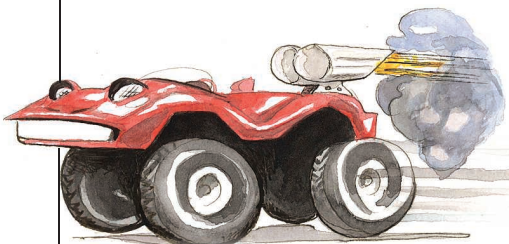


Teddy Wayne and Mike Sacks

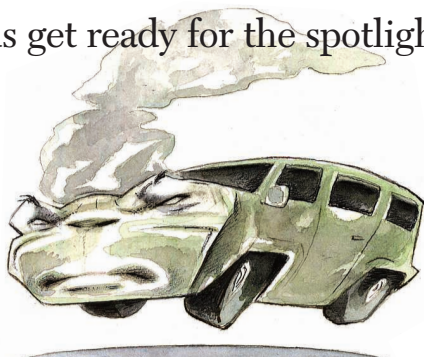
The 2008 American Auto Show

The leading brands get ready for the spotlight. Next stop, Iowa!



THE OBAMOBILE

Definitely not your father's Obamobile. But is America ready for the first-ever mass-produced hybrid car? A formidable entry for 2008—even its critics have praised its “clean lines” and “articulate ad campaign”—and yet a product still shrouded in mystery. Concerns over its fast acceleration (from zero to 60 in practically no time at all) are giving some potential drivers reservations about its staying power over the long haul.



THE MCCAINAVIGATOR

The slightly smaller cousin to the Hummer (although still something of a gas guzzler), this car maintains remarkable popularity thanks to its designers' willingness to speak candidly about defects in other models by the same maker; they recently said the Rumpfesel “will go down as one of the worst lemons in American history.” Cons: temperamental engine overheats easily, which may result in an eventual recall.



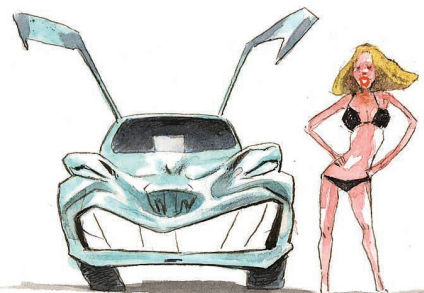
THE HOT-RODHAM

The Hot-Rodham is poised to make a big splash in '08, but consumer confidence may be shaken by an earlier model from the '90s, which had issues with control and manageability. Although the new, improved version still tends to drift toward the middle of the road, engineers claim they are addressing this alignment problem and should have it fixed well ahead of its nationwide '08 debut. Note: drivers must buy universal auto insurance.



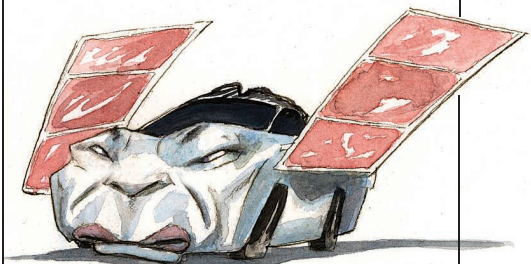
THE BIDENZA

During its unveiling, the Bidenza rolled dangerously backward several feet, nearly causing irreparable damage to the car's wheelbase. Engineers offered several quick excuses, but the initial gaffe may unfortunately doom the car's market reception. Many drivers also complain about the GPS's recommendations for sudden U-turns and too-late exits. Another minus: it's manufactured in Delaware.



THE EDWARD-ZX4

Its aesthetically pleasing chassis may actually hurt the Edward-ZX4; buyers have expressed fears of rollover due to its lightweight build. And its failed 2004 launch as a sidecar has many questioning whether it can get out of the gates as a full-size vehicle. All models include an attractive hood ornament that should prove popular with heartland female consumers and drivers who appreciate a little flair.



THE ALGOREX

Does this solar-powered car actually exist? A 2000 model failed to win over key judges, and many drivers rejected its wood paneling as old-fashioned. Its new, softer image includes rounded bumpers and a roof rack (perfect for baggage). Although it may not be released in time for '08, expect to see a prototype at auto shows and organic-supermarket openings from coast to coast, not including Florida.



THE GIULIANOVA

The prototype was used for years by New York City police officers, who raved about the unfettered power the Giulianova afforded them. Test audiences seem split, with many disliking its maker's controversial, outspoken boasts, while others admire its precision handling under the most stressful demands of urban traffic.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR TIME BY STEVE BRONNER