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# ZOOM in on america

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## CLASSIC CARS



*Crowds at an auto show look at a custom-made 1965 gold Cadillac Eldorado designed by George Barris and Elvis Presley in Chicago, January 17, 1987. The car, designed before Presley's death, has three gold Elvis Presley records imbedded in the rear headrest and has a body, telephone, television, bumpers and grill covered with 14 karat gold leaf. The car is touring the country appearing at malls and auto shows. Photo: AP Images*

In this issue: American Classic Cars

Zoom in on America

## It's All in the Car

Ingenious in design, big in dimensions, powerful and comfortable, the car has defined 20th century American pop-culture. The country's huge size, long distances and good roads have made Americans reliant on cars.

Henry Ford believed the car should be inexpensive and available to an average American. Himself an engineer and inventor, Ford discovered his own ways to manufacture cars more cheaply. He introduced a conveyor belt into the manufacturing process, which helped reduce the assembly time of a car from over 12 to less than 2 work-hours. He also discovered that producing spare parts and shipping them to market areas where they were put together helped lower production costs. His Model T got cheaper and cheaper. From the original price of \$825, it went down to \$290 in 1924, a sum that did not exceed the average family budget. While lowering the price of his car, Ford raised the wages of his employees and reduced the length of the workday. One thing he underestimated, however, was the importance of upgrading the design by making it more beautiful. His Model T changed very little over the 19 years during which it was produced. "Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black," said Henry Ford. But the customers wanted more colors and modernization. For example, it was quite hard to start the car. The driver had to use the crank and hold it

with a firm grip so that they would not get hurt in case the engine "kicked back." These drawbacks were worked on by competitors who spared no efforts to beautify and modernize their vehicles. In 1927, having sold more than 15 million cars and having revolutionized the market, Ford's Model T was discontinued. The Cadillac, designed and made by General Motors, was addressed to those who could and wanted to pay much more for an elegant product that could please even the most demanding and sophisticated tastes. Up until the oil crisis of the 1970s, the designers were free to do as they pleased. Long hoods, trunks with tailfins, wraparound windshields, chrome grilles and bumpers were the embodiment of opulence. They were also in a variety of colors, from flamboyant hues of pink to highly elegant shades of white and black, all polished to reflect every single sunray. Additionally, the leather furbishing of the interior made the Cadillac one of the most luxurious cars in the world. The Ford Mustang - a product of the Ford Motor Company - is yet another car with a "soul". Named after a fighter plane from World War II, the Mustang was designed to embody excellence, power, style, and reliability. Its characteristic long hood and short rear deck came to be regarded as the father of the family of the so called "pony cars".

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*A three-row Cadillac XT6 crossover SUV is shown after being unveiled during media previews for the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, January 13, 2019. Photo: AP Images*

## Classic Cars: An Interview with Collector Justin Little

Zoom in on America: We have Justin Little from San Bernardino in California here with us today. Justin is on an internship at the Consulate in Krakow, learning if the job in the foreign service is what he wants to pursue as a professional career. Justin is also interested in cars, old cars to be precise. Up until recently he was an owner of a Ford Mustang. Justin, thank you for agreeing to talk to Zoom in on America about your hobby. How did your interest in old cars start?

Justin Little: I guess it always starts with the TV. My favourite TV shows when I was a child I noticed every good guy and every bad guy has a pretty cool car and often those cars are older classic cars, and so from there I was always interested in them, and when I was able, I saved up a lot of money and I bought my own classic car.

ZIOA: How old does a car have to be to be considered ... a classic car ... an antique car ... or a vintage car?

J: Well, I guess the difference is between those three terms, classic, vintage and antique. They can all apply to the same cars, if you're going by the exact meanings of the words. I would say, typically classic cars are considered cars from the 60s and 70s, which adhere to the hotrod

aesthetic in the United States. Antique and vintage cars are usually referred to as such because they're from an early period, the 50s, the 40s and the 30s and they're much more the family oriented town car that people have kept in good running condition and sometimes they restore them as well.

ZIOA: And can you tell me about the classic car you owned?

J: Yes, I was able to save up a bit of money and with my dad's help I bought a 1965 Ford Mustang, which is probably the most widely available classic car.

ZIOA: I imagine you had to do some repair work on your Ford Mustang. What did you have to fix the most often?

J: When I bought my Ford Mustang, it was in running condition, but it needed some elbow grease, like they say in the United States. So me and my dad worked over the summer to repair some of the engine components, specifically the thermostat. My car had an issue of overheating, which we were able to fix, and we also were able to give it a fresh coat of paint and reupholster the interior.



*Justin Little and his Ford Mustang*

ZIOA: Was it expensive to keep it in good condition?

J: Not as expensive as I thought. Basically, we put in the work to find good deals. We went to junk yards to find parts that were still in good condition. Restoring the car was cheaper than you might think.

ZIOA: So now I have a question about regulations. How do you register a classic car in the United States? Is there a fee? Does the car need a MOT certificate? Do classic and vintage cars have distinctive registration plates and is there a specific colour scheme?

J: In the United States most cars have to pass what's called the "smog check", which is to make sure your car is in compliance with the emission requirements for the environment, and California has its own separate regulations concerning older cars because they won't be able to meet a lot of these regulations. They usually get an exemption, but there is a permit fee upfront when you register a car. So it's a one time fee for a few hundred dollars and you are exempt from the smog requirements for the car. We don't have distinctive plates to mark them, but it's actually a voluntary thing. In California they have a program where you can get a distinctive licence plate on your own, but you have to pay a little bit more for that, and

it's because these plates are in the original colours that cars in 50s and 60s had. Since then they've changed colours, so you can pay a little more to have the original-style plates.

ZIOA: So in that way people who see such a car know that this is a classic car even if they don't recognise it?

J: Yeah, it's just one more thing you can do for your car to make it look original.

ZIOA: Can you drive all the roads in your old car?

J: In my 65' Mustang I didn't have any problems on any roads. Most people who restore cars will just make sure that they don't go down dangerous roads, they want to make sure it's a very well paved road just to make sure they are not putting on any undue risk for their car because with some of these older cars you just want to ride them easily so they can last even longer.

ZIOA: And now question about car shows. Did you have your favourite car shows?

J: There are always very large car shows in Los Angeles at the LA Convention Center so I've been to a few of those, but my favourite one was the Route 66 Car Show in San



*Photo Justin Little*

Bernardino. It's kind of a flea market where people come to sell things and to show off cars. It's a pretty big deal in my city so that was always my favourite car show because I usually can get to know some of the people showing off their cars and then you see them driving around town in their classic cars later throughout the year.

ZIOA: So I know that at the moment you don't have a classic car, but are you going to buy one?

J: I think that for now I'll wait. When I get further in my career, I want to restore a 1969 Shelby GT500. That's one of the rarest classic cars and so if I could get my hands on one of them, I'd be really happy.

ZIOA: I wish you luck with that and thank you very much for talking to *Zoom in on America*.



*Photos Justin Little*

#### THE 2020 VERSION OF THE MUSTANG

The photo below, taken on July 31, 2019, shows the 2020 Shelby GT500 displayed during a Ford press conference in the Detroit suburb of Clawson, Michigan. The Mustang will be the most powerful Ford Mustang ever built and will go on sale this fall. *Photo: AP Images*



Today, the car has to be economical and much smaller in size from its predecessor made in the 50s or 60s. A lot of people, however, are very much in love with old cars. Many of those who have the means and time become collectors.

Many uniquely American phenomena are associated with the car. One of them is the drive-in theater. People arrive to watch movies in their cars and remain comfortably seated in them during the screening. A large outdoor movie screen and a projection booth are the only cinema structures while a large parking area substitutes for rows of seats for the audience. The drive-in cinemas' peak popularity was the late 1950s and early 1960s, but still today there are theaters for those who enjoy this kind of entertainment.

Other popular car-related phenomena in the United States are car races, for example drag races. Most of such races are 400 meters (1/4 mile), but shorter races of 200 or 300 meters are organized as well. Usually two cars compete at a time in a drag race. When one car loses a race, it is knocked out of the competition while the winning car moves on to the next round. Finally, just one car stays on the track. The winner of a race is not necessarily the car that crosses the finish line first. In determining which car has won, two times are measured and added up: the

elapsed time, i.e. the time of the drive, and the reaction time, which is the time between the moment the green light is lit and the start.

Watching cars travel at speeds of up to 325 miles per hour is spectacular, but spectators expect even more than that. They are thrilled by the so-called "standing burnouts" performed by drivers before the start of a race. Standing burnouts are used to warm up the cars' tires. Vehicles drive onto pavement that has been watered down. The drivers stop their cars and then powerfully spin the wheels. Smoke fumes surround the car and its driver in a spectacular way. This practice is actually good for the tires, which heat and clean for a better traction. For many spectators this is an important part of the show.

NASCAR (National Association for Stock Auto Racing) is the most popular form of car racing in the United States. "Stock car" racing started during Prohibition (1913-1933), particularly in the Appalachian region of the American south.

Last but not least there are Monster truck races, which have been organized since 1985. A common feature of monster truck shows today is the crushing of some smaller cars.



*Dave Harwood drives his 'Monster Patrol' truck over two cars at Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord, North Carolina, August 16, 2002. Photo: AP Images*

# ACTIVITY PAGE

September-October  
2019  
TRIVIA QUESTION  
What is the drive-in  
theater?  
Send the answer  
(with your home address) to:  
KrakowAIRC@state.gov  
The 1st, the 8th and 11th  
sender of the correct answer  
will be awarded with a book  
prize.  
Deadline December 15,  
2019

Summer 2019  
Answer:  
Bernard Maybeck  
The winners are:  
Franciszek from Szczecin,  
Maria from Szczecin and  
Aleksandra from Wielun  
CONGRATULATIONS!!!  
The prizes will be sent to you  
by mail.



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## Exercise 1. Discussion

Work with a partner. Look at the photos of the cars on pp. 1-8. Choose the car you like the best. If each of you has chosen a different car:

1. Look at your picture and read the captions. Then describe your picture to your partner. Let your partner do the same.
2. In a conversation compare and contrast the pictures.
3. Discuss the reasons for your choice.

If you have both chosen the same car:

1. In a conversation describe the car you have chosen.
2. Compare the reasons for your choice.
3. Describe your future dream car to your partner. Then listen to their description.

## Exercise 2

There are several idiomatic expressions with the word "road". Match the expressions 1-5 with the definitions below:

1. road show
  2. down the road
  3. hit the road
  4. the road to hell is paved with good intentions
  5. road hog
- a. well-meant acts can result in a disaster
  - b. a tour arranged for a particular purpose such as a political campaign
  - c. a driver whose vehicle straddles two traffic lanes
  - d. at some future point
  - e. set out on a trip

## Exercise 3: Discussion

In groups discuss the future of the car.

Think of the following:

- type of propulsion (e.g. hydrogen, battery-powered, biofuels, diesel, gasoline)
- design of the exterior and the interior
- speed
- safety
- price

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A 2002 Aston Martin Vanquish used in the James Bond film "Die Another Day" is displayed at the Dezer Collection Museum in North Miami, Florida. More than 1,000 cars are on display at the 250,000-square-foot museum which features American Classics, military and electric cars, bicycles, and cars featured in movies. Photo: AP Images