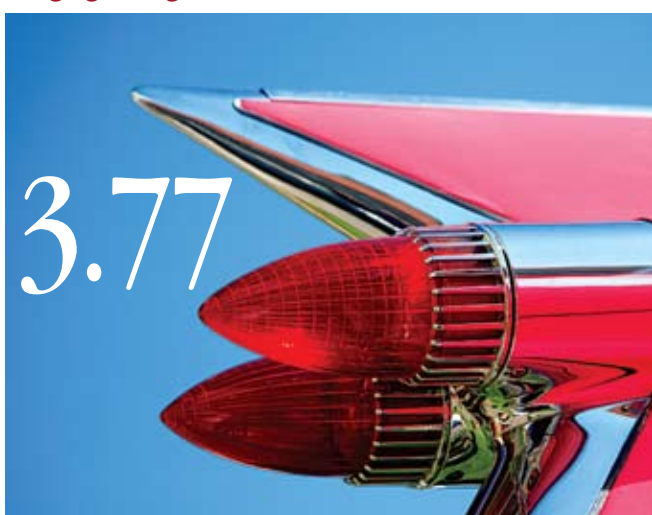


Big garage



Number of classic cars owned by the average vintage vehicle collector in 2008

SOURCE: CNW Research, Bandon, Ore.

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Buying



AUDI A4

By JIM GORZELANY | CTW FEATURES

Those who have a few extra dollars extra to spend and are looking to buy a new luxury sedan will find that it's a buyer's market out there, precipitated by the recent slump in sales. "It

appears that the confluence of tighter credit and the overall economic downturn is impacting purchases of high-end vehicles," says Tom Libby, senior automotive analyst with the marketing information firm J.D. Power and Associates in Westlake Village, Calif.

Still, despite the economy's effect on the overall market, the industry is rolling out an assortment of new upscale sedans, particularly in the so-called "near luxury" segment where sticker prices come in at less than \$50,000. These models provide added comfort, performance and features over broad-branded midsize models, with an element of exclusivity that's a cut above the norm.

Here's a look at a few reasonably affordable, yet accommodating luxury sedans that are either all-new or SEE AFFLUENCE, PAGE 2

ENTRY-LEVEL AFFLUENCE

SEVERAL NEW 'NEAR LUXURY' CARS DELIVER ADDED POSHNESS AT WHAT ARE RELATIVELY REASONABLE PRICES, FOR UPSCALE BUYERS ON A BUDGET.

Trends

WORTH THE WAIT

By DEB ACORD
CTW FEATURES

There's a health and fitness center. Gourmet coffee shop. Restaurant. Internet business center. Barbershop. Boutique. Movie theater.

Is it a high-end mall? A big-city airport concourse? No, it's the customer service area at Island Lincoln-Mercury-Jaguar-Land

Rover, a car dealership on the east coast of Florida.

Drivers waiting for their cars to be serviced here don't have to pass the time flipping through two-year-old magazines, trying to find a comfortable position on cheap plastic chairs, and choking down burnt coffee.

No, while these car owners wait, they can get in their 30 minutes of cardio on a

treadmill at the Cougar Health and Fitness Center which also features free weights and weight machines.

Not their day to work out? There's gourmet coffee and treats at the Carback's coffee shop, lunch at the Tiki Grill, Internet access in the Wall Street business area and an 1890s-style barbershop with \$2 haircuts. And, oh yeah, movie times are at 9 a.m., 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

This dealership in Merritt Island and others around the country have taken the concept of customer service to new heights. As the car business has become ever more competitive, dealers are being increasingly creative in their efforts to lure new customers and to keep their regulars coming back again and again. A recent

SEE SERVICE PAGE 2

Steering you right



WITH SHARON PETERS

STUD SERVICE

Q: This will be our first winter in the extreme north. There will be lots of snow. Do we need studded tires or will snow tires do the trick?

A: Go for a set of good-quality snow tires. Studs make no sense for the normal driver, even when he or she is regularly driving through deep snow.

I spent several winters living in the Colorado high mountains near Vail and Breckenridge where there's 300 inches or more of snow every year. Good snow tires (and cautious driving) got me through even the worst storms without unpleasantness. Moreover, my friends who were ski instructors, snow plow drivers or ambulance attendants - folks who had to be on the road at 4 a.m. when conditions were often at their worst - did not use studded tires, which are just plain awful when you're not driving through thick ice or 12 inches of snow.

Keep your road speed slow, even if the lunatics around you haven't reduced speed a whit in deference to the conditions, and you'll maintain good control of your vehicle.

Q: We're buying our daughter a new car for her birthday. We're doing the legwork, narrowing the field to about six models and then on her birthday taking her to the various dealerships so she can make her own choice. You've written a couple of really good columns making suggestions about how we should go about making the right choice and cutting the right deal, and we've saved them. Is there anything else that has occurred to you in the several months since sharing that advice?

A: Yes. First, make sure she gets to see the dashboard at night, when it's all lit up like a Christmas tree. A friend bought a car a couple of months ago that she loves in almost every regard. But the first time she drove at night she recoiled in horror: The dashboard is a bilious, unnecessarily copious spread of red lights of a particularly putrid shade. She claims she would not have purchased that car had she known of the light issue ahead of time. Indeed, the light configuration and color is alarming enough that even weeks after settling in with this otherwise perfect vehicle, she is unhappy with night driving. She's an artist, so is a bit more sensitive to some things than others of us. But I'm no artist, and I find the dashboard sufficiently eye-wearing that even I don't enjoy being a passenger in her car at night.

Also, I have often recommended to budget-conscious readers that they buy a solid, low-mileage vehicle that's a year old or so in order to avoid the shocking depreciation that occurs with a brand-new car the moment you drive it off the lot. That may still be the best way to go - or maybe not. I discovered when I set out to buy a one-year old vehicle during the summer that although they had two on the lot that were exactly what I was looking for, the new car was actually cheaper. The reason: not only was it practically the end of the model year, there were manufacturer rebates and incentives to move that new(ish) inventory before the next wave of new-model-year vehicles arrived. So I went the new-car route, on the grounds that everything, including the tires, would last longer than would be the case with the vehicle with 11,000 miles on it.

You/she will pay more for car insurance for a new one than a year-old one and also more for the tags and registration, so that's something to factor in.

The economy is so screwy now that the past rules of wise car buying don't always apply. You'll have to alter your thinking and buying approach - even on the very same day as you move from dealership to dealership.

But if you stick to the original advice of doing price comparisons, not buying add-ons you don't really want, being open to a color that may not be the first choice, working with a salesperson who respects your thoughts and limitations and moving on if you don't get the deal you want, you'll do fine.

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What's your question? Sharon Peters would like to bear what's on your mind when it comes to caring for, driving, repairing and making the most of your vehicle. Send your

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Service

Continued from Page 1

survey by the market research firm J.D. Power and Associates in Westlake Village, Calif., asked consumers to list amenities that add value to the waiting room experience. Both customers of premium and non-premium car models said clean and comfortable seating was the most important element at a dealership. Other amenities in the top five in both categories (in order of priority) were wireless Internet access, premium coffee, large-screen TVs and computers with Internet access.

Adding a touch of luxury at Island, a dealership that opened in 1985, has made waiting a positive experience. "When this facility was opened, the owner and his wife had this vision that would place us well above other dealers," says Jim Cavanaugh, general manager.

Island customers have enthusiastically embraced the dealership's amenities, Cavanaugh says. "We have one couple who cancelled their gym memberships after they bought their car here. Now, they come in every Monday, Wednesday and Friday to use the gym." Oh, and gym rats don't have to worry about freshening up after their workout - the dealership has men's and women's full-service locker rooms with showers.

Island's idea of the perfect full-service dealership "has worked really well," Cavanaugh says. "Customers don't pay a penny more here than they would anywhere else, but we have created a place that is the talk of the town."

The dealership hasn't forgotten traditionalists and offers them a more ordinary waiting room with a TV. But the other amenities - a Cartoon Zone play area for kids, a library stocked with books, a bar (open for special occasions) and a great viewing window which happens to offer a panoramic view of lift-offs at the nearby Kennedy Space Center - make it unique. "We don't want people to get bored," Cavanaugh says. "We want people to feel satisfied when they come here."

Maintaining a high level of comfort for customers is tantamount at Herb Chambers Lexus in Sharon, Mass., says general manager Giovanni Tosti. "We are trying to not miss anything," he says.

"That's the key to selling cars right now. That's the difference. Everybody is selling the same cars, so you have to make yourself different."

Chambers Lexus has an elaborate waiting room with a fireplace, big-screen TVs and a well-equipped



WAITING IN STYLE

The in-dealership experience can be enhanced by movie theaters like Island's 38-seat facility or other diversions limited only by the dealership's size, location and capacity for innovation. Free Wi-Fi Internet connections and computers are fairly common. Coffee bars are becoming routine, too. But how about a putting green? Check out these innovative amenities offered by dealerships around the country:

- Atlanta Classic Cars in Duluth, Ga., has a golf driving range and putting green and complimentary massages.
- Galpin Aston Martin Los Angeles features Club Aston, a private club with areas for members to gather with friends.
- In Newport Beach, Calif., the Newport Lexus dealership's entrance features two majestic fountains, a grand player piano, an onsite putting green and a Tommy Bahama store.
- Meade Lexus of Southfield, Mich., advertises an owners lounge "that rivals that of a five-star hotel" and its own roadside assistance program.
- Heuberger Subaru in Colorado Springs, Colo., has CD music listening stations, video games and TV with wireless headphones.

playroom for children. And like many dealers, it takes service beyond its facilities, offering pick-up and delivery programs for test drives and monitoring car update and news that could affect its customers.

Tosti says more elaborate dealerships and thoughtful amenities are going to help the industry survive. "We are trying to bring the retail auto industry into the 21st century. We have to think outside the box to do that. It has taken a long time for our industry to change."

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LINCOLN MKS

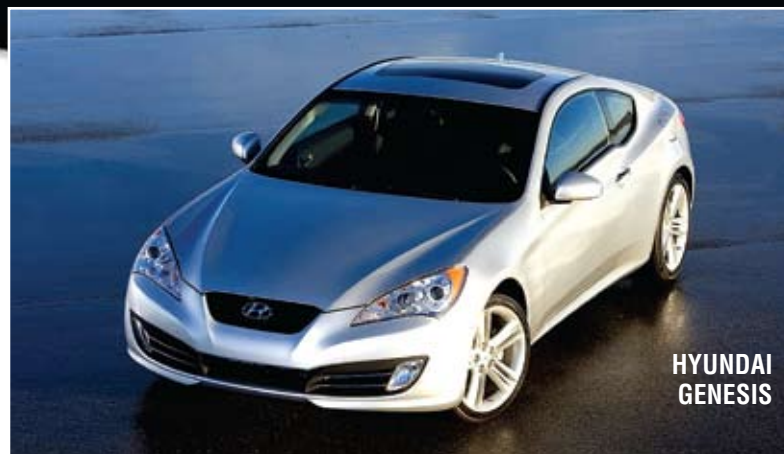
Affluence

Continued from Page 1

significantly redesigned for 2009, offered for those with a need for four doors and some additional panache:

- Acura TL. Acura's redesigned Honda Accord-based midsize TL sport sedan is larger than before, carries dramatic new styling and offers added features, many of which are borrowed from its larger sibling, the RLA 280-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine is standard, with a 305-hp, 3.7-liter V6 coming with the top SH-AWD model. The latter stands for Acura's road-holding "Super Handling All-Wheel-Drive" system. The TL's five-speed automatic transmission comes with steering wheel-mounted paddle shifters for manual operation. The TL's interior is now more spacious, with 1.3 inches added rear legroom. Already amply equipped, an optional technology package adds bells and whistles such as real-time traffic navigation, Doppler-radar weather maps and a 440-watt DVD-audio surround-sound system. MSRP: \$34,955.

- Audi A4. A redesigned Audi A4 midsize sedan is larger than before and carries a fresh exterior appearance with friendly "eyebrow shaped" LED running lights. The A4's 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder and 3.2-liter V6 engines now generate a stronger 211- and 265-hp, respectively, with enhanced fuel efficiency. A 40:60 rear-biased ver-



HYUNDAI GENESIS



VOLKSWAGEN CC

sion of Audi's quattro all-wheel-drive system affords sportier and more secure handling; it's standard with the V6 version and is optional with the 2.0. Depending on the version, the car can be fitted with either a gearless six-speed continuously variable transmission, a six-speed manual or a conventional six-speed automatic with Tiptronic manual gear selection. The driver-focused interior design is both handsome and functional. MSRP: \$32,700.

- Hyundai Genesis. Hyundai nudges its way firmly into the luxury market with the new full-size Genesis luxury sedan. Tastefully stylish with a handsome exterior and a rich looking interior that suggests a more-upscale brand name, the Genesis is the automaker's first rear-drive car. A 290-hp, 3.8-liter V6 engine is standard, with a refined

375-hp 4.6-liter V8 alternately offered. Both engines come mated to a six-speed automatic transmission with manual-shift capability. Standard equipment is plentiful, though it's just a notch below the best cars in its class in terms of overall refinement. MSRP: \$32,250.

- Jaguar XF. The midsize Jaguar XF attempts to break the automaker's stodgy image with contemporary coupe-like styling and a rich and novel interior that literally springs to life when the door is opened. When the driver enters the vehicle, the backlit start button pulsates like a heartbeat. Push the button and the dashboard air vents automatically rotate open while the JaguarDrive Selector (used to select various performance modes) rises to hand from the center console. Otherwise, the XF shares much with its larger sedan sibling, the XJ, including its standard 300-hp, 4.2-liter V8 engine and available 420-hp supercharged version. Both engines are mated to a six-speed automatic transmission. The top Supercharged model adds the XJ's computer-controlled suspension that allows a user to dial in more or less ride comfort or cornering grip. MSRP: \$49,200.

• Lincoln MKS. Not as sporty as some models in this segment, the Lincoln MKS nonetheless holds its own with an attractive exterior and solid overall performance. It comes with a 275-hp, 3.7-liter V6 engine and smooth-shifting, six-speed automatic transmission; a V8 isn't available, but a quicker turbocharged V6 will arrive next year. A higher than average roofline contributes to what is a generous amount of interior room. A long list of tech-oriented features include Ford's Sync multimedia system and the optional Sirius Travel Link system that provides weather and traffic information, sports scores, movie listings and local gasoline prices. MSRP: \$37,665.

• Volkswagen CC. Essentially a sleeker-looking, lower-riding and costlier version of the midsize Passat, the CC (it stands for "comfort coupe," though it is, in fact, a sedan) can be equipped with either a 200-horsepower turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine or a more-suitable 280-horsepower 3.6-liter V6. The four-cylinder Sport version comes standard with a six-speed manual transmission, with a six-speed automatic optional there and standard elsewhere in the line. Handling is reasonably nimble, and all-wheel-drive is offered on the top V6 model for added authority on wet or dry roads. A nicely designed interior features four separate bucket seats. MSRP: \$26,790.

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