

THE REAL NEWS



DISPLACEMENT ISSUE MAR04

CHICAGO AUTO SHOW

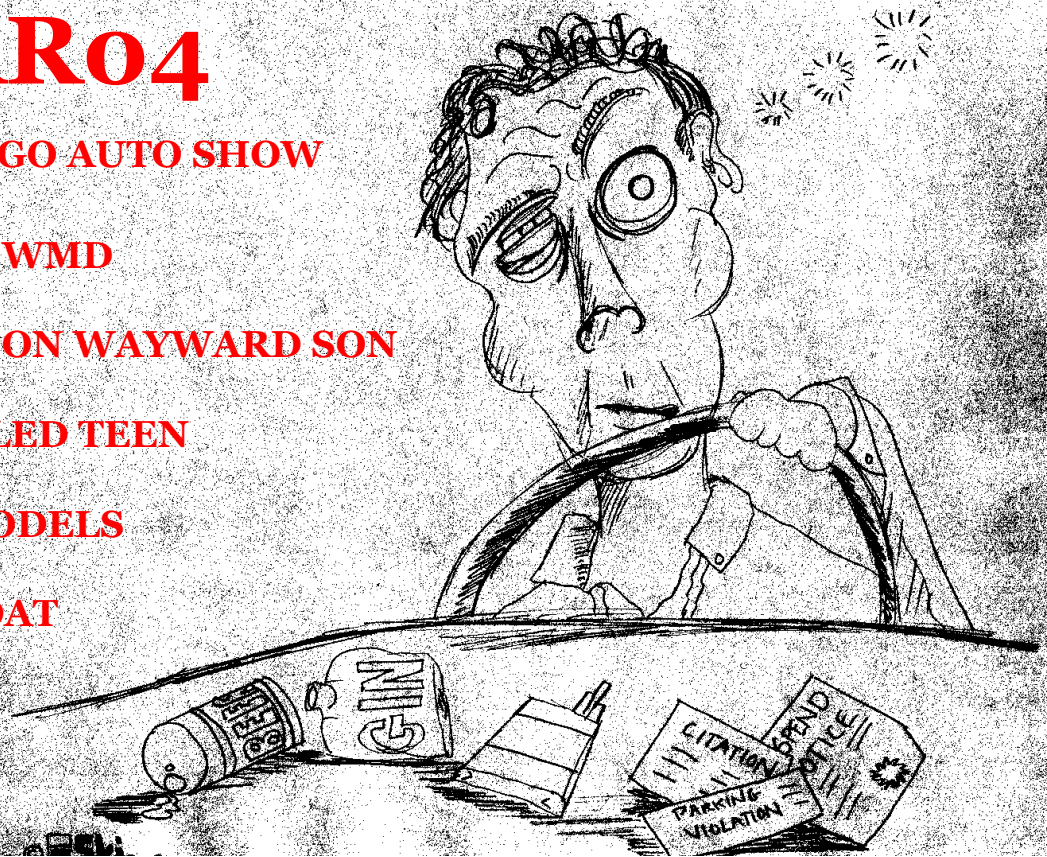
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Everything that is old is new again. The cycle of life or repeating the past is the consumer engine for the economy. 1970s muscle cars, with 350 cubic inch displacement V-8s now command high prices at auto auctions. The men with their midlife crisis falling out of their wallet are attempting to recapture their youth with such purchases. Displacing Detroit metal for the good or ill in their lives.

America's self esteem runs hand and hand with the American auto industry. So long as the US continues to produce powerful motorcars, it will be a powerful nation. The industrial revolution began with the gear grease of the Henry Ford assembly line and continued to adapt technology in search of profit.

Fads are churning quicker than a stock broker burning through an account before the Internet bubble burst. Soccer moms needed to bring monster trucks to the picnic. NASCAR dads want to race along side Richard Petty during the commute to work. Focus is now degraded to one issue at a time, whether it is politics, government corruption, or this year's new cars. One thought mentality pushes the big picture from the infoconsumer's mind. This leads to trouble.

CHICAGO AUTO SHOW

The 2004 Chicago Auto Show was as trendy as a trade show could be without going over the top. As the recent Barrett-Jackson vintage car auction foreshadowed, the aftermarket is eager to buy muscle cars. Fueled by the cable television craze of metal fabrication, horsepower and monster styling of choppers and hot rods, auto manufacturers are piling up the sports roadsters of the 21st Century like Keebler cutting out batches of chocolate chip cookies.

The first exhibit from the gate is Jeep. The precursor of the SUV/truck boom, the Jeep Cherokee was the most profitable chassis on earth prior to the Benz merger of unequals. Jeep introduced a new "Rescue" vehicle, a Jeep on steroids to compete with the Hummer. But it appears to be marketed solely to your tax dollars-- for forest rangers and fire departments as an all-terrain rescue vehicle. But the most interesting Jeep was the Limited, a stretched Wrangler that actually has real second row seating and storage.

The Dodge Dakota has the monopoly on the midsize

truck market. GM has the new models, the Colorado and Canyon, which look bigger than the Dakota but in reality are smaller. It appears that Chevy has rehammered the 1500 series into the Colorado.

The overhype of the "concept car" for the past few years has been displaced by the new, two seat asphalt burner roadsters that each manufacturer is currently selling like candy. The surprise Pontiac Solstice looked like its high price cousins, but allegedly will be sold for only \$20k in 2005.

But the triple play crowd pleaser was at the Ford exhibit. In a row, painted in matching silver with two wide white racing stripes were the new Ford GT, the Shelby Cobra concept and the new retro Ford Mustang fast-back. The GT looks like it just roared out of the pits at LeMans. It surely will get one more ticks per mile than gas mileage. The last Shelby Cobra is sculptured aluminum spaceship. The Shelby name is street racing power. Under my glass student desk growing up was a picture of a 1969 Shelby Cobra. The cars of legend were cool and fast.

The copies were all over McCormick Place. Chevy Nomad concept was a two seater two child chopped fastback. BMW has more lettered sportscars than one can keep track of; for \$70k one could actually buy two cars for one beamer. The new Corvette takes cues from old vettes. Its platform is pure old school: engine bay, roll cage, and transaxle bay.

There were disappointments on the show floor. Mercedes Benz is looking its age and has lost its luster. The new Maybach superticket luxury car has horrific oversized rear tail-lights. The Dodge Magnum superwagon had such a low roofline anyone over 5'9" would have trouble with access. The Lincoln Aviator has one sunroof as the roof, and an out-of-place hood ornament sticking out of a curved hood. It was noticed that all Lincoln trucks looked like Buicks. It also seemed like Mitsubishi was taking Pontiac grills, Nissan and Lexus body styles and throwing them on their cars like a Frankenstein design team entry. The Pontiac GTO looked too "small" considering the old-timers remember what the original GTO looked like: speed boats.

Chrysler was touting its \$3000 cash back plus 0% financing. Other dealers were giving additional \$500 car show bonuses. So the car industry is running as scared as fast and sleek their new roadsters appear on the showroom floor.

IRAQ & WMD

When the US weapons inspector came back to the Congress and testified that he found no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the Democrats thought they found themselves an election goldmine. WMDs was the issue that Bush relied upon to start this war. And if Bush lied to the Congress and American people, he should not be elected to a second term. The Dems want to brand Bush a "liar."

The traction comes from daily stories about another GI being killed in an ambush near Baghdad. The longer the US is caught in the Iraqi crossfire, the more heat will be put on Bush's popularity poll numbers.

There are several things wrong or missing from the current WMD debate. First, the original UN resolutions and inspections lead to the Saddam regime giving the world an inventory of their weapons assets. The UN was aware of Iraq's military infrastructure. The resolutions required Saddam to document his disarmament. Once inspectors were kicked out of inspecting, Saddam had years to bury, move, dismantle or destroy his arms. After Gulf War II, the inspections come back to Iraq to try to confirm that Saddam destroyed his weapons. Critics have now jumped on the conclusion that there were no weapons since we could not find them today. This

conclusion fails to input the other probable results: Saddam destroyed the weapons, Saddam buried the weapons, or Saddam sold or ship the weapons to his allies in the Middle East. The correct conclusion is probably a combination of all three.

Just after the war, troops found MIG fighters buried in the desert. It was always a mystery why during the war, Iraqi generals did not use ANY air support to repel the advancing US and British forces. The reason was that the air force commanders decided to bury their squadrons then to lose them.

Saddam's family fled the country with billions of dollars. His daughters found safe harbor in Syria and Jordan. Those countries are in the cross-road of the terrorist black market. In the instability of the middle east, there is profit at those cross roads. WMDs are what highly financed terrorists like Bin Laden are after; Saddam or his allies would not destroy inventory that is worth a fortune in their black market economy of war.

Saddam was given the opportunity to verify that he destroyed his WMDs. He did not. That led to the war. He was a dangerous man who had used gas on his own people, the Kurds, and his neighbors, Iran. The missing WMDs is a red herring; it does not prove that the reasons for the Gulf War were wrong. It may merely show Saddam saved them for new, Iraqi guerilla war.

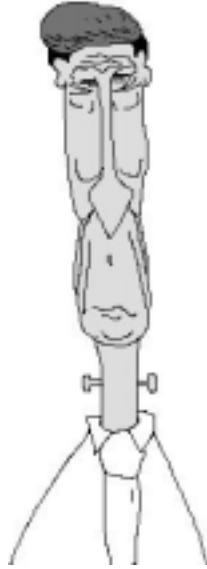
KERRY ON MY WAYWARD SON

Now that John Kerry has been proclaimed the Democratic nominee after his victories in Virginia and Michigan, the mysterious private background of his family and character. He claims he did not know his grandparents were Jewish? He has spent 20 years in Washington DC but only has 9 bills sponsored under his name? He left his first wife, who was worth only \$200 million, to marry a widow worth \$550 million?

During Valentine Week, there was a report that several major news services were investigating whether Kerry had an affair with an intern. No one wanted to follow up on Drudge's report on Kerry? Well, the Sun Online(UK) claims to have actually interviewed the alleged woman's parents, who describe Kerry as "a sleazeball."

Welcome to John's excellent adventure.

He goes on the Don Imus radio program to say there is no truth to story. Imus retorts if he is lying, he is dead. Dems feel relieved; but others parcel the words just like Clinton used to find that it was at best a non-denial denial. He denied the report not the rumor. Probably he fears more from his wife. Ms. Ketchup Queen was quoted before the run as saying if her husband ever strayed from the nest, she would "maim" him. Eurowomen have their own marriage counseling



methods, circa the Spanish Inquisition.

Wes Clark, so wanting the limelight, and knowing about Kerry's alleged foible, endorses him today so he can be his VP candidate. The slop in the pig sty is neck deep now.

Is it not strange that the Democrats are rushing their candidates down a DNC minefield without a map? Dean gets too popular too fast, and he fires up his vagabond college base in Iowa, and the regular Dems drop him like a constipated dump. Then Kerry goes out to the people with the message, "I can do better" without any substance. He follows the polling, I have the best chance to beat Bush because I was a war hero and he was not. Now, Kerry is in the midst of his own Fornicator-in-Chief scandal. He has denied the story and relationship. Just like Clinton. The

cover-up is always worse than the scandal itself. Do the regular pundit Dems want to get into bed with another Clinton?

Kerry is trying to seduce the country with his JFK initials. Kerry is riding on his wife's money and not relying upon the DNC. The story has been rumored for years, so the timing is important to do max damage. If the Dems had the chance to cook the cocky goose, they'd dump Kerry now, when he has less than 10% of the delegates before Super Tuesday. Which then places John Edwards on the top of the garbage heap. But the D.C. boys look at him as another Jimmy Carter-slow draw -- cheeky plain vanilla yogurt candidate. They would rather rally around a horse with two broken legs and a massive cocaine addiction than Edwards. They will draw and quarter Edwards record, his trials, his personal life, and make a big deal that he was a do-nothing senator (just like Kerry by the way). Who would be left? Special K and the Rev? (Now that is a prime time cable TV pilot).

If the economy rebounds, and the Iraqi people take control of their government this summer, the Democratic nominee has no fire-in-the-belly voter issue to attack Bush. The attack would center around character. But no one knows what the real character of John Kerry is; and may not know until it is too late.

HOT MODELS

The Auto Show returned the talking spokesmodel buzzing statistics while a hot model transformed from hard top to rag top to the main stage. Topless, fast cars and women. That's the fabric that is stitched into each bucket seat.

The manufacturers let the general public pawn all over their models. Inside and out. The basic marketing technique that if you can get a consumer into your car, he or she will have a personal connection to it. Personal connection and brand loyalty are still the strongest ties that bind consumers to the cars they drive. But each manufacturer has to sell the concept that driving their cars will still be "cool." People fear not being "cool" as much as public speaking.

There are a few constants on the cool spectrum. The obsession with convertibles is never ending. The need for speed always peaks the interest of even the penny-pinching old lady from Pasadena. But the car designers have fallen madly in love with the CAD programs ability to make curves. Curves upon curves. Layered swooping lines. Gone are the days of bullet chrome bumpers and large tailfins. Each new car has the curved silhouette of a classic roadster. The design factories have made a commodity on the appearance of modern cars like the hourglass figure.

With everyone using letters like SS and GTO for speed and 300, 3, 500 series to denote the models no wonder the average car buyer is confused and thinks that all cars look the same. In many respects, they are the same. Consumer studies over the decades have defined what the average person thinks is the hot model; so everyone tries to make a copy.

One commentator once said that no car built after 1980 is destined to become a classic. In mass production terms, he is probably right; who could go for a new 1957 Nomad right now?

On The Cover: zigzag from top left: 2004 Corvette, Impala, Monte Carlo, Pontiac GTO, Chrysler Crossfire, Chevy SSR pickup, and 2005 Corvette.



THE GOAT

CHICAGO (2/21/04)-- Walking south down Rush Street toward the River was shocking. The parking lots have turned into high rise hotel/gallerias. Nearing the end of the street, I glance to see the location of the old St. Louis Browns bar--gone; now a health club parking lot. This end of the block was the mecca of old school journalists; Ricardo's and the Billy Goat located under Michigan Avenue. I had not returned to this area for several years; the city had redone lower Michigan Avenue to displace all the homeless bums.

I get to the old Ricardo's to find that it has changed into an Italian Steakhouse, whatever that is. I turn the corner to find the Billy Goat sign still hanging in its proper place. As I begin my turn toward the bar, I notice what looks like a homeless guy inbetween parked cars. Upon closer examination, I saw no plastic bags or shopping cart. It could not be a homeless guy; but maybe one of those industrious window washing scam artists.

There was a strange air in the city that evening. Earlier in the late afternoon, walking down Rush Street, a boomer power couple was exiting a posh department store. He stops in his tracks and says, "Wait 20 minutes, I need to get a cup of coffee." She stops a few strides later and turns and yells, "What's up with you

and your coffee?!" He immediately blows up and yells back. Their comments get louder and louder with each volley. A full blown argument over coffee on a crowded downtown street corner.

In a war zone era, someone in city hall approved a shock and awe fireworks display on the City Front center at the Michigan Avenue Bridge. The mortar fire rattled the crystal displays all along the Magnificent Mile.

So the day had been fraught with fireworks. Dealing with an unemployed, bearded, homeless man under Michigan Avenue seemed to be par for the course.

Of course the man was not who I expected as I approached. It was Professor Reed, the ringmaster of the journalism department reunion at the Goat. He had bad news. He said the Billy Goat had been overrun by 13 year olds. The place had turned into a teen age dance club. He opened the door; the music was as loud as fireworks, and the place packed tighter than the sardines in a tin can.

The Billy Goat turned into a teen music club hangout instead of a hardcore working journalist ink stained fingernail hangover spot?

So our whole plan was displaced by a mob of teenie screamies. So the gang would go back to the Holiday Inn at Fairbanks and get kicked out of the hotel bar early at 1 a.m.

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LETTER FROM THE PUB

This edition leapfrogged three other partially completed Real News publications. Why? I have no idea. It seems whatever electrical discharge near the underside of the bridge of my nose gets paginated quicker than the scraps of paper around the computer.

This year has been very demanding so far. Instead of friends asking if I will attend a function, they are demanding my presence. It is like I am some traveling dinosaur exhibition. So a press on; double down on deadlines by taking time off; which cycles into more and more weird ideas and stories to tell.

The John Kerry-George Bush presidential debates appear to be a bigger bomb than Jonathan Brandmeier's Thanksgiving made-for-TV movie. The intellectual vacuum will probably suck all the creative life out of America by the end of the summer. It's a bad time to give up full-time drinking.

Aloha,
Ski.