

Randi Payton
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