

What Your Car Says About You

by (ARA)

Trendy and artsy: Mini Cooper. Cool soccer Mom: BMW wagon. Nostalgia lover: new VW Beetle. Midlife crisis: vintage Corvette. It's no accident that certain cars are driven by certain types of people. In fact, by the time a car has reached the marketplace, a target buyer is practically in its DNA. "Car manufacturers are designing vehicles based on focus group studies that give key insights into satisfying lifestyles, egos and current status symbols," says Ron Miller, a graphic design instructor at The Art Institute of Pittsburgh. For a recent class, Miller teamed up with EdVenture Partners, a company that pairs schools with actual clients, to create an advertising campaign for Toyota's new introduction, the Yaris. And talk about a specific demographic. According to Miller, "Toyota designed the car to appeal to a target demographic of 18 to 30 year olds, so the car features a MP3 player, multiple storage compartments and an appealing price tag of \$10,500." Some drivers may choose a car outside their target demographic intentionally, for example, the soccer Mom who doesn't want to be pegged as one, may choose an SUV hybrid rather than the much-clichéd van, or a middle-aged man may eschew a classic midlife crisis car and go for an upscale, fuel-stingy model like a Prius. "The type of car that we choose not only indicates who we are, but also who we would like to be," says Carol Oster, PsyD, a psychology professor at Argosy University/Chicago. "Our cars are often a reflection of the entire person - our past, our future, our hopes and dreams. So while any car can get us from point A to point B, we often feel a connection to them. They help us communicate with our fellow drivers." No one likes to be pigeon-holed, but it's hard to battle back all the research that goes into designing cars. Toyota, for example, has decided that in the future, the next generation of consumers will be technologically savvy, creative, concerned about the environment, social issues and want value for their dollar. So watch out consumers of the future -- automobile designers have a car in mind for you.

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