

# Car as Story-Mate

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As networks become mobile, the car will become a media-receptive device. How will media extend and enhance our future automotive experience?

Most car manufacturers and associated companies will focus on the experiences of the driver. The driver's stories are legend. Our "first car" stories, tales of automotive daring-do, communicate that the car is a source of adventure and freedom. Later, stories of traffic jams, accidents, getting lost, and chauffeuring family members hither and yon suggest that the automotive experience is not always pleasurable. Certainly, stories will play a part in the automobile of the future, both as entertainment and as vehicles for learning.

Before turning to the potential for story-based automotive experiences of the future, I would like to point out a few features of the media-based story that will help us envision a way forward. To make stories for the future, one needs to understand something about how past media are being replaced by young computational media. While we can still apply the techniques of Scenario, Observation, and Fantasy, computational media stories bear little resemblance to the long, linear celluloid object of past film. While this single-strand material form was more or less continued as the media story transitioned to television, this was more or less a feature of chance, and as we transition to digital media this material form will change: stories will become multithreaded, the story will be delivered by a machine selecting bits and pieces almost in real time. Finally, the story may well be co-constructed through a person-to-person teleconferencing link.

The next question to consider is what to play, when, and for whom. While car companies focus on the security, comfort, and safety of the driver, they are not linking the driver to the environment. Today the car does not warn its driver when she foils the social conventions of the roadway, such as driving too slowly in the left hand lane, or pulling out into the left hand lane and slowing down. In addition, car companies give little thought to the passengers of the car, from the perspective either of touring or entertainment. When we are touring, an accompanying passenger might be pleased to know more about the region or even check in on some particular sites -- such as gardens - - to see if one is appropriate to visit.

A mother transporting her children to and fro is often strained to keep her sanity as the children joke and play in the back seat. This is a perfect situation for a game-like narrative, perhaps one in which the other cars on the road become dinosaurs, loping alongside or, more excitingly, chasing the car home.