

I still want George Jetson's flying car

All the confusing dashboard technology doesn't make up for this ultimate failure

BY CLAUDIA GRYPVATZ COPQUIN

Remember the good old days, when all you had to do after buying a new vehicle was figure out which button unlocked the door and which one rolled the windows up and down? You didn't have to camp out in your driveway for two weeks, up to your ears in operating manuals for satellite radio, hands-free cellphone units, voice command, navigation systems, rearview cameras, automated parking . . . the list goes on and on.

Manufacturers still can't figure out how to make the flying car from "The Jetsons" we all thought we'd be zooming around in by now, so apparently they're trying to distract us with all sorts of complicated high-tech bells and whistles, placing newfangled equipment on our dashboards to simulate a flight deck and make us think they're close.

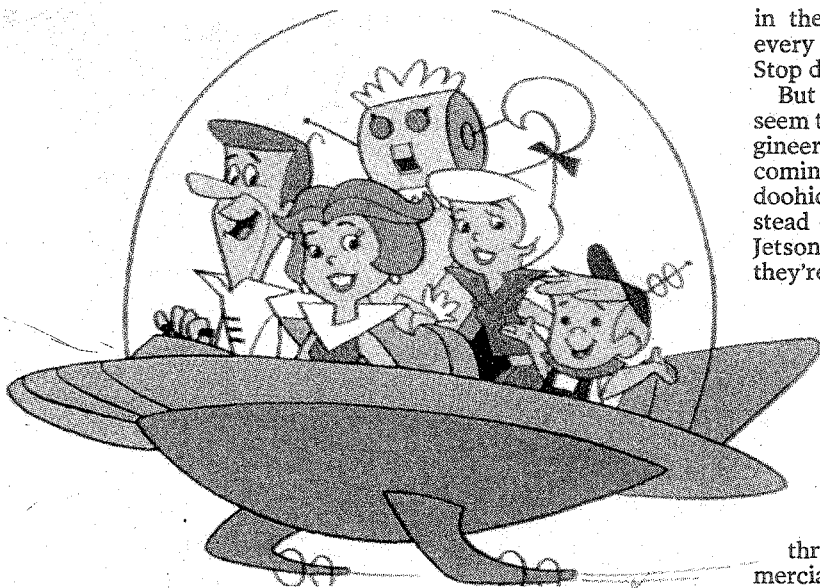
But all of this computerized auto wizardry is just making our heads do wheelies.

A recently released study by J.D. Power and Associates

showed that while the quality of new cars is perceived to be at an all-time peak, so is consumer bewilderment about the technology within. "Cars better, but confusing" said the headline in *Newsday*. The most often-reported complaints are about audio, entertainment and navigation systems, problems that are up by 45 percent since 2006.

Personally, I take no umbrage with my global positioning system — quite the opposite. Completely enamored, I cannot fathom how I got around for three decades without my GPS, and I can't help but dole out a haughty "I've got this" when people try to give me oral directions. But I do seem to have developed a sick codependency on the device, often blindly following its instructions when I know with 100 percent certainty that they are wrong.

Then there's the dashboard on my hybrid, which came with multiple charts showing me the gallons of fuel that I'm saving and when the battery smartly kicks in as I'm driving. At least,



I think that's what the graphics mean. Really, I haven't a clue. But I glance at them every one in a while, out of a deranged sense of obligation.

The hybrid, by the way, has a remarkably noiseless engine. It runs so inaudibly that sometimes after parking, I forget to turn off the ignition. I wonder what those cryptic charts register when the car idles for 10 hours at a time.

I also have issues with the built-in Bluetooth, a hands-free

phone gizmo that's supposed to keep both my hands on the wheel and my focus on the road. Instead, often when a call comes in, the Bluetooth has inexplicably disconnected itself from the phone. "Hello??" . . . HELLO?!" I holler wildly into an unresponsive system. That's not too distracting. Meanwhile, a good friend has a habit of carrying on lengthy gab fests over the speaker of her built-in car phone, without letting the caller know there are passengers

in the car, silently absorbing every word. Note to friend: Stop doing that.

But these sorts of problems seem to be of no concern to engineers, who as you read are coming up with more arcane doohickeys for our vehicles instead of concentrating on that Jetsons prototype. So while they're at it, here's the gadgetry

I'd like to have in the car of my future: a one-cup cappuccino dispenser, a garbage disposal for used coffee cups and a built-in flat iron for my hair. Oh, and also a fast-forward remote so I don't have to sit through unadulterated commercial breaks on the radio.

Yes, I'm still attached to my retro terrestrial audio system. It plays staticky AM channels and annoying Top 40 hits on FM. But it works with just one on-off switch and one volume-control button — old-fashioned, manual simplicity that keeps me grounded.



Claudia Gryvatz Copquin of Northport writes frequently for *Newsday*.