

AutoSunday

Odd noises can lead to a big repair bill

Here is a good example of why you don't want to let noises go unchecked.

A client had been hearing a clunking noise from the front of his Chevy Blazer for some time, but he did not have the time to get it in the shop so we could check it out.

It turned out to be a big mistake. The problem was a ball joint (part of the front suspension) that was loose and rattling. It ended up letting go on the tollway. The front of the vehicle dropped to the ground and he came close to having a serious accident.

Once we got the car towed in and up on the lift, the damage done was quite substantial. The whole left front suspension needed to be rebuilt. Let's review:

- Ignoring the noise took it from a \$200 repair to a \$2,000 major repair.

- He put himself and others at serious risk.

- He almost missed the concert he was heading downtown to see.

- He was without the vehicle during the busy holiday season.

My advice: Don't let strange noises go unchecked. Most of the time they are not a big deal but every once in a while they can be the symptom of a very serious problem.

More winter woes

A very good client called me the other day about his Chevy Suburban. He said he was having a problem with the engine racing very fast. It didn't happen all the time but he was concerned about driving the car. It had really revved up high and almost caused him to lose control.

Because it was so unpredictable, we decided to have the vehicle towed in for safety's sake. When the tow truck driver went to pick up the vehicle, he discovered that the driver's floor mat was all balled up and frozen. Depending on how your foot rested on it, it would push on the gas pedal. With the floor mat straightened out and back in its proper position, the Suburban was fixed and drove just fine.

The moral of this story: Keep your floor mats from jamming themselves forward toward the brake and gas pedals.

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Auto brief

Hyundai offers job-loss protection

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Can't make the payments on that new car you just bought? No problem — just return it free of charge. That's the deal being offered by Hyundai Motor America. The South Korea-based automaker will cover the depreciation on any returned leased or financed vehicle for the first 12 months to those who find themselves unable to make their car payments. However, the offer only applies to customers stricken by misfortune outside of their control, such as a job loss or disability.

As GM's fifth design boss, he was a quiet man who let his work do all the talking

BY JASON STEIN
Wheelbase Communications

In the world of automotive design, where each crease has a meaning and every crevice has a story, Wayne Cherry was a wiggle in a world of straight lines.

In an era of pop-star obsessions over designers and their creations, General Motors' former North American design boss was the anomaly.

He was a Midwestern boy with a global outlook; a soft-spoken executive whose artwork spoke volumes.

Not extravagant like current GM product czar Robert Lutz. Not a cult figure like Ford design whiz J Mays.

And definitely not a conversation piece the way BMW's lead designer Chris Bangle has been.

Cherry always preferred the shadows. He let his vehicles take the spotlight.

"I'm probably biased, but I think that design is terribly important," he once told The Car Connection, an automotive Web site. "But we (designers) shouldn't get in the way."

In 42 years at GM, the last dozen years as its leading designer, Cherry always avoided being in the way.

But his products shook the landscape.

The roll call of concepts and innovative designs that were created on his watch reads like a list of automotive all-stars. The Chevrolet SSR. The Pontiac Solstice. Cadillacs. Chevy trucks. And Hummers.

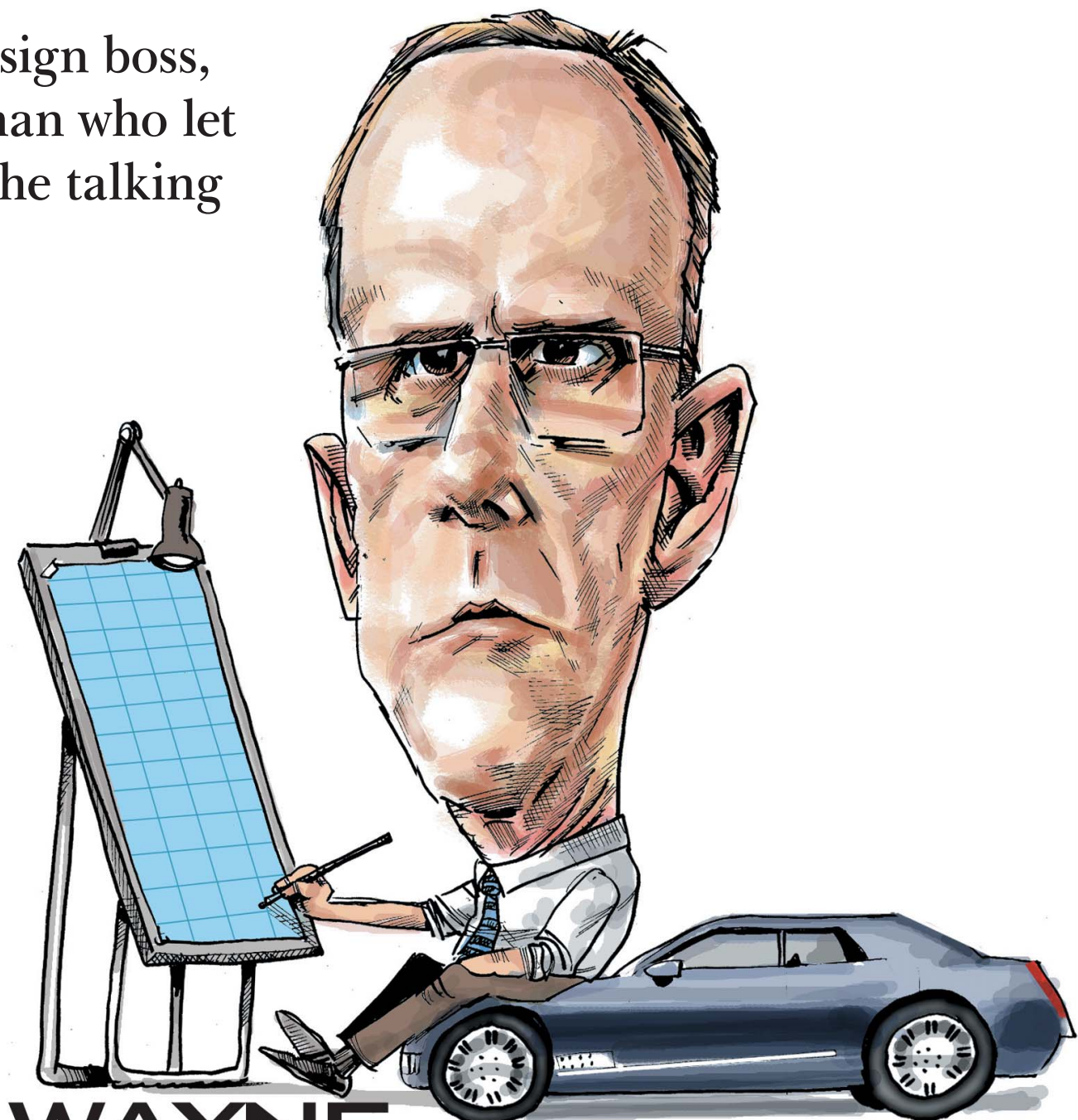
Under Cherry's direction, GM revealed more than 35 concept cars and trucks around the world, more than any other automaker in such a brief period.

An award-winning designer, Cherry, now retired and in his early 70s, is considered by many as the leader of a design renaissance at GM. And all of it occurred during some of the most challenging times, financially, for the automaker.

Born in Indianapolis, Cherry began his career in 1962 in GM's advanced design studios after graduating from the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles.

Three years later, after helping create the groundbreaking 1966 Oldsmobile Toronado and the first-generation Chevrolet Camaro — two cars that would become cult classics — he transferred to Vauxhall Motors in Luton, England. It was considered a "temporary" assignment. He returned to the United States 26 years later.

During his time in Europe, Cherry climbed the corporate ladder, leading the design direction for Vauxhall and Opel. He established a new



WAYNE CHERRY

identity for European cars and trucks and would help bring GM Europe to No. 1 in overall sales through vehicles like the Corsa, Vectra and Omega, to name a few.

Cherry returned to North America in 1991 and was named GM's new design boss a year later.

As just the fifth design boss in nearly 100 years of GM history, Cherry quickly molded, shaped, sculpted and stamped the automaker's product line.

Usually soft-spoken and rarely outgoing, a one-liner was just that with Cherry ... a one-liner. He wasn't flashy. And, mostly, he wasn't forceful.

Even with GM struggling over money woes, he had work to do and his designs said plenty.

"Frankly, we had to rebuild an awful lot of bridges (in the early 1990s)," he told The Car Connection.

"For a number of years, all advanced design operations had to stop. A lot of our advanced work wasn't focused

on product."

Under Cherry's leadership, it found life. In America, his first vehicles were the 1997 Chevrolet Corvette and the Impala SS. But the real renaissance took shape with the new direction at Cadillac. Pushed aside by imports and forgotten in the automotive landscape, Cherry helped bring Cadillac back to prominence with a set of angular lines and a defined style.

He found his greatest success with the CTS and the Escalade and his Cadillac Sixteen ultraluxury concept car was characterized as "breathtaking" by the automotive press.

There were hits, and some misses. Cherry was responsible for the Hummer H2 as well as the Cadillac SRX. But he was also responsible for the 2001 Pontiac Aztek, still a source of conversation for its design.

Near the end, Cherry had an influence on GM's AUTOnomy high-tech platform, as well as the design direction of the Solstice roadster. He also thought trucks shouldn't get the

short shrift, telling a reporter once that "trucks deserve design, too."

But his influence on advanced computer design and hiring practices was perhaps even more profound. He encouraged interactive, plasma-screen reviews of products in two- and three-dimensional models. And he hired from other companies, taking in talent from Chrysler, Renault, Audi and Fiat, a practice not common at GM in the past.

Cherry retired on Jan. 1, 2004, handing over the design reins to Ed Welburn, an executive previously in charge of body-on-frame architectures for GM Design. But Cherry will not soon be forgotten.

Buyers still clamor for his Cadillac Sixteen concept. Ford's J Mays even called it "the best damn piece of work to come out of GM styling since (former GM design boss) Bill Mitchell's days."

• E-mail feature writer Jason Stein at www.wheelbase.us/mailbag.html.

Challenger is a throwback to muscle car era

BY ANN M. JOB
For The Associated Press

The 2009 Dodge Challenger is testosterone in a car — a retro-styled car, that is.

From its bold, 1970s muscle car styling to its throaty, loud Hemi V-8, the Challenger in top SRT8 dress is an awesome display of brawn and power.

Push the accelerator pedal, and passengers' heads instantly get sucked back into the head restraints as the hefty Challenger lurches forward. Rear tires can squeal and smoke at aggressive startup, and the big steering wheel requires some dialing to direct the car, just like the Challenger of old.

Never mind that the four-passenger, 2009 version of Challenger is a gasoline hog in these days of fuel savings and environmentalism.

It's so politically incorrect in today's world, it's nearly cool.

And men — young and old — materialize around it like magic. Young guys took pictures of the test car with their cell phones, while baby boomers recounted stories of what they drove in the 1960s and

At a glance

Price as tested: \$43,730

Engine: 6.1-liter V-8

City/highway fuel economy: 14/22 miles per gallon

Length: 197.7 inches

Wheelbase: 116 inches

Curb weight: 4,140 pounds

Built: Brampton, Ontario, Canada

'70s when muscle cars were the rage.

Too bad the new Challenger doesn't come with the price tag of the original 1970-74 Challenger.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is \$21,995 for a base, 2009 Challenger SE with 250-horsepower V-6. The most powerful and iconic Challenger is the top-of-the-line SRT8 with 425-horsepower Hemi V-8 and a starting retail price of \$39,995.

This compares with the 2009 Ford Mustang that starts at \$20,790 with V-6 and rockets to \$44,780 in top-of-the-line,

V-8-powered Shelby GT500 Cobra form.

Next year, Chevrolet officials plan to revive their Camaro muscle car for what is shaping up as a celebratory comeback of '60s and '70s power machines from Detroit automakers.

But lingering oil-price hikes, a jittery stock market and consumers worried about the economy have taken some air out of the sales prospects for the devil-may-care retro cars.

Still, shoppers with the money and a certain "so-what" attitude about greenhouse gases and oil revenues or a bursting need to relive the boomer heydays can enjoy the Challenger as a remarkably well-designed muscle car with the best attributes of yesterday and today.

Based generally on the underpinnings of the Dodge Charger sedan, the Challenger is a bit shorter in length and lower in height.

But the body is instantly recognizable as a Challenger, with a long hood, short rear deck and a low-browed look to the headlamps. On the test



COURTESY OF CHRYSLER

The retro-styled 2009 Dodge Challenger may jump-start a comeback of '70s power machines from Detroit automakers.

car painted bright TorRed with big black stripe on the hood, everything was nicely in proportion with the 20-inch tires.

Inside, the black front seats had substantial support and suede-like fabric inserts and side bolsters to keep everyone in place during spirited driving. In back, only two seats are provided, with a smallish amount of legroom — 32.6 inches. Trunk space is a decent 16.2 cubic feet.

There was no driving quietly in the Challenger SRT8.

The engine rumbled as soon as it started up, and its decibels rose from there as I pressed the gas pedal and moved forward. The first gear was short with the six-speed manual transmission, so if I didn't shift quickly, I'd be hearing screaming engine revs before I knew it.

The ride wasn't harsh. Sure, I felt road bumps all the time, but the feeling was the big tires rolling over the road bumps, not shaking or severely transmitting the bumps to passengers.