

## Automobiles

Section 11



Gift ideas, clockwise from top left: Ferrari moccasins, Motor Oil Cologne, Bobby Benz, auto books, Parking Pal, Air Bag Shield.

## A Benz for Baby, a Safety Belt for Spot

By DAVID WALLIS

WHEN the social philosopher Marshall McLuhan wrote, "The car has become an article of dress without which we feel uncertain, unclad and incomplete," he might have understated the attachment of many drivers to their cars. After all, most people don't talk to their pants or name their jackets. But Americans often treat their automobiles like children, friends or lovers — as objects of affection to be protected by alarms, caressed with creams, sheltered in garages and spoiled with gifts.

According to the Specialty Equipment Market Association, Americans shell out more than \$15 billion a year for car accessories and after-market parts — everything from fuzzy dice to 24-karat-plated license plate frames. Even more money was spent on specialty products like automotive periodicals, racing jackets and toy car models.

With such a selection, why give carnuba wax to everyone on your list? The items that follow, hardly essential to anyone, offer an alternative: something for the vehicle that has everything — or for its driver.

#### AIR BAG AND STEERING WHEEL SHIELD, \$39.95

Available at retailers including Sears and Pep Boys, or by calling (800) 527-3345.

Air bags are designed to protect drivers, but with thefts soaring in cities, some drivers are taking steps to protect their air bags. Winner International, which makes the Club antitheft device, has introduced the Air Bag and Steering Wheel Shield, a "hacksaw proof" steel cover that locks onto steering wheels in conjunction with the Club.

#### FERRARI DRIVING MOCCASINS, \$180

Available only at Ferrari dealers

You may not be fortunate enough to own a Ferrari, but your feet don't have to know.

Hand-sewn in Italy, the extravagant leather moccasins (red or brown) have studded rubber soles for nonslip acceleration.

#### LEASH O' LIFE, \$49

Available directly from Johnson Pet-Dor, (800) 457-3911

If Spot rides shotgun in the pickup, a dog-restraint system is certainly in order. A leashlike cable links your pooch to a molded piece of plastic that slides along a four-foot track in the truck bed. The device may save your dog's life, as well as a few dollars: many states fine pickup drivers who are caught chauffeuring untethered pups.

#### BOBBY BENZ, \$89

#### MERCEDES 500SL PEDAL CAR, \$275

Available at Mercedes dealerships or by calling (800) 367-6372

Bobby Benz, a squat, lemon-colored plastic roadster for children ages 1½ to 3, is one of the fastest-selling and least expensive cars to wear the three-pointed Mercedes star. And slightly older tots can tool around in a sleek, red 500SL pedal car. In its accessories catalog, Mercedes is unapologetic about marketing status symbols to children: "An appreciation of the finer things in life must be taught at an early age," reads the description of the mini-SL.

#### PARKING PAL, \$9.95

#### MEDICAL PARKING PAL, \$12.95

Available by phone, (718) 946-6736

New York City raked in \$352 million in parking fines last year. A Brooklyn motorist, Louis Campore, contends that many tickets are mistakenly issued, so he produced Parking Pal to clear up any confusion. One of his laminated placards reads: "Broken meter. Legal parking space. Do not issue summons," on one side and "No regulatory sign on this block" on the other.

"Displaying Parking Pal puts overzealous traffic agents on alert that you are parked legally and within your rights," said

Mr. Campore, who recently added Parking Pals for doctors on house calls and for commercial-vehicle owners making deliveries.

The inventor conceded that lay people might try to use the Medical Parking Pal to outwit parking enforcement officers. "If you don't have special M.D. license plates, then you will get a ticket with or without Parking Pal," he cautioned, adding, "There are many devious people out there."

#### MOTOR OIL COLOGNE, \$39.95 (for you)

#### NEW CAR SCENT, \$1.99 (for your car)

Cologne from Grix's Garage, (800) 345-5789; car scent sold at Kmart and Wal-Mart.

Despite its name and amber color, Motor Oil Cologne contains not a trace of 10W40. Indeed, the cologne (subtitled "Eau de Road"), which arrives in a black-and-white checkerboard bag, smells more like citrus than Castrol. At the other end of the olfactory scale is New Car Scent, an air freshener that attempts to re-create the just-off-the-assembly-line odor of virgin vinyl.

#### A CENTURY OF AMERICAN STYLE: 100 YEARS OF AMERICAN CAR DESIGN, \$59.95

By Michael Lamm and Dave Hollis; Lamm-Morada Publishing, (209) 931-1056

#### PICKUPS: CLASSIC AMERICAN TRUCKS, \$39.95

Photographs by William Bennett Seitz and text by Harry Moses; Random House; available at bookstores.

Mr. Lamm, an automotive journalist and historian, teamed up with Mr. Hollis, a former General Motors designer, to publish this comprehensive book on American auto design. Besides tracing the evolution of the auto body in painstaking detail, the book singles out previously unheralded pioneers like Andrew F. Johnson, who taught car design by mail to more than 2,300 students from 1900 to 1943.

The Seitz and Moses coffee-table book worships at the altar of the pickup, featuring portraits of immaculately restored vintage trucks and their beaming owners.