

The latest status symbol: a faded price sticker.

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• One of the more curious practices of our time is the habit some people have of keeping that official price sticker on their car long after the chrome has begun to pit and the paint is dulled and blistered. This is a fetish that I find oddly revolting, but I can't quite figure out why. After all, if some yahoo wants to go around and continually inform the world that he paid \$69.75 for undercoating, \$489.50 for air conditioning and \$42.16 for rear bumper guards, who am I to deny him his dolish pleasures? Let's face it, the outlay that his pretentious piece of junk represents is probably damn near his yearly salary, and he wants to let other fools know that they are not alone. Maybe if they added the amount of cabbage required by the monthly payment in red letters on the sticker, he might be less likely to flaunt it.

I was sitting in my car waiting for a friend who was picking up a 6-pack at one of those "climate-controlled shopping malls" that are breaking out like a galloping case of smallpox all over the country when a gaudy, tinsel chariot pulled into the slot next to me. A beefy native who actually *did* have a beet-red neck lumbered out of the vehicle and waddled toward the Mammoth Mart.

I found myself reading his price-list sticker and noted with interest that he had indulged himself with the Deluxe Rallye Group at a mere \$102.76. *Sport Trim* . . . \$46.98. Hmm, I thought, that certainly is a reasonable buy. *Special Wheel Covers and Chrome Rims* . . . \$94.60. I craned my neck to observe these expensive beauties and noted that he had already lost the right front wheel cover and that his right rear looked as though someone had flattened it with a ball peen hammer in an attempt to heist his beautiful, distinctive plastic emblem, which was now badly discolored because somebody's dog had used it as a public facility. *Vacu-Matic Antenna* . . . \$28.14. I noted

sadly that a coat hanger resided where the proud Vacu-Matic had once gone up and down so merrily at the flick of a switch. The coat hanger probably worked at least as well as an antenna, but it sure wasn't as much fun to run. I had a brief mental picture of an acne-pocked cretin snapping it off for use in a mugging or maybe just because it was there—which is more likely in this age of total vandalism.

I blasted my horn at a blue-haired lady, her head covered with an infestation of grotesque plastic curlers, who was mindlessly backing a 34-passenger station wagon into my grille.

I moodily continued my reading of the price sticker, since the plot was beginning to interest me. *Solar Tint Glass* . . . \$36.84. *Luxury Nyla-Pile Carpeting* . . . \$19.90.

Glorioski, I thought, what the hell do you get as standard equipment when you buy a car? Then a fugitive notion hit me: What if other industries adopted the same practice and you had to pay extra for "Deluxe Sport Knobs" for your TV set and "Rallye Zippers" for your pants or maybe "Wrap-Around Deluxe Laces" for your shoes?

I was only a quarter of the way down the list of goodies and reading with rising interest when the proud owner of this impressive price sticker returned, bearing a floor lamp of wondrous ugliness apparently inspired by the court of Queen Isabella or possibly Ferdinand Magellan. Galleons sailed around its plastic parchment shade and, true to form, it bore a large crimson banner that read *RED TAG SPECIAL: REG. \$139.95, REDUCED TO \$89.95*.

Now why would a man want to advertise his nuttiness? Isn't it bad enough putting out all that money for all that nothing without wanting to flaunt your weakness before the world? It should be noted that the car in which he roared away was last year's model

and a good 18 months old, price sticker and all. What is it in cars that brings out the cuckoo-bird side in so many of us? I'm sure it would never occur to even that red-necked dildock to leave the price tags on his new Robert Hall polyester 2-way stretch Edwardian suit so that all the gang down at the Legion Hall can know that not only has old Clarence bought a new suit but that he paid \$79.95 for it, including the deluxe pearl buttons and removable foul-weather lining.

I have never been able to get a coherent explanation from anyone as to why people leave those damn price stickers on their side windows. It's a very sensitive issue. But for some obscure reason, the practice is growing and could very well spread to other items. *Cape Cod Hideaway Model* . . . \$47,500 not including 11 percent Mortgage Charges and Closing Costs would look nice on the front door of your new plywood shanty. Or a little pennant attached to the side of your plate at an elegant restaurant: *Cha-teaubriand* . . . \$13.50 including Gravy. *Potatoes au Gratin a la Carte* . . . \$1.25. *Petite Pois a la Carte* . . . \$.85. That would let all those other cheapskates sitting around eating meatloaf know that they were in the presence of a true big-timer.

No telling how far this could go. Say, a tasteful little sterling silver tag on the left sideburn that reads: *Monsieur Pierre's Custom Miracle Hair Replacement* . . . \$349.50 less fitting—a mark of true fashion.

Why not? After all, "If you've got it, flaunt it" seems to be the current full-disclosure policy of our dynamic, ever-truthful world. And if you don't have it, fake it. I know one guy who had all the identifying marks taken off his Datsun 240Z and replaced with Ferrari insignia. He reports a completely different attitude now down at his friendly Mobil station, and he has grown over two inches in height since the change. •