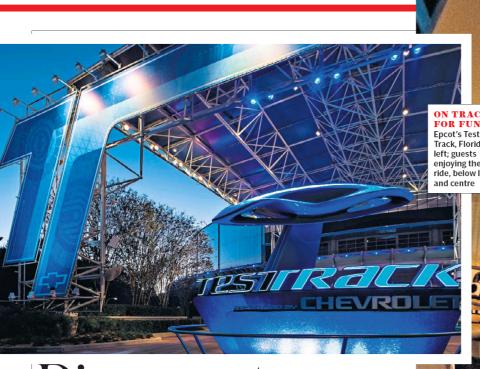
# OPEN ROAD



# Disney puts visitors in the driving seat

With a glitzy Chevrolet showroom and the chance to design your own motor, Epcot's Test Track knows how to take the boredom out of queuing, says Christian Sylt

lorida conjures images of theme parks, cuddly children's characters and, inevitably, long queues. It doesn't evoke images of stand-ing in front of a tuching in front of a touch-screen tweaking car

designs before they reach production – but it should. The Epcot part of Disney's sprawling theme park complex near Orlando, famous for its giant, grey golf ball-like structure, is a celebration of human achievement. The rides tend to be slow-moving and based on lofty themes like energy, marine conserva-tion, space and environmentalism. There is one big exception.

It is called Test Track and it has an

industrial feel that begins the moment you join the queue. Exposed steel walk-



wind around futuristic microcars, while hanging from the ceiling is a dissected General Motors (GM) EN-V, a two-seat urban electric concept car

developed with Segway.
Videos beamed on to the walls explain how cars are designed – and it soon gets hands-on. Chevrolet has its badge on the attraction and the part nership runs deep.

Although it may not be well known in the field, Disney has been involved with sponsorships for longer than many sports series. In the late Forties Walt Disney himself enlisted blue chip brands to help finance the construc-tion cost of his first Disneyland theme park in California. An innovative mar keting deal was struck where Coca-Cola was given rights to be the sole supplier of soft drinks within the park in return for its backing.

When Disney opened Epcot in 1982 it took corporate partnerships to a new level, as almost all of its main attractions had a sponsor. It helped ease the gigantic overheads of what was then the world's largest construction pro-ject. "General Motors became the first Epcot," says a GM spokesman. "Our re-

lationship dates back to 1945."

Disney now has a suite of partners which sponsor attractions at its park complexes in the United States, France, Hong Kong, China and Japan. While some opt for product placement in shows on the Disney-owned ABC television network or even branding in superhero movies made by its comic book division Marvel Entertainment, others, such as General Motors, work with Disney to design and brand theme park attractions.

Disney's Imagineers, the wizards who design its theme park rides, collaborated with GM to create a unique and relevant way to

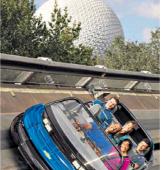
in the Test Track queue. "At Chevrolet, the diversity of talent on our team allows us to consistently produce sophisticated, refined and detailed design but we don't typically design through the eyes of a 12-year-old," said Jeff Mylenek, GM's manager of global exhibit and merchandising design.
"Working with Walt Dis-

while the time away

were inspired to see our brand story from a more youthful perspective and really opened the parameters on how to approach this design challenge."

In the Test Track queue

guests stand in front of touch-screens and are given four minutes to design a car.



Waiting guests get four

minutes to design a car,

then a computer creates

a 3D wire-frame model

You start by hand drawing a line from the front wheels to the back set to

give your creation a general outline. Some computer trickery then smooths

it out, like an aerodynamic airbrush, before you get a chance to drag the line in different directions thanks to three

Want a long-nosed speedster? Then drag one of the

discs over the nose and pop give it a natural spoiler. How

about more of an SUV? Just space the discs at the front,

middle and back then push them upwards to make your

outline less streamlined. The possibilities are endless – and this is just the start.

over again and creates a 3D wire-frame model of the emerging ride which will

The computer then takes

make your kids think they're on track to be the next Adrian Newey. It can be

rotated and dragged to adjust the width and length before selecting the engine,

bodywork, paint scheme, wheels and

number of options al-for the creation of

cars that resemble moon landers as

much as family

four-doors

Accessories range from mundane spoilers to hubcaps that look like hi-tech sails. The huge

movable discs.

justed to switch from a saloon with low-profile tyres into a monster truck in an instant. Each change affects four values at

Even the size of the wheels can be ad

the top of the screen – capability (handling to us Brits), efficiency, responsiveness and power. It's a bit of "edutainment" and it's carried through to the main event. All Walt Disney World park tickets now contain chips which allows them to store photos and video as well as credit card details (a cunning way of getting you to part with cash without thinking about the consequences). The tickets also interact with rides such as Test Track b storing your custom creations which

then get a virtual test drive.

The ride itself couldn't be much more different to the rarefied air of design. You sit in six-seater, 250bhp cars decked out like test vehicles. They appear to be moving under their own steam but are actually giant slot cars which race through an indoor track. It climbs over rough road surfaces and twists and turns around artificial haz-ards to show the difference made by

safety features such as anti-lock brakes
The finale comes when the car unex pectedly bursts through a hidden doorway on to a banked outdoor oval where the speedo hits 64.9mph – a fraction below the local speed limit. Test Track is no slouch and when it

launched, it was the longest and fastest ride in Disney theme park history. Throughout the ride, panels rank the performance of the cars created by the riders and at the end the winner is de clared. A giant screen shows the day's



top performer and although it doesn't affect the outcome of the ride, it gives guests a reason to return.

Chevrolet makes the most captive audience that is on a high after the ride. They are faced with more touchscreens, which allow kids to create a mock advertisement featuring the cars they designed. Guests also get funnelled through a glitzy Chevrolet showroom where they

can get hands-on with 10 cars including the all-electric Bolt and V8 Stingray. "The showroom at the end of the ride shows the end result of the design and testing that goes into de-veloping a vehicle – it ties the story of the ride together nicely. Also, it is an excellent opportunity for us to showcase the newest de-

the Chevrolet line-up," says the spokesman. Perhaps surprisingly, there's no hard sell as the cars aren't on sale. It gives it an atmosphere more like a motor show than a fore

signs and technologies in

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RIDE APPEAL **GM sponsors Test** Track, top; guests try out car design mascots Mickey and Minnie, inset

traffic. According to research firm Aecom and the Themed Entertainment Association, Epcot had an estimated 11.7 million visitors last year, making it the world's sixth most popular theme park.

The showroom is understood to be one of GM's largest lead gen-erators but the real impact is in

brand-building.
Unlike sports
teams, theme teams, theme parks aren't cluttered with corporate logos, which makes the ones that are there even more memorable, especially on ar-mies of early adopters. It's common to see parents explaining driver safety con cepts on the ride to their children and Disney also sells Test Track toys to drive the message home. It doesn't stop

there, as photo op-portunities with other GM cars, such as historic Cadillacs, litter Disney's Victo-rian-themed hotels the Yacht Club and the Grand Floridian. There are also tangible benefits, as GM is first in the queue when it comes to supplying car fleets at Walt Disney World. It

isn't just about boosting sales but in-centivising staff and clients, too. Hidden away in most Epcot attractions are corporate lounges and the one at Test Track is among the grandest, with windows overlooking the park and the in-doors section of the ride.

With its unusual location and satellite link to GM's world headquarters in Detroit, the lounge has been filled with everything from dealer meetings to executive management sessions. So Mickey Mouse really is playing a key role in boosting GM's business. Who'd have ever thought it?



# **HONEST JOHN**

# **EXPERT ADVICE**

The dealer you can trust is on hand to answer your questions on car

problems and consumer issues

#### GUILTY AS CHARGED

My elderly mother called out the AA to start her infrequently used car and the patrolman said it needed a new battery. He tried to sell us one, but we declined. The next day I went to ATS to buy a new battery, but they did a test and told me the battery was fine. Well done ATS Gateshead for honesty, but could the AA be making money dishonestly by selling batteries that aren't needed? GF

Let's see how long the existing battery lasts. Given the use it has been put to, it will have lost some of its capacity to hold a full charge so it would not surprise me if it fails again within

## JACK OF ALL

I am taking delivery of a new Mazda2 auto. I asked Mazda to quote for a spacesaver spare wheel, but have yet to hear back. Do you know of any other companies making these? RD

They are on eBay for £80, including jack and spanner: www.ebay.co.uk/itm/2007-To-2017-MAZDA-2-SPACE-SAVER-SPARE-WHEEL-15-034-Jack-amp-Spanner-Free-Uk-P-P-/331804647941.

### NAIL HARM STRONG?

My mother's VW Golf 1.6 TDI went for its MoT and a nail was found in the sidewall of one of the rear tyres. The garage said it would require a new tyre as

sidewall damage is not repairable, which I was expecting. As the tyres were more than 30 per cent worn (the other rear tyre was down to 6mm), they recommended replacing both rears on safety grounds. True or false? AB

I don't think that's necessary on a car like a Golf 1.6 TDI. wheel drive vehicle, because the tread disparity can confuse the system

# ALL ROADS LEAD TO

I like the look of the Dacia Stepway. Is there an automatic version on the way?⊤N

It's possible, but hasn't yet been announced. TRY, CONVERSION

Are there any companies that could convert cherished vehicles to electric? I might consider it for my 1999 VW T4 Campervan if the EU and government start banning old diesels. RO

Conversion of rear-engined VW Type 2s is common in the USA. These people have been around for a long time: www.battery vehiclesociety. org.uk/forums/index.php.

### CHEAP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING

I took my two-year-old Auris into a Toyota garage for a number of reasons one being that mpg had dropped from mid-50s to mid-40s. When I told them that I'd bought fuel from two major supermarkets thev added Redex

👔 additive. It is now up to 52 and still climbing. Is this the norm? IM

The Redex cleaned the deposits that cheap fuel had left in the system. It's best to use branded super unleaded, That way, you won't suffer the problems that the Redex cured.

#### RAMP ARTS My wife needs an automatic that will accommodate a mobility scooter. Any suggestions? AY

Go for an adapted vehicle with a ramp at the back, rather than one with a complicated hoist. There are a number of companies that offer adapted Citroën Berlingo Multispaces, Peugeot Partner Teepees or VW

Caddy Lifes. Try brotherwood.com or alliedmobility.com.

# THE BANNED PLAYED ON

THE BANNED PLAYED ON I have a seven-year old Saab, which I would like to keep, but I live in London and it is a diesel. What are my options? Could it be converted to petrol? MC

Yes, but it makes no sense. Diesels older than EU6 and petrol cars older than EU4 face prohibition from

London, on pain of heavy daily penalties, from autumn 2019. Older cars could be converted at colossal expense, but would still be bound by their original EU emissions rating.

# **LOT OF TROUBLE** I bought a Maserati

Quattroporte in a car auction, with the motif "sold as seen". Five miles down the road the oil pump failed, resulting in a ruined engine. Do I have any

Unfortunately not. 'Sold as seen" means there is no form of warranty.

# **TAIL OF THE UNEXPECTED**Occasionally the boot of my Seat Ibiza

ST won't open. I press the unlock button and all doors unlock except the boot, which sounds as if it's trying to unlock but the lid will not lift up. In each case, offer driving along a bumpy road, the "boot open" warning light appears on the dashboard and if I stop the boot opens. A squirt of WD40 hasn't helped. Any ideas? TC

All you can do is replace the lock servo. These do have a hard life from salt-impregnated water being flung against the rear of the car in winter.

### IN THE DARK

My 2016 Hyundai ix20 1.4 petrol does not have daytime running lights

(DRLs). I thought all vehicles of a certain age had to have them fitted by law? AD

Manufacturers had to fit DRLs to new types of passenger car and light goods vehicles (car-derived vans) from February 2011. Although your car was built in 2014, it's an older design that was type-approved before February 2011.

#### CIVIC RECEPTION What is the most reliable,

used, petrol automatic I can get for less than £8,000? Honda Civic 1.8i VTEC five-speed torque

converter Tovota Toyota Auris hybrid.

COARSE My VW Golf 1.4 TSI emits a growling noise at low speed or when accelerating. It has been

suggested this might be the air intake in the turbo. Is this a possibility and is this a known problem? JB That is most likely to be an air intake noise because a pipe has split or come adrift; not a fault with the turbo itself. But if it's the timing

#### chain you're in trouble ... CROSS PURPOSE

MASERAT

My Toyota Yaris is shod with Dunlop 175/65R15/84H tyres. I would like to fit Michelin Cross Climates but they do not appear to be available in this size. What would you recommend? AC

They do them in a slightly higher load rating: 175/65R15/88H XL.

## WRITE TO US

**NORWICH CITY** 

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Port Vale

Portsmouth

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