



• Dr. Sigmund Freud formulated most of his theories about life and sex and traumatic shock and hysteria, hangups, perversions and all the rest of it long before the automobile became a central fact of Twentieth Century Man's life. And since Freud's theory holds that much of Man's torture evolves from the complex issue of Sex, it then must hold that the automobile which for countless millions in our time has replaced and in fact to many has become sex, is responsible for many deep contemporary psychic scars. That sex and the car have become deeply intertwined is such an obvious fact that I feel a little embarrassed to bring it up.

Of course, all the old fears which guys used to have about females have had to be transferred to the more modern love object, the car. Especially are these noticeable in that select group of car maniacs who habitually buy, for their own reasons, used cars. Probably no other single purchase is more fraught with potential nightmarish grief. I'll tell you, most of us have trouble remembering the first girl we dated, but there isn't a guy who can ever forget the first car he owned. He will carry the memory of its bad transmission to the years of his dotage and beyond.

There was the time, for example, that I fell in love with a '49 Ford Club Coupe.

The '49 Ford was an exceedingly pretty little piece, and in fact, the model is even a minor collector's item these days and for good reason; clean uncluttered lines and a real watershed design that ended the inflated Pumpkin school and began the whole square-cut concept which we're still in today. But at the time I wasn't much interested in theory. It was just a hell of a great looking little car and I had to have it. It was clean, and seemed to be in good shape, but such was my frenzy to own it that I overlooked a lot of telltale clues which I would have spotted if my mind had been working. Love is always that way.

I worked on it constantly, rebuilt the car-

buretor a couple of times, ground the valves, put in a new set of rings. I did everything for that bitch but I still couldn't satisfy her. It got more and more demanding. The kingpins went out; the front wheel bearings froze and then one night coming home from a big date, the clutch simply stopped engaging, just like that. I walked two and a half miles in the rain to get to a phone and didn't get the girl home 'til seven o'clock the next morning, just in time to meet her old man coming out the front door on his way to work, and let me tell you, that was nip and tuck for a while.

But I still loved that '49 Ford. Maybe even more since I put so damn much into it. By then even my friends were beginning to talk, like "Hey, has your differential given out yet?" "How 'bout your transmission? Still got a second gear?" I took to being furtive and close-mouthed about the latest trouble. They appeared regularly, at about 10-day intervals. I could almost predict when the next hassle would start.

There was one thing that really bothered me, though, and that was the paint. It was a kind of pretty metallic blue but if there's anything more treacherous than metallic paint I'd like to know what the hell it is. No matter what I did, the hood had a kind of dull, crystallized flatness; the door on the driver's side shined up great, but the door on the other side had turned a kind of watery grape Kool-Aid color. No matter how much Simoniz I used, it just kept getting worse and worse.

Then one day I read this ad:

6

ATTENTION CAR OWNERS
In just four hours we
guarantee to convert your dull,
lifeless car into a gleaming,
like-new beauty. Thousands
of colors to choose from, at an
UNBELIEVABLE \$39.95

,

ATTENTION CAR OWNERS. How would you like a gleaming, original color baked-on paint job that makes your car look like new and will add thousands to its resale value. In just four hours we guarantee to convert your dull, lifeless car into a gleaming, like-new beauty. Thousands of colors to choose from, at an UNBELIEVABLE \$39.95! (The \$39.95 was in giant blood-red type.)

Yes, for just \$39.95, hardly more than the price of a good wax job, you can have a beautiful baked-on finish that will add years to the life of your car. Phone for an appointment now, or come down to see us. Kwik-O Paint and Body Refinishers.

I sat back and thought about how great the Ford would look with a magnificent gleaming baked-on sparkling new paint job. Now at that time \$39.95 was a lot of money for me to shell out for something as basical-

ly frivolous as a paint job. Let's face it: Paint is only cosmetics. It's like shooting your wad on a false moustache or a \$40 tie. I didn't take the bait right away. I thought about it for a couple of days, but it was a foregone conclusion. I pretended that I was debating back and forth, but I knew that I was going to pop in the end because every time I got in the Ford I kept seeing her in a beautiful new baked-on finish guaranteed to add years to the life of the car. So I went down to the bank where my balance stood at \$48 and drew out the \$39.95 and drove down to the address given in the ad. It was a big, barn-like place with KWIK-O PAINT JOBS \$39.95 splashed in red over the front display window. I pulled the Ford up and the fact that there seemed to be a hell of a lot of other cars parked around with bad-looking paint jobs did not escape me. I was not alone. I walked in. A guy smoking a cigar squatted at a desk in the seedy little office. I told him I wanted a paint job.

"Okay, son, siddown. What kind of car you got?" He puffed away at his soggy White Owl as he pushed paper coffee cups around on his desk, hunting for a pencil.

"A '49 Ford. Club Coupe."

"Ah yes indeed," he mumbled. "A '49 Ford, ah yes indeed." He wrote something on a form. "That's a two-door model, right?"

"Ah, yes," I answered. "A Club Coupe."

"What color do you want it, son?" He never looked up as he scribbled away.

"Ah, I want an original '49 Ford color."

"We got red, white, and a nice light blue. Now what color you want?"

"Uh . . . your ad said 'original colors.'"

"Ah yes indeed," he mumbled. "Original color, let's see. You say that was a '49 Ford?" He slid open the bottom drawer of the gray metal desk and dragged out a giant clothbound notebook.

"Ah, yes, a '49 Ford. Two-door. Is that a Six or an Eight?"

"An Eight."

"Ah, well, they had . . . let's see, a Florentine Blue, Mist Grey, Maroon, and Desert Cactus Green . . . and ah . . ."

"Hey that sounds good." For some obscure reason I always wanted a green car.

"Ah yes, you want Desert Cactus Green." He ran a finger down the page of the catalog and began to scribble again on his form. "Ah yes, that's paint number 1479 dash Cee. Leave your car out front. You can pick it up tomorrow at noon."

I forked over the \$39.95 and walked out. There's something exciting about getting a new paint job. It's almost like getting a new car. Somehow you get the feeling that all your troubles will be over once you get the damn thing painted. I went home that night on the bus. My kid brother asked me where the car was. "I'm getting it painted."

"Painted?"

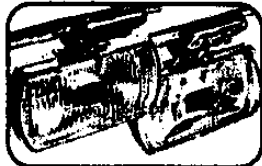
It isn't every day you get a new paint job. He was surprised.

"Yep. Getting her painted."

"What color?"

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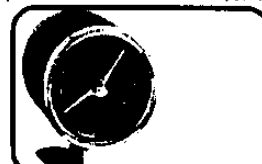
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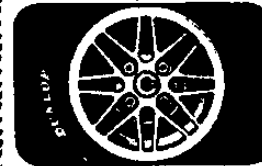
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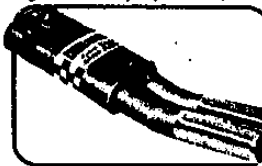
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JEAN SHEPHERD (CONTINUED)

"You just wait and see. You're really going to be surprised." I figured that Desert Cactus Green just had to look good on a '49 Ford Club Coupe.

The next morning I could hardly wait to get down to old Kwik-O and pick up the Ford. At exactly 12 noon I popped into the office where the same guy still crouched behind the desk. "I'm back." He didn't even remember me. Apparently hundreds of cars went through Kwik-O every day and each customer must have had exactly the same look on his face.

"Gimme your ticket," he said, and he stamped it. "Go out and see Andy. Out in back, through the side door. Show 'em this."

I went out the side door. Andy was in a little glass cashier's booth. I gave him my ticket. "That'll be \$22.75," he said after going through the file. "What do you mean? I already paid!"

"Says here you wanted a special paint job . . . Desert Cactus Green. Is that right?"

"Yeah," I mumbled, feeling the silent jaws of the Great Con closing on my throat.

"Well, that's a special job. It's \$22.75 extra." The way he said it made me know that it was no use to fight. I had been had. I went out to the phone and called my brother.

"I gotta have \$22.75."

"What for?" he asked.

"Just get it and come down. Borrow it from Schwartz or something. I gotta have it right away."

Half an hour later he showed up, looking mad. I handed the \$22.75 to Andy. He holstered into an intercom.

"You can bring out number 438. It's that Ford in the back lot." We stood around for a couple of minutes. Then around the corner of the garage came a car. For a couple of seconds I thought they had brought somebody else's by mistake. A kid hopped out and tossed me the keys. It sure as hell was my key ring. I just stood there looking at it. And then my brother Randy said it for both of us. "That's the first pickle-colored car I ever saw. It looks just like a pickle!" He caught it just exactly right. My beautiful '49 Ford had been turned into a dill pickle on wheels. It was the worst looking paint job I ever saw on a car. Ever.

It was not only dill pickle-colored but it was the shiniest, hardest-gleaming dill pickle I'd ever seen. You could see that damn paint in the dark four blocks away, it was that aggressive. We got in, and began to cough. Instantly. The smell of turpentine and Dill Pickle Paint was overpowering. I couldn't open the trunk for two weeks because the paint had glued it shut. Old Kwik-O had also sprayed a fine mist of green paint over the windshield, which didn't do much for visibility. They also got the rear window for good measure. Not only that, perfect strangers laughed openly when I drove past. Ever since then I have disliked dill pickles, and green in any form makes me sneeze. I wonder what Dr. Freud would make of this case.