

Baby, you can drive my car

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Car manufacturers have always used product placement and content to good advantage, but it's time to take this to the next level.

Baby, you can drive my car - except baby might not want to these days.

The [Economist](#) published an article recently that suggested that "in the rich world, people seem to be driving less than they used to".

The article harks back to the days of the movie [American Graffiti](#), when owning a car was essential to the American dream

As a general trend, car ownership and miles travelled have been increasing throughout the rich world since the 1950s. Now, however, this trend seems to have stopped.

There's more than one reason for this according to the Economist (and if they don't know, who does?) including congestion in cities; fuel prices; recession and better transport systems. In addition, the article speculates that the high levels of desirability and glamour that cars delivered last century have been transferred instead to other status items that are more easily attained, like smart phones and tablets. If this is the case (and car usage is far from collapsing, its not as if the roads are deserted is it?), then the question becomes what can the car industry do to drive demand (no pun intended) back up to earlier levels, to ensure that growth is maintained and sustainable in the future.

Throughout the article the authors reference last century's popular culture. The character of Toad in American Graffiti says, "I'll love and protect this car until death do us part". In [Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman](#), the dream of one protagonist is, "My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women". We can all think of plenty more examples of road movies and road music that heighten the glamour of the car.

Have aspirations really changed that much? Is it eerily significant that it was phone and tech shops that suffered the worst of 2011's looting (I can't remember any reports of car dealers under attack for a joy ride)?

If content created the desire in the past, it can do so again. Practical solutions around fuel economy, car sharing and better road systems is one thing. Car manufacturers have always used product placement and content to good advantage, ([here's one great recent example from our own agency](#)) but it's time to take this to the next level. This sector (and it's not the only one) needs to ensure that the status of driving a cool car is still relevant to the next

set of drivers. This is yet another reason for brands to consider content in a completely different context from paid for advertising: not as a "nice to have" addition, but as a long-term desire-driving essential route map.

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