

# Most new cars purchased by women. But don't 'think pink'

BY NADINE GOFF  
for Capital Newspapers

They call it "pink thinking," and in their book "Don't Think Pink," marketing specialists Lisa Johnson and Andrea Learned urged businesses to avoid stereotype-driven views about how to market to women. It's a message that Madison-area car dealers and sales personnel have heeded.

Ask what women want in a car and you're not likely to hear about cup holders. Safety, good gas mileage, excellent sightlines, convenience, and four-wheel drive are among the features women most frequently request say area car sales managers and consultants.

Although the numbers vary a bit and the sources for those numbers are elusive – sometimes it's a sales consultant offering "my best guess" and sometimes it's unspecified studies or surveys cited in consumer publications and on the Internet – there seems to be general agreement that women account for about 85 percent of all



Volvo's YCC Project is an all-female design team responsible for all decisions in developing a concept car. PHOTOS © VOLVO CAR CORP., ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



consumer purchases and about 65 percent of new car purchases. "Sometimes we don't see a woman's spouse until delivery time," observes David Miller of the Don Miller dealership in Madison.

Miller says the 2008 GMC Acadia, a crossover vehicle, is one of the hottest cars with women buyers right now because – although it's spacious and comfortable – it's not like driving a giant truck. He also says while in past years women often purchased minivans and sedans, these days Don Miller is selling a lot of half-ton pickup trucks to women who want to use them for personal transportation.

Crossover vehicles like the Toyota Highlander are very popular with "women who want to get out of the soccer mom

van," says T.J. Johnson, new car director at Smart Motors. Although many buyers originally replaced vans with SUVs, Johnson says SUVs become too big for many consumers, both in terms of fuel economy and sheer size. Crossover vehicles, he explains, are built on a car platform, so drivers get a good ride, easier maneuverability, and better fuel economy while still enjoying the high seating and four-wheel drive offered by SUVs.

When it comes to luxury cars, Todd Bollenbach, a sales consultant for Fields Volvo, says women are particularly impressed by Volvo's safety and reliability, as well as its very understated, simple elegance. In addition, he notes, the cars offer comfortable seats designed by orthopedic surgeons,

built-in booster seats, and, unlike as with some other luxury cars, "you don't have to go back to college to learn to drive them." Bollenbach estimates that 60 to 70 percent of the Volvos sold at Fields are purchased by women.

Volvo has a long history of listening to and targeting independent, professional women. Several years ago, an all-woman team – Volvo's YCC Project – developed a concept car that paid special attention to such features as the ease with which drivers could get in and out of the car, the ease of parking, good visibility, and easy maintenance.

When it comes to buying a car, sales consultants say women are much less intimidated by the process than they used to be. The Internet has made is very

easy for women to educate themselves before they purchase a car, says Amy Wach, sales manager at Zimbrick Volkswagen in Middleton. Women will no longer put up with being taken advantage of by salespeople who still adhere to the high-pressure, "old school" way of selling cars, she says.

"Women are very comfortable coming into Saturn because we're not a pressure dealership," says Debra Pierce, a sales consultant at Saturn of Madison. "We don't play games. What you see on the sticker is the price you pay. 'No hassle, no haggle' is still our deal."

Pierce says the 2008 Aura, "a classy four-door sedan," is probably the

most popular Saturn with women right now, although many also like the Saturn Vue, a small SUV.

Women who come into Saturn usually have a good idea about what they want, which includes safety and good mileage, as well as "a car that looks nice and feels good," says Pierce. "But they don't know about engines and different trim levels – and that's why they like to talk to a woman."


Pierce says she can often see relief in the faces of women who realize they're going to be dealing with a female sales consultant.

Wach isn't so sure that women who are buying a car prefer to deal with women sales consultants instead of men. "Maybe five years ago, but not now," she

says. Wach, who's been with Zimbrick for 12 years and is the only woman in a management position, says she went into sales because "I wanted to be paid what I'm worth and sell big ticket items – which meant either pianos or cars." Refreshingly forthright, Wach says that while there aren't very many women selling cars, she believes women are better at sales than men, but haven't always learned to believe in themselves.

When it comes to brand popularity, Wach wants to make certain that consumers don't "think pink" when it comes to Volkswagens. "People think a Beetle is a chick car and it's not," she says. ■

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