

Babson's Point of View On:

# Swing Toward Foreign Cars

By ROGER W. BABSON

Babson Park, Mass., January 5. Some executives of our own U. S. auto-manufacturing Big Three — General Motors, Chrysler and Ford — have admitted that they expect another dip during 1967 in total output, which would mean the second consecutive year of lowering sales. Executives of firms importing foreign cars express no such doubts. Almost unanimously they predict that 1967 will be the second successive record-breaking year for their products. Does this mean a greater swing toward the purchase of foreign cars; and, if so, what is behind the switch in trend?

**BASIS FOR DIVERGENT PREDICTIONS**

The question may well have more than one answer, probably a number of answers. But the essential fact is that statistics already provide a reasonable basis for the contrast between the pessimism of domestic producers and the optimism of foreign car dealers. Taking November figures (latest available), it may be seen that foreign car sales have risen an impressive 18% over those of a year ago. This compares dramatically with a decline of 7% in domestic new car sales over the same period.

While it is true that foreign car turnover represents only about 8% of the total market, there is something arresting about the fact that practically all the leading importers are chalking up gains while all our biggest producers are registering declines. If it were a matter only of restlessness or watchful waiting on the part of the consumer public, there is no reason why both domestic and foreign auto sales should not reflect the same weakening tendency.

**MAGNET: SMALLER, CHEAPER CAR**

As in the case of residential construction, tight money undoubtedly is having some adverse effect on the demand for larger, more expensive cars. The lowest-priced model made in this country is now the Rambler American, which goes for \$2,073. But look at the price range for foreign models; eight out of the ten best-selling imported cars can be bought for less. And there are a couple

of score of other foreign makes also below the Rambler American price range, even though not among those best known to the public.

In other words, the U. S. producers have once again outpriced themselves. This happened following 1960, when foreign cars set their previous record for sales, capturing more than 10% of the total market. At that time, Detroit recognized its lack of models at the lower end of the price scale and moved in with its "compacts." These caught the popular fancy to a considerable degree, but gradually became larger and more expensive. Now it appears that the situation has come full-circle: If a buyer wants a small, inexpensive car, he can do best, he is convinced, in the import field.

**WILL THE TREND LONG CONTINUE?**

The momentum carrying sales of foreign cars upward has increased notably, and there is reason to believe that it will persist for some time to come. It is not, for example, purely the lower original cost that is helping the market for imported autos. When a family needs a car primarily for use by the housewife in shopping and for other short hauls, the woman often prefers a vehicle that is light, maneuverable, cheap to operate, and easy to park.

Then there is the question of glamour. If a man could easily afford a Cadillac, he is often likely to buy himself instead a Mercedes-Benz or a Jaguar. The exotic flavor has appeal, and this has been partly instigated by our own effort to popularize the "sports car" image in such models as the Mustang, which caught on remarkably quickly. But, now, to be really different, many buyers feel that the foreign car is the thing, whether for economy purposes or for the kind of show-off of style found in the Jaguar.

Question is: Will Detroit try again to lure away some of this market with new, small, inexpensive sports models? Best guess is that the domestic auto makers won't unless foreign car sales once more move well above 10% of the market. Importers will be watching

from there through Vance to Santee.

Well, that's enough knocking about for one day.

I might add that as I entered Charleston I passed near the great building which houses or inspires the daily wisdom of our News & Courier, today under the leadership of my friend, the accomplished editor, Tom Waring, a man who blends the patriotism of the Charleston spirit with all the modernity of a New York editor, without the foibles of New York journalism.

I came back through Summerville, still radiant and captivating and by Harleyville, too, with its industrial life in full blast. Ever been to Harleyville? Holly Hill, you know, had two banks all through the Depression.

Passing through Vance, in Orangeburg County, a again admired some of the fine homes and the opulent farming characteristics of that rich area.

I came back through Summerton, one of the most attractive towns of our State.

So back to Manning, said by some Northern tourist passing through, to be the loveliest town between New York and Miami — or somewhere else.

I thought he was possibly under the spell of our fine water, but I can't complain. As someone remarked, when he received a check remitting part of his income payment, "I have no complaint to make".

I always think of Summerton, Clarendon County, as the happiest place in the State. I cherish these sturdy folk very especially and I like to say that my friends of Summerton never let business interfere with pleasure, that whenever someone calls for a party, a fish fry or a barbecue, all are ready, closing business, if necessary.

In that lively and happy little city are many churches: I recall, offhand Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Catholic — all in that delightful community.

Over in Holly Hill, Orangeburg County, the two banks operated, as I recall, during the period of bank suspensions.

You know, of course, the attraction of the Santee lakes a few miles from Manning. But the great lakes near Columbia draw vast numbers of visitors, for there you have many miles of lakes.

South Carolina abounds in beautiful scenery. Not only the famed gardens and avenues of Summerville, but the residential areas of Columbia repay a visit.

I spent some time in the yard of old St. Andrews Church, across the Ashley on the road of overhanging trees leading to Summerville, Cottageville and Walterboro.

I had darted in and out until I passed through thriving Holly Hill and Harleyville;

By SPECTATOR . . .

## COMMENTS

ON

### MEN AND THINGS

Have you ever traveled over South Carolina? During the years I have visited every county of our state.

Most counties have county seats bearing the names of the county, the notable exceptions are Richland with Columbia; Jasper with Ridge-land; Dorchester with St. George; Kershaw — Camden; Berkeley — Monck Corner; Calhoun — St. Matthews; Lee — Bishopville; Oconee — Walhalla; Clarendon — Manning, etc.

Recently I had a sort of refreshing trip, going to Charleston, crossing the handsome big bridge over the Cooper River, running around Mount Pleasant and Sullivan's Island. By the way, where is the Mount at Mt. Pleasant? Or is Mount Pleasant like Lake City?

From Mt. Pleasant I went to Sullivan's Island and again wondered at the demolition of the defensive mounds and batteries there. As I once held the chair of military history and war plans in an outstanding military college you see why my mind runs to the defensive weakness of a great port without forts.

Someone will cite Fort Sumter, which commands the entrance to Charleston harbor.

I've been told that mines and warships will defend our ports.

Since naval guns of today have a range of twenty miles an enemy ship could stand more than ten miles from Charleston in the Atlantic Ocean and throw high explosive shells into Charleston.

Remembering our experience with the Japanese, and our enormous and catastrophic losses we might well survey our defensive condition, or un-defensive conditions.

If we rely on the Navy we must patrol more than fifteen hundred miles on the Atlantic and about the same on the Pacific. Any damage to the Panama Canal would divide our fleets.

All present defensive preparations of the fleets and planes are subject to the hazards of chance.

In the War of the Revolution the British landed troops on Long Island, now the Isle of Palms and that attack from the rear of Fort Moultrie and existing batteries was remedied by revolving cannon. But, as I see it, we have demolished such defenses. We rely on mines and ships and planes. Several decoy barges could destroy the mines and our navy and planes might be taxed immeasurably in protecting Boston, New York, Norfolk, Charleston and other ports.

So I presume to point out

not only the Charleston harbor and city but our great Naval station seven miles up the Cooper River.

I may be in error, but it is a thought prompted by our experience. While the great mounds were standing why were they virtually destroyed? And the provision made for housing the defending forces — where is it?

If it seems that I am a bit presumptuous in making these observations let me remind you of our disaster in the Pacific, not to mention the Battle of the Bulge, which seemed to catch us off balance, didn't it?

Well, now, so much for the military aspect and conditions. Let's go back to the peacetime travel of your humble servant, who dismissing all humility presumes to differ with and from the bemuddled and uniformed leaders.

Of course I rode around "The Battery" at Charleston, the most appealing park I know. By St. Michaels Church, and St. Phillips in whose yard rest the remains of great men — and, of course, great women for how can a nation have great men without great women? After all I was impressed by a bit of humor recently: the young would-be husband said to his bride to be "Understand, I will wear the pants". The sweet and winsome young lady said, "Oh yes, you'll wear the pants, but I'll tell you which pants to wear".

So now you have the low down, eh?

I crossed the magnificent new bridge across the Cooper River, leading to the Isle of Palms, too.

I rambled around the city, passing not only the Catholic Cathedral but The Church of the Holy Communion where I was once a choir boy — a long, long time ago! Time flies and I fly with it, of course. Even so.

After lunch in a nice place, on Spring Street near the Ashley River, I crossed the Ashley and roamed around that prosperous territory.

You know of course, that Charleston, the city of today, was started across the Ashley, but the Spaniards and Indians made forays from near Beaufort, so the city was moved ten years later to Oyster Point, across the Ashley and between the two great rivers, Ashley and Cooper.

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