

'MotorWeek' host enjoying 'Gearhead-Job-of-the-Century'

John Davis to appear Saturday at Delaware Auto Show

By **BETSY PRICE, The News Journal**

John Davis pretty much parallel parked his way into his job as host of PBS's popular "MotorWeek" television show.

In the early '70s, he earned a mechanical and aerospace engineering degree from North Carolina State University and then a master's of business administration from the University of North Carolina. He thought maybe he was headed for a career in finance.

"I worked my way through college in radio and TV," he says. "Frankly, I didn't have enough money for a pilot's license, so I was always kind of involved with my cars."

He was offered the chance to produce "Wall Street Week" with Louis Rukeyser, and in the middle of doing that, jumped at the Gearhead-Job-of-the-Century to create the "MotorWeek" pilot.

"We went on the air in 1981, and my résumé stops there," Davis said.

Davis will be in Wilmington Saturday to attend the 2007 Delaware Auto Show, heading

We put our own queries to him, to see whether he'd shift into high gear or just spin his wheels. Here's what he had to say:

What do you think of auto shows?

The auto show is a very valuable tool for consumers because there's no where else they can try on everything they want to compare, without going from dealer to dealer. Not even at a tent sale can you have this opportunity to just hop into everything. They are all within a short distance. You can make instant comparisons. Even if you're not in the market for a car, it's a good way of keeping up with the latest in gadgets and styles, so that when you are in the market for a car, you don't have to do a lot of cramming.

How should someone who wants to buy a car approach an auto show?

They'll probably go with a list of a few cars they want to look at, but they should keep an open mind and be willing to expand that list.

Always make sure you bring something to bring brochures back home with. They'll give you those little plastic bags, but a cloth shoulder bag is probably better and easier for you to handle.

Wear or take with you something that you might normally be driving in. Take a winter jacket and pull it on when you get in and out of a car. A lot of people just hop in in their shirt sleeves, and it doesn't give them an idea of seasonal comfort come winter, when they are bundled up.

If you have children, take them with you. Let the kids have a say. If they are more comfortable, they will be quieter. You can't take a child seat, which is too bad, because some cars are easier to hook up than others.

Don't be afraid of asking questions. The dealers will not try to sell you a car at the show. The most they will do is give you their card.

If they don't know the answer to a question, move on to the next car, because that is their loss.

Go there with the idea that no one is going to stop me just trying out these vehicles.

What if you're not interested in buying a new car?

Just go and walk around, look at what's new, pick up brochures. They make nice light reading. It's an infectious atmosphere. It's hard not to get excited.

What are women watching while their guys are watching "MotorWeek?"

You know, 35-to-40 percent of our viewers are women who are not gearheads, but tell us they watch because we are easy to understand. We try not to talk down to people who are not gearheads. Women find it helps them in their car ownership. They find cars, they like them and they want to know how to leave with them more easily. You don't have to be a car enthusiast to enjoy the show.

(He finds it hard to describe the show, which is combination of car tests, mechanical trends, lifestyle pieces and consumer pieces.)

"It's like 'MotorWeek' with a little 'Popular Mechanics' and a little current lifestyle magazine in there," he says.

He's proud that "MotorWeek" draws so many women when most automotive publications' female readership is only 5 percent.


You've got to remember that women are the deciding factor in 75 percent of all automotive purchases.

What's your favorite thing about being on the show?

Staying on the air. (He laughs.) I think for me, it's seeing how the automobile has affected societies way beyond our borders. It's very exciting when you think that this contraption, these nuts and bolts, allow people to be mobile and work forces to move around, and all the things that make the economy grow.

What new technology are you interested in?

I'm very high on what I call the hydrogen hybrids, technology that a lot of Detroit automakers are looking at -- fuel cells in conjunction with normal gasoline or diesel engines and batteries. All three of them are designed to power the vehicle and use far less petrofuel ... to drastically reduce the need for gasoline. Vehicles shown by Ford and General Motors have batteries, so you can plug them in, and a fuel cell, and they may have a tiny gasoline engine that helps charge the battery. They're looking at running on pure electrical power for maybe 40 miles, which will get most people to their jobs, and then using gasoline or diesel engines to go further, and then a hydrogen fuel cell. I do believe that down the road we'll be driving a lot of vehicles that will not use gasoline or diesel.

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