

James Ruppert



Trade secrets Is it time we were able to get Astras at Asda?

I like car showrooms, but I can't help thinking the way cars are retailed could do with a shake-up. I love the independent and prestige sectors, which are usually highly enthusiastic, but the mass-market sellers can be a little underwhelming and not always that helpful. Clearly, some showrooms are a waste of space.

To that end and, initially, not wanting to upset the UK Retail Motor Industry, I have found myself wondering out loud why Americans can't buy a Chevy, along with all the usual groceries, at Wal-Mart.

I was not alone. Industry veteran Peter Danaher and his team at Automotive Research Solutions also thought the logical solution to the ongoing car sales crisis lay in rethinking how cars should be sold. With a huge marketing and retailing structure already in place, surely it wouldn't be much of a stretch to get a Chevy as an impulse buy at the checkout?

Compared with short-term and costly scrappage schemes, it made all sorts of sense. Danaher accrued the air miles and burnt the midnight oil and few could argue that he was wrong. Except that it took one clever academic to point out that it was actually illegal for Detroit to sell new vehicles directly to the American public, because



Next step on from here is to buy a new car with your groceries

'Mass-market sellers can be a little underwhelming and not always so helpful'

manufacturers and dealers carve up the nation into designated sales areas.

Tony Polito is associate professor at the Department of Marketing & Supply

Chain Management, College of Business, East Carolina University, so he spoke from a position of colossal authority. He revealed the complex legal reasons why you can't

buy direct on the net in the US, even though dealers know it is an efficient way of working, because many re-market used cars this way.

Even so, post-bankruptcy GM piloted a scheme with 225 of its 250 Californian dealers on eBay. Customers could bid on vehicles and there were 960,000 searches in the first week but just 45 cars sold. Apparently, people enjoyed finding out as much

as they could online and then ended up at the dealer for a test drive anyway.

This may prove that selling cars really is a special case. Then again, selling cars in a no-hassle, familiar retail environment – one where every car maker competes for your cash – must be tested. Given this brave new option, customers could pretty soon head down the aisle...

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I couldn't help noticing... Ruppert's secondhand obsessions this week



Renault Kangoo 1.5 dCi 68

What? 2006, 36,000 miles, £4695
Details: Authentique trim, lots of space and superb visibility. A warranty costs extra, but insurance is just group four.
Call: 020 8669 0938 (dealer)

Ford Focus ST170

What? 2003, 69,000 miles, £3980
Details: Not an RS, but any hotter-than-average Focus is good. Half-leather seats. A main dealer part-ex.
Call: 01543 500005 (dealer)



Maybach 57

What? 2006, 48,500 miles, £89,950
Details: If an S500 is too ordinary, how about this, which has had one previous high-profile owner?
Call: 01932 373000 (dealer)

Lamborghini Gallardo

What? 2004, 21,000 miles, £56,995
Details: E-gear paddle-shift Lambo with proper history and all the usual extras, including bi-xenon headlamps.
Call: 01530 249618 (dealer)



AUTOCAR

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Toyota's 'younger' Prius

Chrysler by Lancia - eh?



NEW GOLF R vs Focus RS and hot Mégane



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USED MINIS FOR £3
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