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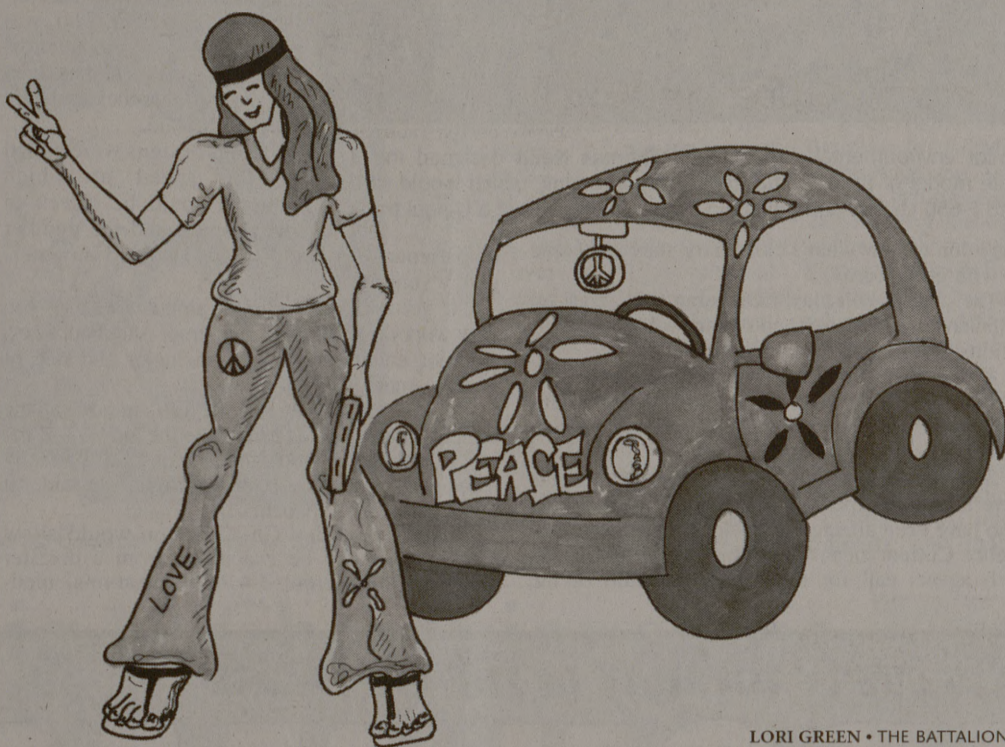
THE BATTALION

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You are what you drive

Drivers everywhere express themselves through the cars they drive

By Nishat Fatima
THE BATTALION



LORI GREEN • THE BATTALION

Michelle Royder has dyed her hair a multitude of colors, used safety pins instead of earrings and graffitied designer bags, all in attempts to express her colorful qualities. A few years and many experiences later, Royder has found a more subtle, yet just as effective, way to express her personality.

"I have always been the type of person who doesn't like to worry a lot, but loves to have fun and be daring," said Royder, a junior psychology major. "When I came to college, I decided to buy a new Honda Civic because I knew I had to get a car with a reputation for being reliable. Between classes, extracurricular work and my social life, it would be one less thing for me to worry about."

Royder said although she wanted a dependable car, she didn't want to settle for any ordinary vehicle.

"When I got my Civic, I made sure that it was bright red and that it was a two-door, for a sporty look," she said. "I got a lot of custom details on it, such as body-side molding, trimmers on the tires and a sun visor. I also made sure that my car had a spoiler and a sunroof."

Royder said she used different vehicles to mark different stages of her life.

"I used to have a convertible in high school, and it was a really cool and flashy car," she said. "I put a lot of stickers and a steering wheel cover on it to make sure it stood out even more. I chose not to go overboard with decorations on my new car because I'm a different person now, and even my car reflects that. I love the simple appearance of my car now because it's really sleek and fun but it still manages to stand out. I think that it reflects my personality in many ways."

For Keith Limpa, public relations representative for the Texas A&M Sports Car Club and a junior geography major, his love for cars runs

deeper than just a hobby. Unlike Royder, Limpa has always personalized his own cars as well as friends' and families' vehicles, and isn't about to stop anytime soon.

"Not everybody gets the kind of car that they want, but there are unlimited possibilities out there to personalize them," he said. "I used to have a '99 Chevrolet Cavalier that I got for a graduation present, and I would always wonder what I could do to make it cooler. I decided to fix it up, so I added an exhaust pipe, Borbet wheels, and then used a body kit to make the exterior look appealing."

After he joined the Sports Car Club, Limpa said, his strong affinity for cars soon turned into an obsession.

"After I joined the club, I gradually began to get more involved," he said. "I started to attend

all of their car shows and autocross meets. I saw that many of the other members had amazing cars because of what they did to the interior parts like the engine rather than the exterior. I decided to make my Cavalier a better racing car, and added Koni socks, Hibachi springs, and made it all adjustable. The Sports Car Club actually gave me the chance to drag race in a legal way, and that was my main motivation for spicing up my car."

Limpa said that after 250 autocross meets and \$3,000 worth of equipment, he found that his Cavalier wasn't made for racing.

"I ended up blowing up my transmission in December, so I had to break down the car and sell its pieces," he said. "I got a 1991 Nissan Z-20, and started to go all-out with gear immediately. I ordered a suspension from Japan, put 17

rims on it, got new tires, a new front bumper and even new seats. I'm aiming to make it look like an all-out racing car."

Limpa said even his wife's car got the race-track treatment.

"My wife, Lisa, has a 1995 Honda Accord with a huge wing, clear lights, full sub woofers, an Eclipse Aiwa MP3 player, Infinity Kappa speakers, and it has been lowered to where there are only about 2 inches between the fender and the wheels," he said. "It is a very aggressive yet feminine car because it is a sky blue and silver color. It really fits her personality."

Ben Nathan, vice president of the Sports Car Club and a senior petroleum engineering major, said that when it comes to his MG, he spares no expense.

"My '66 green MG convertible and '67 white MG hardtop are my pride and joy," he said. "The convertible hasn't even worked in five years, but it has become a project of mine to work on it and make it run. My primary vehicle, the '67 hardtop, is a big amusement for me and all of my friends as well, because it hardly runs well, and I am constantly having to spend money to keep it alive."

Nathan said his car has proven to be more of an amusement than a mode of transport.

"It has broken down at interesting times in interesting places," he said. "The second day I had it, a girl crashed into it. Then after I had it for a while and I finally got it to work again, it got hit by a drunk driver in a parking lot. Right now I put a new Ford 2.3 liter engine in it, added a new suspension and put full chrome tires on. It looks completely stock and vintage from the outside, and it attracts a lot of attention, even from the ladies."

Nathan said despite the lack of dependency and economy his cars have, he isn't ready to trade them in for a conventional set of wheels anytime soon.

"Despite all of the hassle the cars give me, it's worth it because I know that they will work smoothly eventually," he said. "I think the reason why I have stuck with them so long is because I am a very stubborn and determined person, much like the cars can be when they decide to die on me."

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