The Automobile: Unwanted Technology-The Later Years Part I: Cars and Crises 1960-1990 Part II: The Dawning of Automotive Electronics
Several factors have influenced the size and design of domestic passenger cars over the past 30 years. Of most significance has been the influx of imported cars, initially from Europe, later from Japan. Interspersed within the fabric of this influx have been two energy crises and several recessions, and the onset of safety, emission, and energy regulations. These factors have led to various responses by domestic manufacturers as indicated by the types of products and vehicle systems that they have introduced during this period. This paper chronicles both the events as well as the responses.

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For the most part, “new” automotive technology was a refinement on earlier work, though these refinements were sometimes so extensive as to render the original work nearly unrecognizable. Cars are not merely continually perfected mechanical contrivances; since the 1920s nearly all have been mass-produced to meet a market, so marketing plans and manufacture to meet them have often dominated automobile design. It was Alfred P. Sloan who established the idea of different makes of cars produced by one firm, so that buyers could “move up” as their fortunes improved. Special safety features have been built into cars for years, some for the safety of car’s occupants only, some for the safety of others. The pre-war part of the classic era began with the Great Depression in 1930 and ended with the recovery after World War II, commonly placed at 1948. It was in this period that integrated fenders and fully-closed bodies began to dominate sales, with the new sedan body style even incorporating a trunk at the rear for storage. The Mustang was the hot ticket and was one of the most popular car of the early 1960s. In 1967 Chevrolet released the Camaro to compete with the Ford Mustang. In 1967 Chevy came out with the Camaro Z28, so in 1969 Fords competitiveness went into gear and they came out with the Mustang Boss 302 and the Mustang Boss 429. For the most part, “new” automotive technology was a refinement on earlier work, though these refinements were sometimes so extensive as to render the original work nearly unrecognizable. Cars are not merely continually perfected mechanical contrivances; since the 1920s nearly all have been mass-produced to meet a market, so marketing plans and manufacture to meet them have often dominated automobile design. It was Alfred P. Sloan who established the idea of