



Global Reach

ONCE AGAIN, I AM IN

Europe on an extended, month-long fact-finding mission on behalf of you, the *AutoWeek* reader. No, no, I don't mind doing this for you. There's no need to thank me. I am glad to be of service.

Plans are big for this trip: I am going to drive a new Mercedes-Benz AMG sedan at the Circuit Paul Ricard in France and then go to Berlin to drive Volkswagen's New New Beetle. But none of that has happened yet.

I have been here for a week, tooling around northern Germany. So far, I have driven *die autobahn* at high speed and eaten a lot of schnitzel. It's still early. But one impression I have so far is the same one I always get when I come over here or go to Japan: These guys get an awful lot of cars that we do not get.

I bet there would be people in the

Peugeot, Citroën and others used to be available here for the price of a boat ticket. But we can't get them.

Why is this so?

I have a theory: It's protectionism. Not just market protectionism, as in limiting the number of foreign competitors in the U.S. market to protect the domestic car industry, but job protectionism. All those guys in tiny cubicles in Washington, D.C., and Ann Arbor, Mich., who make absolutely certain that Part 2906 meets Specification 8,000,000,002 or the whole thing gets shipped back to Untertürkheim or Nagano or wherever it came from. This leaves us in the United States with a limited number of choices, all brought here at great cost.

This is ridiculous. Yes, we have to have safety and emissions standards. Everybody wants crumple zones and airbags, and no one wants NOx and unburned hydrocarbons. But I'll let you in on a secret: The Europeans and the Japanese have standards, too. They

don't want their customers squashed any more than we do. And no one wants air pollution. So they have standards to address those issues.

Our government will tell you that our standards are made just for us to address the wants and needs of American car buyers. I say,

Let's let the market decide if the Renault Kangoo will sell here.



United States who would buy some of those big, beautiful Peugeot sedans, BMWs and Mercedes-Benzes with crazy engine combinations and still more people who would buy tiny Citroën C1s and C2s, not to mention all of those handy little trucklet things and any number of larger vans, trucks and buses. Give me a Renault Kangoo, or give me death.

The market doesn't want those, you say? Why not let the market decide? Maybe quality has improved since

heifer *Popell*! The average Günter or Nobuhiro is not all that different in size or shape from the average Joe. If the car is safe for him, it's safe for you. If we have standards that say you have to survive a front-end collision even without a seatbelt, then maybe our standards are the ones that are wrong.

So, tell your congressman that you want to be able to buy any car meeting the standards of any G7 country. It's the free market, baby! Who's with me?

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