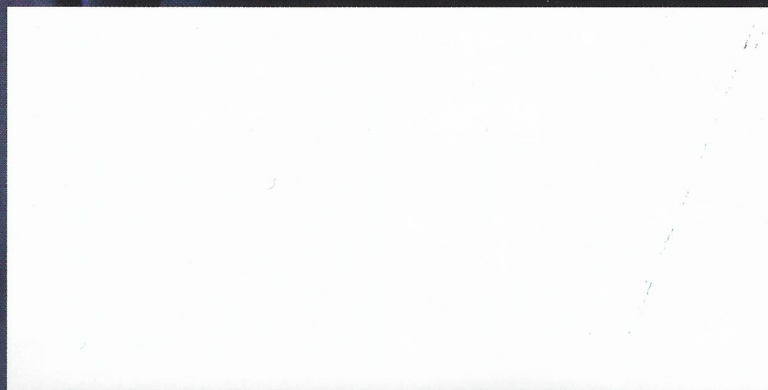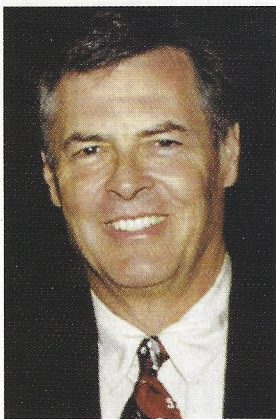# Turning Ford Around

How is Chairman and CEO Bill Ford steering Ford back to profitability?

★ 2005 Industry Forecast

★ Accord Hybrid

★ Visteon Crash Avoidance System

★ A Look Behind The IP

Please, Mom, I'd Rather Do It Myself!

Start your engine and your headlights (and/or daytime running lights) turn on. Open the door, your interior lights illuminate. Close it, they stay on and then fade out over time. Shift to reverse, your outside mirror dips downward. Shift to drive, your doors lock. Touch a window switch, the window zooms all the way down. Touch it again, it zips back up.

Did you want your incredibly clairvoyant car to automatically do all these things for you? Or are some such oh-so-thoughtful actions helpful but others annoying, even troubling?

Excuse me, but who decided to transfer control of such small but important decisions and actions from vehicle occupants to computers? Who concluded that they were too much trouble for mere mortals to manage? Who figured out exactly whether, when and how much we want our doors to lock, lights to light, windows to wind and mirrors to tilt?

Earth to planners and engineers: please, Mom, I'd rather do it myself!

I think this idea of programming cars to decide and do such things for us started, with noble intentions, at GM, with doors that auto-locked to reduce their likelihood of flying open in a crash. Did they auto-unlock as well? No, because, for security reasons, you'd sometimes rather they wouldn't. Other times, you wish they would. Either way, they were guaranteed to annoy a lot of customers a lot of the time.

Then some genius decided that we all want our interior lights to illuminate whenever we pull the key or open a door. And that we'd love for them to fade out after 30 or 40 seconds once the door is closed, a feature called "theatre lighting."

There are times and places where you don't want to illuminate your vehicle's interior and everything in it. Women alone at night should be especially concerned. And most of us know where our cabin light switch is and how to use it.

Some vehicles now have an override switch to keep interior lights off when you don't want them on. Others, annoyingly, don't. They won't let you prevent them from lighting, or let you quickly shut them off once they're on. And some (especially Japanese) happily continue with simple switches offering three basic choices: 1) on,

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2) off, or 3) on when a door is open.

Certainly, DRLs have genuine safety benefits. The more likely I am to see you coming, especially in shadow and low-light conditions, the less likely I'll turn in front of you. The more likely you are to see me coming, the less likely you'll pull out in front of me. But why are the damned things on when you're idling in park? Why don't they wait until you shift to drive?

Automatic headlamps relieve the driver of responsibility for turning lights on when needed, which can be a good thing. But get used to driving a vehicle that has them, and you'll lose (or never acquire) the habit of switching lights on when you should. Then

you drive a borrowed or rental car without this feature and wonder why folks keep flashing you at night.

Mirrors that tilt downward in reverse are showing you the curb ... not a bad idea for parallel parking. But when backing up close to other vehicles or objects, or into a garage door, the last thing you need to see is the ground.

Full-down and full-up power windows are handy when you want them all the way down or up. But they put up an annoying, distracting struggle when you want to crack them slightly for ventilation.

Such automatic features can be great when they correctly guess what people want and when. But I'm betting a lot of folks, like me, would prefer more control over these things most of the time. And therein lies the key to making them less annoying: make them defeatable and/or easily programmable.

If you program the vehicle to do something for me because you think I want it to, please also provide the means to prevent it when I don't. Thank you, Mom, but please ... I'd rather do it myself! ★

Gary Witzenburg, a former advanced technology engineering manager and part-time racing driver, is a widely published auto writer and Editor-at-Large of Automotive Industries.