

America's road romance dies

Level 2 | Intermediate

1 Key words

Match the words from the text with their definitions.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. decline | a. basic, essential |
| 2. bleak | b. a car that uses a huge amount of fuel |
| 3. lay off | c. do better than |
| 4. invade | d. a reduction in the amount or quality of something |
| 5. fundamental | e. something that represents an idea |
| 6. icon | f. to enter a place in large numbers |
| 7. gas guzzler | g. without hope for the future |
| 8. outperform | h. make redundant |

2 Find the information

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible.

1. How many workers did Ford and DaimlerChrysler lay off in total?
2. What loss did General Motors report last week?
3. How many factories did Ford close?
4. In 1979, what percentage of new cars in the US were produced by the Big Three?
5. In October 2005, what percentage of new cars in the US were produced by the Big Three?
6. Which company is worth more – Ford or Google?

America's road romance dies

Level 2 | Intermediate

America's road romance dies as 36,000 car industry jobs go in one week

John McVeigh left Scotland at the age of 21 and moved to Detroit to work in the factories producing the cars that defined US life in the 20th century. He started out as a worker but when he retired in 1989 he was part of the management. But after a week in which Ford laid off 30,000 workers and shut 14 factories, McVeigh knows his story is now part of history, a way of life his grandchildren will never know. 'You can't do what I did now. It just could not happen again,' he said.

The statistics tell a bleak story of economic disaster. The Big Three US car companies – Ford, General Motors (GM) and Chrysler – have a falling market share and enormous pension costs. All three companies have to reduce their prices to sell their cars. Chrysler has been taken over by the Germans and GM reported an \$8.6 billion loss last week, its biggest since 1992. Ford has been losing its market share for 10 years. Last week's news was so bad that few people noticed DaimlerChrysler quietly announcing it too was laying off 6,000 staff. Meanwhile foreign car companies have been invading the US.

In 1979, the Big Three sold nearly nine out of every ten new vehicles on US roads. By 2004, as European and Asian firms took a share of their market, only about 50% of new cars were sold by US producers. By October 2005, cars made by the Big Three accounted for only about 40% of the US market. Toyota, Honda and Korean Hyundai had taken a big share of the market. Even 30% of the US truck market went to foreigners.

The US car industry is moving into terminal decline. A fundamental part of America has died as well. Nothing symbolized the American 20th century more than the American car. It began with Henry Ford and the Model T and went right through the monster cars of the 1950s and hot rods of the 1970s. American cars were about freedom, sexual liberation and confident patriotism. The car gave birth to other US icons: the motel, advertising billboard and diner. They were all children of the road.

Of course, Americans still buy millions of cars, whether they live in LA with its traffic jams or in the middle of Kansas, miles from the nearest town. But what does it mean when a country's cultural heart is now made in Japan? Or Korea? Or Germany?

The story of the American car began at the start of the 20th century in Detroit, when Henry Ford, born on a Michigan farm, mass-produced the Model T. He changed not only his own life from rural poverty to urban riches, but the life of the whole country too. America went from a farming-based society to an industrialized giant where the new cultural hero was the big city capitalist. The new frontier was not out on the open range, it was on urban streets, and the new horse was a car.

America's road romance dies

Level 2 | Intermediate

Detroit became Motown – Motor City. Car advertisements showed open roads, blue skies and fathers driving wives and children along new interstate highways. American cars were the best in the world because America was the best in the world.

It ended in the 1970s with the oil crisis. Suddenly America – and its cars – were in a difficult position. Rob Latham, of the University of Iowa, had his first car then. 'It was a 1963 Chevy Malibu convertible. I was 16 years old, driving this huge gas guzzler in the middle of the oil crisis when you were only allowed to buy petrol every second day. It was crazy but I loved that car.' He now drives a Subaru. The same thing happened to Detroit. The 1970s was the start of the decline of the American car industry. America's love affair with the car has died.

Americans still need their cars, but they no longer really love them. Chrysler was taken over by Germany's Daimler. Japanese firms, such as Toyota and Honda, are opening factories as Ford shuts down. Cars are not big business any more. Ford is worth about \$15 billion; Google is worth \$129 billion. US car design and production values have also been criticized. For years American cars have been outperformed by their European and Asian competitors. Many US cars now copy modest European and Japanese designs and future cars will be more fuel-efficient and 'green'.

The Hollywood car of choice now is no longer a Fender Ford or a Buick Electra. It is the Toyota Prius, an energy-efficient car driven by Cameron Diaz and Leonardo DiCaprio. Latham says his students no longer see their cars as an essential expression of themselves. They talk about their iPods or computer games, not their cars. 'Cars have become functional. They are not statements any more. Electronics are,' he said.

After decades of the car being so much more than just a mode of transport – symbolizing industry, art, freedom, sex, a powerful America - it has now become simply a way of getting from A to B.

2 Comprehension check

Decide whether these sentences are TRUE or FALSE according to the text.

1. The market share of the Big Three is falling.
2. Foreign competitors are taking a bigger and bigger share of the US car market.
3. Americans now buy more foreign trucks than American-made ones.
4. New York is known as Motown or Motor City.
5. Americans are now buying smaller, more fuel-efficient cars.

America's road romance dies

Level 2 | Intermediate

6. The oil crisis of the 1970s was the beginning of the end for the US car industry.
7. Young people in America still see the car as an essential expression of themselves.
8. Cars are now just a way of getting from A to B.

4 Vocabulary 1: opposites

Find the words in the text that are the opposites of these words.

1. riches _____
2. urban _____
3. increase (v) _____
4. shy _____
5. gas-guzzling _____
6. optimistic _____

5 Vocabulary 2: chunks

Complete these expressions from the text using prepositions. Check your answers in the text.

1. part _____ history
2. nine _____ every ten new vehicles
3. accounted _____ 40% of the US market
4. gave birth _____
5. at the start _____ the 20th century
6. driving _____ new interstate highways
7. a way _____ getting from A to B
8. the decline _____ the American car industry

6 Vocabulary 3: word building

Complete the table.

	Verb	Noun
1.	manage	_____
2.	retire	_____
3.	reduce	_____

America's road romance dies

Level 2 | Intermediate

4. announce _____
5. advertise _____
6. criticize _____
7. perform _____
8. express _____

7 Discussion

How can the car industry become 'greener'? Does the car industry have a future?