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Shari Barnett dresses talent for 9 car brands

BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • JANUARY 17, 2009

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It's not just the [vehicles](#) that catch your eye at the Detroit auto show, which opens to the public today. Shari Barnett wants to make sure the display narrators and product specialists -- commonly called auto show models -- look good, too.

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Barnett, 45, is the wardrobe manager for Productions Plus, the Bingham Farms agency that manages and outfits [auto show](#) talent for several brands. The Bloomfield Township resident studied at the Parsons School of Design and already is working on 2010 showstoppers.

HER CLIENTS: Barnett outfits the auto show personnel for Toyota, Lexus, Scion, Nissan, Infiniti, Honda, Acura, Mitsubishi and Porsche. The auto companies might have displays at more than 70 shows across the country from September to May.

OFF THE RACK OR ONE-OF-A-KIND: She and her staff might design unique outfits or pull items from store racks. "We like to do a custom wardrobe, because then nobody else is going to have what our product specialists are wearing," Barnett says.

DRIVING MESSAGE: "I really see wardrobe as another element of the display. I'm trying to incorporate what the product specialist is wearing so that everyone has one message."

WHEELS AROUND: She visits auto shows overseas to assess trends. She puts on mini fashion shows for auto execs in the spring to pick a look for next year's displays.

WEAR-ABILITY: The clothes have to hold up well. "Some of these people work over 100 days a year, and we've got to find fabrics that are going to hold up well, and dry-clean well."

VALUE ADDED: The costs of designing and assembling a wardrobe for one spokesmodel can range from \$2,000 to \$11,000. Over a large brand, that's big bucks. Toyota, for example, has about 80 narrators and product specialists staffing a large show such as

Detroit.

ON DISPLAY IN DETROIT: In a creative show of recycling chic, the Lexus spokespeople are wearing cuffs, earrings and necklaces made from the tailpipes of Lexus vehicles. Ask them about it. Honda's people are wearing a custom wardrobe. "It's a navy suit, and we put a turquoise tank top with it, to give it a pop of color. It's younger and more fun," Barnett says.

WHAT BARNETT'S WEARING: "After going to school in New York and living there for a long time, I'm into head-to-toe black," the married mother of three says. "I look for texture and I look for silhouette, and I usually stick with black."



MANDI WRIGHT/Detroit Free Press

Shari Barnett, 45, is the wardrobe manager for Productions Plus in Bingham Farms.

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WHAT SHE'D LIKE TO SEE YOU WEAR TO THE AUTO SHOW: "It's nice to see people who take time to put themselves together," Barnett says. She advises wearing comfortable "but nice-looking" shoes. "You can wear comfortable shoes. The product specialists don't."

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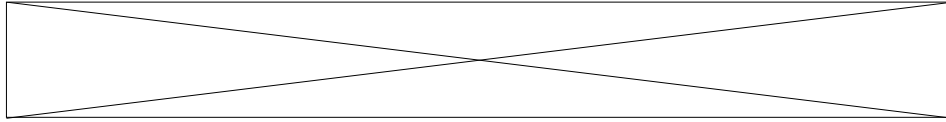
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