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Brains and beauty

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by Sharon Dargay

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Go to the North American International Auto Show to see the vehicles and talk to the models and then put it all into historical perspective with Margery Krevsky's book, *Sirens of Chrome: The Enduring Allure of Auto Show Models*.

Krevsky, a Bloomfield Hills resident who owns Productions Plus, a Bingham Farm-based agency that supplies auto show talent, will sign her coffee table-style book during the show, which runs daily through Sunday, Jan. 25, at Cobo Center in downtown Detroit.

Packed with rare photos, programs and posters from private collections and corporate files, the

book traces the history of the auto show model from the early 1900s - when images of mythological goddesses and sirens first appeared in vehicle marketing materials and as hood ornaments - to present day, when product information specialists of both sexes entice customers with both their knowledge of the vehicle, as well as their appearance.

Stories highlight the auto show displays, event hoopla, vehicle advertising campaigns, celebrity spokespersons and model changes - both human and automotive - over the past century.

RESEARCHING

"When you go into business, you collect a lot of stories," said Krevsky, who founded Productions Plus with former auto show model Harriet Fuller, in 1991. "There are so many stories connected with the auto shows. I started thinking, what if I connect them to a picture? I started to think of stories to go with pictures. I thought it might be interesting to do a history."

She jotted down ideas and began searching for photos, first through the National Automotive History Collection at the Detroit Public Library, and then from corporate and private collections.

"It took a year to conceptualize. There were so many pictures. That was the hard thing to do, to put them in order, to get permission to use them."

In some cases, Krevsky knew exactly what she wanted.

"I knew I wanted a picture from the 60s ... there was an incident at a press conference where a model was mauled by a lion at BMW. I had heard the story. It was difficult to find the picture."

The black and white shot on page 112 of the book, shows the 21-year-old woman in short lederhosen, sitting with her arm around a live lion on the floor of the New York Auto Show in 1966. The accompanying copy says the animal locked its teeth on her thigh seconds later. The model survived, her leg intact, but a decade later took her own life.



You wouldn't guess sore feet and backs are an occasional hazard of the job by looking at this glamorous auto show model.



A model demonstrates a Toyota "i-unit" at the 2005 New York Auto Show.



Auto show models in hot pants show off themselves - and a concept car from Czech automaker Å koda - at the 2005 Frankfurt Auto Show in Germany. The photo is in Margery Krevsky's book, "Sirens of Chrome."

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Krevsky had heard another story, about a concept car called the Cadillac Debutant. It had debuted at a show in the 1950s, showing off an interior of 187 "Somali leopard pelts" and hardware plated in 24-karat gold.

The photo, found on page 68 of Sirens, shows a model seated in the \$35,000 vehicle, wearing a suit with matching leopard cuffs and collar.

UPDATED WARDROBE

One of Krevsky's favorite photos shows suffragists Alice Snitzer Burke and Nell Richardson, stopped on a dirt road beside the 1916 Saxon - which was marketed as a woman's car - on their 10,000 mile trip across the country, advocating for the vote. Along the way the pair changed tires, replaced spark plugs and repaired its engine during an era when women still wore ankle-length dresses and tight corsets.

"They left wearing their vintage Victorian clothing and by the time they had finished the trip, their corsets and bustles had bit the dust."

Krevsky was instrumental in the evolution of auto show models, changing the glamor and cheesecake image to a more sophisticated look that complemented the client's product line. She also gave voice to the models, training them as product information specialists able to entice customers with facts.

"I went up to one of them (a model) and said 'Can you tell me about the car?' She said she wasn't allowed to talk about the car," Krevsky said, recalling a visit to an early 1980s auto show. "I thought to myself, there is some opportunity here. What if everyone could be both attractive and a gearhead?"

She turned her attention from the local fashion show scene to the auto show industry. Her revolutionary ideas - training models to become thoroughly versed in the vehicle and matching wardrobe to the brand - met with "a great deal of resistance" at first.

"Pontiac gave us the first opportunity, Nissan the next. They gave me one year to let me make my point. Historically, the time was right."

An exhibition featuring the Sirens of Chrome continues through April 30, at the Detroit Public Library's Rose and Robert Skillman Branch in Detroit. Sirens of Chrome, a hardcover published by Momentum Books LLC, is available through select Barnes & Noble, and Borders bookstores, as well as online at Amazon.com and MomentumBooks.com. It costs \$24.95.

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