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John Kelly's Commons

Auto Show-Me State



A few years ago I wrote a column about the detailers at the [Washington Auto Show](#). They spend their days in eternal buffitude: cleaning and recleaning the cars on the exhibit floor, banishing fingerprints (and worse). I don't know whether they hang out with the "product specialists" when the crowds leave. Somehow, I rather doubt it.

Product specialists -- or narrators, as they're sometimes called -- are the attractive women and men who stand on rotating platforms and sing their particular vehicle's praises. I spent a few hours yesterday wandering around the convention center watching them at work.

The auto show season is from October to April and as it approaches auditions are held around the country. It's a bit like an acting gig and actors, models and ex-pageant participants are among those who audition. I was talking to a woman who's been with Scion for six years. She had auditioned for a spot with Nissan but the agency said, "No, you're Scion." Scion is "edgy" and I guess she was too.

"When I tell my friends what I do they think I do this," she said, moving her arms as if she was presenting a bedroom suite on "The Price Is Right": *Ta da!* In reality, they have to know the vehicles inside and out. (And they have to call them "vehicles." There are no "cars" at an auto show. Everything is a "vehicle.")

Sometimes they memorize a script. Sometimes they are given bullet points to hit. Sometimes they team up with another narrator and do something approaching improv. Often they have to do it while standing on a rotating platform, as if performing on a huge lazy Susan.

These days most narrators have a little remote control they can use to stop the platform from spinning, but some seem to like taking their Sisyphean stroll, walking in place. (Tip: It's easier to remember a script if you're moving. If you're standing still you're more likely to forget it.) One girl from Dodge (they call each other "girl") told me she has motion sickness. I noticed that she always stood at the edge of the platform, where it didn't move.

Each has a uniform. There are plenty of black and gray slacks on the women, but a skirt ending at the knee and a pair of stiletto-heeled boots seems to be most common. They get to keep the boots, though after a seven- or eight-month auto show season they boots are usually pretty shot. Sometimes they get to keep the outfits too. (The picture above is of some of the Toyota product specialists. I think they look a little like superheroes.)

A woman named [Margery Krevsky](#) is credited with revolutionizing the auto show narrator world, insisting that they be knowledgeable about their brands. (There was a time when they were often referred to as "booth bimbos.") Krevsky has just published a book on the profession: "[Sirens of Chrome](#): The Enduring Allure of Auto Show Models."

[The Sirens](#), you will recall, were the sea nymphs who lured sailors to their doom in the Aegean. I suppose that's sort of what auto show models lure visitors to too -- or, if not doom, then a monthly car payment.