

DRIVING AROUND THE COMMUNIST BLOC

IF ONE SUMS up the various numbers mentioned in newspaper front page headlines, Russia soon will produce 1.5 million cars a year—about 16% of the annual U.S. output. This will be 10 times as much as Soviet automobile plants manufacture today—approximately 150,000 cars per year, of which 66% are earmarked for police, military and official use.

Reversing the Kremlin's "BYT" (way of life) theories that advocated communal rental services in place of private car ownership, Soviet Russia's new leadership has signed a series of agreements with Western companies to establish automobile plants in Belorussia, the Ukraine and Latvia.

Italy's giant Fiat combine will build

a sprawling complex of factories near Novaya Kahovka in the southern Ukraine. The plant will employ 40,000 local workers, but will utilize Western engineering know-how, blueprints and production lines to turn out 700,000 cars per year. Because the plant will turn out only one model, a Russian version of the Fiat 124, costs probably can be cut and overall output can be increased.

France's state-owned Renault Automobile Works will build a plant near Minsk in Belorussia, to manufacture 400,000 cars per year. These will be of the successful Major type, to be known as Sokol (Hawk) in Russia.

The British Motor Corp. will erect a factory, either near Riga, Latvia or Vynnitsa in the western Ukraine, to produce 350,000 cars per year. These will be an improved version of the Morris/Austin 1100 model.

Russia's own Moskvich and Volga plants will increase production to 450,000 cars per year, while the jinxed Zaporozhets plant, dubbed "Pishy Propalo" (Write it Off) by local wags, will be switched to production of bandit-proof taxicabs.

There is more to the automobile business, however, than just cars. The impact of wheels on "BYT" and other areas of communist ideology cannot be gauged at this stage by veteran Kremlinologists, but all agree that Mother Russia will be forced to change her face, if not her soul, under the crushing impact of motorization. It will be a long while before Soviet citizens will benefit—if that is the word—from drive-in movies, drive-in banks and drive-in restaurants, but Soviet authorities are aware of the multitude of problems they have created by deciding to establish a modern automobile industry.

To understand the technical, economic, political, moral and ideological problems involved, it is necessary to analyze the automobile situation behind the Iron Curtain now and as it will be in the 1970s.

ALBANIA—China's only satellite in Europe manufactures no cars, imports less than 50 vehicles a year and has only 340 miles of paved roads. The capital of Tirana is still served by Chinese-made trucks, copies of Russia's Zil model, with crude wooden benches, in lieu of buses. Of the city's five taxicabs, one is parked in front of the airport terminal building, the other one across the street from the dilapidated Shkipetar Hotel, and three are under repair. Most of the traffic moves on bicycles, or on foot.

Albania believes cars to be a wanton luxury, which demoralizes the people and subverts their spartan devotion to the communist cause. No provision for

manufacturing automobiles has been made in the little satellite's current (1966-1970) 5-Year Plan.

BULGARIA—Bulgaria manufactures no cars and has no plans to establish production lines of its own. Because of booming tourism from the West, however, Bulgaria has devoted a major share of its budget to construction of a network of first-rate asphalt roads. This naturally resulted in greater impatience and concerted pressure on the part of local consumers for private autos of their own.

For the coming year, Bulgaria plans to import 17,000 cars from Russia, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and East Germany. With a waiting list of

109,000 citizens who already have paid deposits sight unseen and about 500,000 more potential customers in sight, this plainly is too little, too late.

Bulgarian Reds obviously will be forced to bow to popular demand and negotiate a deal with some major Western manufacturer for a local automobile assembly plant. Otherwise, they will seriously jeopardize their country's tourist trade, a vital pillar of national economy. Gangs of auto thieves and black market speculators carry out lightning raids on Western tourists' cars to cannibalize them for parts.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA—Czechoslovakia is the most sophisticated and industrially advanced of all Eastern Bloc na-



THE RUSSIAN Zaporozhets ZAZ-966 was put into production in 1966. The car now is powered by a 4-cyl., 27-bhp air-cooled engine, but a 40-bhp unit of the same type is being readied for future installation. At the rear, Muscovites admire the new model.

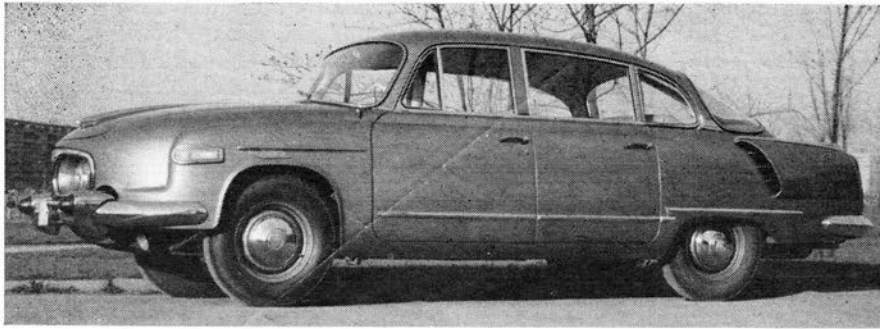


RECALLING THE 1956 Plymouth is the Soviet Volga, top, priced at \$5230. The car offers truck-like steering, but handles well in snow and sand.

EARLY ZAPOROZHETS, below, were built in an Opel factory, dismantled and moved lock, stock and turret lathe to the Ukraine following World War II.

For the Red Countries, Constructive Socialism Now Means Building Cars

BY LEO HEIMAN



CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S TATRA luxury model retails for \$2550 in the West, but sells for \$22,500 to Czechs. Power is from a rear-mounted, air-cooled V-8.

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tions. This is reflected in the country's automobile production—192,000 cars in 1965. Because the Czech Skoda and Tatra cars are considered first-rate even by Western standards, Prague had no difficulty selling 50,000 of the total in Western Europe and the Middle East. Another 40,000 were exported to Soviet Bloc nations, 65,000 went to the armed forces, police, and officials of the government, party functionaries and union officialdom.

This left 37,000 cars for sale to private users. With 130,000 people on the waiting lists, rackets, graft and corruption were unavoidable. The official newspaper of the Czechoslovak Communist Youth Federation, *Mlada Fronta*, disclosed recently that it sent a reporter posing as a private car buyer, to the Mototechna Agency, the only legal sales outlet for Czech autos. The man was told that he had to pay 50,000 crowns—about \$7500 at the official rate—for a Skoda sedan that sells for

\$1570 in the West. He was required to pay one-third of the sum while registering and another third the following year in order to keep his place in the queue, then pay the balance when he finally receives his car in 2-3 years. He could not choose the exact type, color or model variation, and was obligated to accept whatever would be available—or lose his place in the queue and wait another three years. And, he could not receive his money back for 12 months, in case he changed his mind.

When the reporter expressed impatience, and hinted that he would be willing to pay more than the official price, Mototechna officials advised him he could buy a "luxury model" without waiting a day. The luxury model turned out to be a Tatra limousine that retails for \$2550 in the West. The officials of Mototechna Agency demanded for it 150,000 crowns (\$22,500). The reporter did not buy it, but he claims many people do pay \$22,500

for a \$2550 car. Because the average annual income of a skilled worker or white-collar employee in Czechoslovakia is about \$2500 per year, and it is difficult to save even \$100 due to the high cost of living, the newspaper demands to know who are the people who can afford a \$22,500 luxury car, which is only a regular Tatra sedan enhanced with extra chromium trim and real leather seats.

Czechoslovakia is the only communist country that has no need for Western know-how and technical aid in this field, but production of automobiles can be increased only if authorities soft-pedal other branches of industry. It is up to government officials to decide which is more important now—railroad locomotives and flatcars, turbines, tanks, jets, artillery and heavy trucks, or more cars for private users.

EAST GERMANY—Goated Walter Ulbricht's vicious satrapy produced only 50,000 cars last year, half of them for export to Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, where East Germany's Wartburg sedan is known derisively as *Lerek* (*Hitler*ek—Little Hitler, minus the "Hit"). The Trabant hardtop coupe, touted as the "greatest achievement of socialist automobile production," has such a poor reputation in Eastern Europe that the Hungarians call it *Trafoss*, which means, "a moving heap of manure."

East European customers are not choosy about the cars they buy, but the Yugoslavs returned the 10,000 Wartburgs and Trabants they bought from East Germany last year, claiming the cars fell apart after the first 10,000 miles.

The East Germans refused to take them back, and the vehicles stood in sun, dust and rain in huge parking lots near the Zagreb marshalling yards until a special commission arrived from East Germany with five trainloads of spare parts and several hundred technicians. The cars were repaired and resold at half their list price.

In East Germany proper, roads are full on weekends with old Third Reich jalopies, most of them made before 1939. These museum pieces were miraculously preserved not only against confiscation by Hitler's *Wehrmacht* and the occupying Russian troops, but also against the weather, wear and tear over 25-30 years.

One can see a 1936 Opel Olympia overtaking a wheezing 1966 Trabant on an Autobahn near Dresden, or a 1935 Horch, its hood strapped down with leather belts and baling wire, leaving an angrily sputtering Wartburg in its wake near Leipzig.

However, the Germans, even the communist East Germans, are capable of producing first-rate cars. The only

reason East Germany neglects the automobile industry is that the communist regime does not believe its citizens require private transportation. East Germany's bus services, urban and suburban electric trains provide efficient and cheap transportation. Motorcycles, motorcycle combinations with a variety of family-size sidecars, and scooters are readily available, quite good and not expensive. Hence it appears that East German Reds oppose autos on principle, rather than for lack of industrial capacity or know-how.

HUNGARY AND RUMANIA—These two countries are in a position similar to that of Bulgaria. They manufacture no cars and import very few, namely from East Germany and Czechoslovakia. As their economies depend on Western tourism, they build good roads, with service stations and motels, and they must satisfy their own consumers, or face an alarming wave of automobile thefts and rackets.

Hungary produces motorcycles and may order 16,000 Yugoslav-made cars next year. With a waiting list of 100,000, this obviously is no solution to the auto crisis. However, the Hungarians offer another choice to ambitious car users. Citizens who contribute to the country's booming tourist trade—as waiters, hotel employees, hostesses, interpreters, travel agents, and so forth—are entitled to special coupons that credit them with 10% of the hard foreign currency the state earned in a year

thanks to their efforts. When they accumulate enough currency to pay for a car, they can get a Czech or Yugoslav export model without waiting.

Citizens fortunate enough to have wealthy relatives abroad, can ask their kin to send them the dollars, pounds sterling, francs and the like, to buy brand-new cars. This means being blacklisted with the secret police, because citizens who receive a few thousand bucks from the West must be capitalists, but the desire for autos overrides caution and fear of possible arrest.

POLAND—The Poles also are negotiating with Italy's Fiat combine for a plant to produce 250,000 of the 1100 model per year. Poland has a tradition of manufacturing Italian cars under license. Indeed, before World War II, there was only one automobile plant in Poland, that of Fiat Polski, cars from which were so good that some still are on the road after 30 years of war, revolution and violent upheaval.

The Poles themselves produce some 35,000 cars a year. The Syrena sedans are known as "Swan Song Cars," because they usually last only one season before falling apart. One of Poland's hottest selling items is Warszawa pickup trucks that are adapted for private use by addition of corrugated aluminum bodies, upholstered seats, sliding windows and other extras. They have good engines, a fairly well engineered suspension system and, much more

important, can be driven for up to 100,000 miles without being scrapped. Trouble is, they are classified as low-priced (\$2350) commercial vehicles and are not for sale to private owners. Not officially, that is. Many industrial plants, trucking syndicates and state-owned enterprises acquire Warszawa pickup trucks, arrange convenient "accidents" and have the vehicles "scrapped." Would-be owners bribe plant directors and junkyard administrators to permit them to buy the salvaged parts and to build cars in their backyards. The net result is that crooked officials buy Warszawas for \$2350, drive them into walls, sell them to junkyards for \$350 and split the \$6000 bribe with other racketeers who are known as "Miracle Healers" in Polish motoring slang, because they restore junkyard scrap to blooming good health.

YUGOSLAVIA—The Yugoslavs were the first, among all the communist countries, to make a real start toward meeting the demand for private cars. An agreement was signed six years ago with Italy's Fiat to set up the Zastava plant at Novi Mesto, halfway between Belgrade and Zagreb. The plant manufactured 120,000 autos and 80,000 commercial trucks last year. Of the autos, the regular Zastava, which is a Yugoslav version of the compact Fiat 750 sells for approximately \$3000, i.e., twice as much as the Fiat 750 costs in Italy. The Zastava Red Flag, which is

THE PORTLY ZIL-111, in 1958, was Russia's automotive answer to the West. Automatic transmission, power brakes and steering, windshield washer, tubeless tires, power windows, radio and 105-mph top speed were touted. Few cars were built.



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the Yugoslav version of the Fiat 1100, retails for about \$5000, three times as much as in Italy. One-third of the plant's output is earmarked for export to Poland, Rumania and Hungary. The Bulgarians are now buying Zastavas, too.

Of the 120,000 cars, 80,000 are made available to private buyers. Armed forces personnel, police and government officials must buy commercial models—pickup trucks, station wagons, radio vans and the like—at reduced prices. Artificially high prices charged for private autos are designed to subsidize the commercial models.

Any citizen can buy a car, no questions asked, without waiting—if he pays his money into the Zastava plant's bank account, or produces a letter showing relatives abroad have paid the equivalent in foreign currency, for which he gets a 20% reduction.

Yugoslavian Zastava cars have been smuggled to Russia through Poland. They have proved so popular in the USSR that the Soviets decided to make their own deal with Fiat. Now the Yugoslavians are planning to add a third line of Partisan cars, along the pattern of Fiat 1500 limousines with sealed cooling systems.

SOVIET RUSSIA—Shortly after the end of World War II, the Russians dismantled East Germany's Opel Kadett automobile plant and transferred it lock, stock and barrel to the Ukraine. Alas, it was easier to dismantle than reassemble, and the machinery gathered rust for ten years, until German experts arrived to set up a production line. What came out at the other end was a small 4-passenger air-cooled car, known as Zaporozhets. It was known throughout Russia as *Pokhoronka* (Funeral Hearse) because it had a rather nasty habit of falling apart at high speed, killing or maiming driver and passengers. Because in Russia high speed means anything over 40 mph, the Zaporozhets was not a popular car even with automobile-hungry Reds.

The production line now has been completely redesigned to produce bandit-proof taxicabs known as Kievlanka. The cab has only one sliding door on the right side which can be opened or shut only by manipulating a lever near the driver's seat. The driver, on the other hand, can enter only from the left side, and his door is burglar-proof. The driver sits surrounded by armor and bullet-proof glass and cannot be robbed by the worst *Blatnoi* gangsters who specialize in taxicab holdups.

Money and change are passed from

passenger to driver and back through a sliding drawer which can be opened from the driver's side only. Drivers don't unlock the door to let passengers out before being paid (and tipped).

Of Russia's three lines of home-made cars, the Chaika limousines are not on sale to the public. Patterned along the lines of the 1948 Cadillac, they serve the needs of party big-wigs, diplomats, senior government officials and army generals. Only 7000 were produced last year.

The Volga is a good car, not unlike the 1956 Plymouth. It retails for \$5230, and drives well, though it handles like an army truck and has no power steering, but it does not stall in snow and soft sand. On the other hand, because no spares are available, owners must either be qualified automobile mechanics with access to modern tool shops, or crooks willing to buy stolen parts from cannibalized cars, stripped in a jiffy by robust gangs of auto thieves.

Russia produced 40,000 Volgas last year, 12,000 of them exported abroad, including 6000 to Belgium, Norway and Denmark. This year Dutch, French, British and Swedish auto users will be able to buy Volgas which sell in the West for less than half of what they cost in Russia—and two spare tires and 300 lb. of spare parts are thrown in for free.

The Moskvich, which sells for \$3740 in Russia and \$1820 in the West, is Russia's most popular car of the pre-Fiat era. It is a good car, about on the performance level of 1940 Fords, but quite suited to East European roads and poor maintenance.

The trouble is, customers must wait 30 months for Volgas and up to five years for Moskvich cars. Those who specify certain colors must wait eight years. However, with manufacture of 2 million cars per year in the 1970s and 1.5 million per year in 1968, Ivan and Masha Ivanovski soon can buy a car—if they have the money—just as in any civilized Western country.

Veteran observers emphasize Russia's problems then will have only just begun. The five headaches that may well undermine the Kremlin's stranglehold over 230 million Russians and 110 million East Europeans, are spelled out as follows:

Crime—No reliable crime statistics are published in the Soviet Union, or any other communist country, but the official press shows that communism breeds even more criminals than “decadent” capitalism. In the Moscow region alone, over 130 persons were sen-

tenced to death in 1965. Of these, 19 were shot for “economic crimes” (i.e., blackmarket speculation), 32 received the ultimate punishment for armed robbery and 79 faced the firing squad for “malicious banditry,” which encompasses hold-ups, carrying of concealed firearms, killings and a variety of other offenses.

In addition, close to 800 criminals were sentenced to terms varying from seven years to life imprisonment—and this in one district of Russia in the course of one single year, in the 50th year of communist rule.

Soviet police would not have been able to cope with the crime wave except for two factors, the shortage of cars which makes it impossible for organized bank robberies and getaways by switching cars, and the absence of roads, forces criminals to escape on trains. The Soviets have highly trained railroad police who nab the wanted persons before they can buy tickets to Sverdlovsk. Each train has a special security compartment with uniformed officers and plainclothes agents, and a 2-way radio/telephone linked to district headquarters. Descriptions of wanted men are flashed to all trains moving away from the scene of the crime and, in nine out of ten cases, the criminals are trapped aboard the train and handed over to *MUR* (Criminal Investigations Branch) inspectors at the next station.

If millions of cars are sold to private buyers, roads must be built and paved. Crooks, thieves and bandits will say goodbye to trains and *troika* sleds and take to motorized wheels. They won't have to buy cars. With so many autos around, they will steal them, or kidnap drivers at gunpoint. This is a serious problem in Russia and the Kremlin is aware of it. A special commission, headed by Major General Vladimir P. Savelyev of the Moscow Police, has been set up to study the impact of cars on crime and law enforcement.

Maintenance—Even today, with ridiculously few cars in sight, the Soviets lack qualified automobile mechanics, service stations and workshops. A flat tire and a flat spare, too, means the motorist may as well junk his car, for which he has waited seven years and paid dearly, because he cannot get new or used tires in Russia, for love or money.

A better illustration of the maintenance problem is that 640 new Moskvich cars were shipped to Norway last year; 540 arrived in perfect condition; the other 100 weren't damaged either, but someone had stolen or maliciously removed their radiator caps. The Russians claimed the Moskvich shipment was sabotaged by enemies of the Soviet Union. The Norwegian importers shrugged and requested an air freight

delivery of 100 new radiator caps, without which the car will not operate, as boiling water would spill over into the engine. The 100 cars still are waiting for the radiator caps in a Bergen parking lot. No spare caps are available in Russia and sending 100 extras to Norway means immobilizing 100 Moskvich autos in the Soviet Union. The Soviets suggested the importers order makeshift radiator caps from local toolshops and bill Moscow export agencies for the costs involved.

If the Kremlin is serious about motorizing Russia, much more is involved than selling cars to customers. Hundreds of thousands of technical, maintenance and service personnel must be trained and manpower shortages in other branches of economy and industry are bound to plague the Kremlin for years to come.

Parking—Today if the parking problem is mentioned to a Russian, he stares at one confusedly, shrugs and walks away. With so many empty spaces around, obviously to consider parking a serious problem is sheer folly. It is evident, however, that traffic jams and lack of parking space eventually will plague Soviet cities which have not been planned for private auto ownership. The streets are wide and smooth, and it is a pleasure to drive them—now. Parking cars at the curbs creates mile-long jams in both directions. There are no private garages, except in the suburban *dacha* villas of big shots. Buses and taxicabs have their own depots. Official cars are locked up for the night in guarded parking lots. The few fortunate owners of private autos have built crude packing-case sheds in the courtyards of their apartment houses, to protect the cars at night against thieves, vandals and hoodlums.

There simply is no room for hundreds of thousands of autos in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk and other cities of the USSR. In the West, authorities do not grant a permit to build a new hotel, movie theater, supermarket or residential tract unless the promoters provide adequate parking space either on, above or under the ground. No such provisions exist in Russia, so one can imagine the chaos if thousands of car owners tried to drive their own autos to a football game at the Dynamo Stadium, or spend a Sunday at Khimki Lake, where there is parking space for only 80 buses and no cars, along 12 miles of beaches.

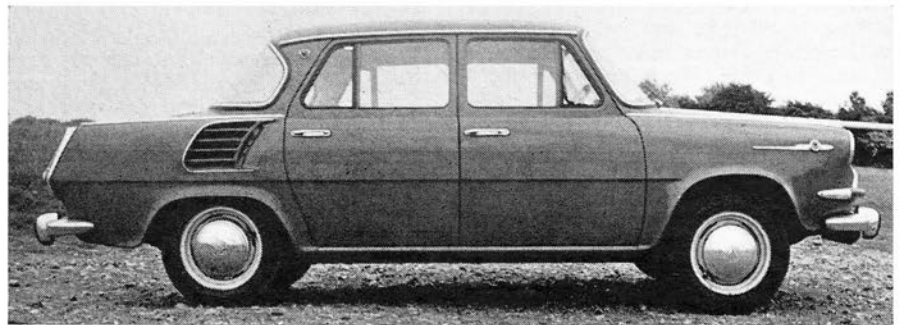
Roads—There are only 230,000 miles of surfaced roads in Soviet Russia, less than New York and Pennsylvania. Experts estimate Russians require at least 1.8 million miles of surfaced roads to accommodate all the cars they plan to produce. Construction costs differ, of course, but even

the cheapest European highways cannot be built today for less than a million dollars per mile. Engaged as they are in a costly space and missile race, suffering from shortages of food and limping agriculture programs, the Russians cannot afford that kind of money unless they divert resources from international subversion and do not send billions of dollars in military and technical aid to pro-communist regimes in Cuba, Egypt and Syria. This would mean a revolutionary change in Soviet communism.

Ideology—The basic principles of communism cannot be removed without destroying the elaborate superstructure of falsehood, hypocrisy and wishful thinking. The Reds believe pure communism will be achieved

somewhere in mid-21st Century, but in the meantime they are passing through the transitory stage of "constructive socialism." Under communism, each citizen will contribute to the state as much as he can, and receive as much as he needs, promise Red leaders. Under constructive socialism, each citizen receives from the state as much as he contributes. This explains the class differences between party big-shots and famous scientists on the one hand and factory workers and peasants, who contribute less in terms of real achievement. But if a new high class of privileged citizens is created by millions of auto owners, who have cars simply because they got hold of money, where are ideology and dogma? ■

SKODA SEDANS are priced at \$7500 in Czechoslovakia, but prospective buyers can't choose color or model, must wait 2-3 years for delivery.



THE WARSZAWA factory in Poland devotes much of its production schedule to a taxi version of its 203 sedan, but station wagons also are built.



EAST GERMANY produces this Trabant 600. Many are exported to Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, where they have gained a very poor reputation.

