

Prof. Thomas Kaiserfeld  
 Department of History of Science and Technology  
 Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden

## **Born to run or chained to the car? American vs European visions and practices of automobile society**

### *Prologue*

In the 1950s and 60s, younger generations of Swedish townships and towns dressed in black leather clothes and boots as they gathered to listen to rock music and drink strong lager beer. Male hairdo was soaked in grease while female was fluffed up beneath kerchiefs. Central to this male dominated culture was rock music and the automobile, moreover the American automobile with stylish tail fins, chromed parts and over-sized body work.

In Sweden, these car-borne youngsters were named “raggare”. The origin was in the U.S. and the hillbilly culture of the south.<sup>1</sup> I will not dwell too long on the culture of younger generations in the 1950s and 60s. Only make the observation that these car-borne youngsters aroused quite some distress among older generations, not only in Sweden but in other places as well. But why were American cars such a central element among a group of North-European youngsters wanting to revolt against older generations? The case of “raggare” and their preferences for American automobiles may seem awkward but can in fact shed light on the issue addressed in this part of the conference: “What makes a car European and what makes its driver to *Homo Europaeus*?”

### *The problem*

The question is indeed reasonable since anyone, well almost anyone, can spot the differences between American and European cars, at least those built in the 1950s and 60s. In these decades, American automobiles were usually bigger and more lavish looking with at least some extravagant designer decorations also for the cheaper, albeit large, versions. In addition, they were equipped with electrical windows, automatic gearboxes, cup holders etc, while European cars on the other hand tended to be smaller, more rudimentary and stripped of details deemed unnecessary, at least in

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Kaspar Maase, “Amerikanisierung von unten: Demonstrative Vulgarität und kulturelle Hegemonie in den Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre“, in: *Amerikanisierung: Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds., Alf Lüdtke, Inge MarBoleck & Adelheid von Saldern, Transatlantische Historische Studien Band 6 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996), 291-313.

cheaper versions.<sup>2</sup> Taken together, Americans seemed to go for convenience and comfort while Europeans pointed out driver control as historian of technology Gijs Mom has framed the differences.<sup>3</sup> When comparing European and American cars, the 1930s over the 40s to the 1950s and 60s were the decades characterized by the most significant differences. The simple question asked in this paper is why? Answers will be provided by what is stated in the secondary literature and elsewhere.

Intriguingly enough, however, the fundamental question in automobile history of why American and Europeans cars have differed in design and construction has not been addressed too often despite the vast volumes produced on automobile history. There has never been any heated scholarly debate over which historical factors can be used to explain the differences between cars of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and which cannot. In fact, it is conspicuous to note how more general problems of the use of cars and practice of car driving has been painstakingly avoided in historical analysis. It is as if the cars themselves and their makers have seduced automobile historians into neglecting the people using and driving cars. As has been pointed out in one review article: “[...] to find reliable and in-depth scholarship on how the automobile was perceived, desired, obtained and above all *used* in everyday life by various individuals and social groups is [...] difficult, particularly when one turns to modern European history.”<sup>4</sup>

Why is this? There are in general two reasons why different historical problems are avoided. The first and most common reason is that it has not been thought of as researchable, perhaps not even solvable. This may be a reasonable explanation also in the case of the problem with differences between European and American cars. In one way, car design is just a manifestation of more general cultural differences between the continents and their inhabitants. To try to pinpoint down the reasons just for this singularity and its relations to other differences, much more influential and important, may not seem possible.

<sup>2</sup>Cup holders originated from the all-American habit of eating out in cars, see: Henry Petroski, “Drink Me”, [www.slate.com/id/2096958/nav/navoa](http://www.slate.com/id/2096958/nav/navoa), November 6, 2007.

<sup>3</sup>Gijs Mom, “Translating Properties into Functions (and Vice Versa): Design, User Culture and the Creation of an American and a European Car (1930-70)”, *Journal of Design History*, October 10 2007, doi:10.1093/jdh/epm023.

<sup>4</sup>Rudy Koshar, “On the History of the Automobile in Everyday Life”, *Contemporary European History* 10 (2001), 143-154.

But it may also be that there has been a lack of scientific interest in this issue. Such a disinterest will be especially serious when the expected solutions to the problem are deemed self-evident and obvious already from the outset. This is the second general reason why a research problem is neglected and not pursued, the problem is not evaluated as worth spending research resources on, especially time. In fact, this is also a very reasonable explanation for why so little has been done regarding the different uses of cars on different continents. Isn't everything bigger in America? So why shouldn't cars be too? After all, they are built to house these children of obesity, aren't they? Moreover, why on earth would it be interesting to try to find out why the differences between American and European cars appeared and what they meant for cultural life? Well, today there are strong political reasons for pursuing this kind of research through an awakening as well as eagerly promoted ideology of European identity. If anything, this conference and its themes is a proof of this.

Whatever the reasons are for earlier neglect of this issue, I think the problem addressed here is not only researchable and worthwhile researching, but indeed important. By trying to address the question of differences between European and American cars, I think it is possible to come terms with broader problems as well. Not only the differences between European and American car drivers leading to a discussion of the broader differences between Europeans and Americans, but also how technology, especially consumer technology, can act as a medium, an interface or perhaps even a catalyst for process where material conditions and ideology affect each other.

### *Financial conditions*

But now back to the original question. The differences between European and American cars, if not their drivers, are perhaps clearest among models from the 1950s. But long before then, the difference in preferences had been clear to automobile makers in both America and Europe. It seems as if the "lighter, cheaper and more modern cars" of European make out-competed American models in Europe already in the 1920s when European sales of the Ford Model T collapsed.<sup>5</sup> Although the problem has attracted sensationally little interest, at least one automobile historian, Rudi Volti, has noted in an essay:

<sup>5</sup>Steven Tolliday, "Transplanting the American Model? US Automobile Companies and the Transfer of Technology and Management to Britain, France, and Germany, 1928-1962", in: *Americanization and Its Limits: Reworking US Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan*, eds., Jonathan Zeitlin & Gary Herrigel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 76-119.

One obvious feature of American cars has been their size. For example, a 1930 Ford Model A roadster, the smallest Ford sold, weighed 2,155 pounds; a contemporary British Austin 7 weighed a mere 935 pounds. In the years that followed, both American and European cars got bigger, but the differences remained. A 1969 Chevrolet Impala was nearly 19 feet long and weighed 3,835 pounds. An Opel Rekord, the product of GM's European operation, was less than 14 feet in length and weighed 2,050 pounds.<sup>6</sup>

Volti goes on to list some features that explain the differences. Firstly, different levels of economic prosperity become clear when pointing to the purchasing power of a statistically average American worker having to spend three months at work to buy a Ford Model T in 1925 while his European counterpart simply could not afford a corresponding smaller European car. Before WWII, many Americans bought cars and carried the heavy costs sacrificing many other consumer products such as telephones. The second factor Volti points out is government policies for the protection of domestic markets from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>7</sup> This argument can however only be used to explain the existence of differences, but not the specific American preferences for comfort. One also needs to add that high European gasoline prices together with a tax system that penalized large engines in order to understand why European automakers went for small and medium sized cars when American raised engine size, power and comfort in the 1920s.<sup>8</sup> Thus, thirdly, the comparatively low fuel costs in the States due to domestic production as well as low tax levels, made fuel economy a second concern and enabled larger engines there. Fourthly, “large cars with big engines suited a vast, open country”, as Volti puts it.<sup>9</sup> Fifth, an oligopolistic situation in the American automobile industry in 1950s and 60s strengthened style, and perhaps size as a style element, as a concept for product differentiation.

Those are the main reasons given in the literature for the differences between American and European cars. Most of them, in fact all except the geographical one pointing to the vast empty plains of the U.S. are financial in one way or another. In this paper, this discussion will be further developed starting with noting that the financial explanations listed here embrace both supply and demand. On the demand side, there are the different levels of prosperity and higher gasoline prices as well as a tax system impeding the demand for bigger engines in Europe. On the supply side, there is

<sup>6</sup>Rudi Volti, “A Century of Automobility”, *Technology and Culture* 37 (1996), 663-685. Quote on p. 673-674.

<sup>7</sup>Volti, “A Century of Automobility”, 674.

<sup>8</sup>Patrick Fridenson, “American Dominance, 1918-1929”, in: *The Automobile Revolution: The Impact of an Industry*, authors, Jean-Pierre Bardou, Jean Jacques Chanaron, Patrick Fridenson & James M. Laux, transl. James M. Laux (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 91-121, on p. 102.

<sup>9</sup>Volti, “A Century of Automobility”, 675.

the oligopolic structure of the American automobile industry stressing design in order to achieve product differentiation.

### *Technological style*

Furthermore, it has been pointed out in the secondary literature that cars of European make in general were made of superior equipment. European cars were smaller, sportier and simultaneously marked by a higher degree of engineering skills.<sup>10</sup> This can be traced back to the very start of automobile industry when French engines, said to be the best in the world, were imported to America to be fitted into Pierce-Arrows. In addition, since automobile society developed in America already during the flourishing economy of the 1920s, but had to wait for Europe until the 1950s, European automobiles were, for a longer period of time than in the U.S., produced almost exclusively for wealthier gentlemen to be used both for leisure and transportation. As a result, European manufacturers developed automobile performance more thoroughly while Americans led the way in production efficiency.<sup>11</sup>

From the 1920s onwards, style developed as a key element of American car production. The origins of this process have conspicuously been termed “GM style versus Ford utility”.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneously, performance enhancing innovations for cars such as fuel injection, disc brakes and overhead camshaft engines had with the notable exception of automatic transmissions, first appeared outside America.<sup>13</sup> It seems as if the European tradition of automobile performance and driver control lived on in the inter-war period as well as during the cold war. Simultaneously, the American developments of production efficiency and driver comfort were strengthened by the mentioned oligopolic tendencies in American auto manufacturing.

The differences can perhaps be generalized by using the concept of style. Originally used by art historians, it was introduced into history of technology by Thomas Hughes in the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> The concept of style has to be used very carefully, but it seems as if there were indeed different and parallel European and American styles of automobile manufacturing and use during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>10</sup>Tolliday, “Transplanting the American Model?”.

<sup>11</sup>Volti, “A Century of Automobility”.

<sup>12</sup>David Gartman, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (Oxford: Routledge, 1994)..

<sup>13</sup>Volti, “A Century of Automobility”, 675.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Parke Hughes, “Regional Technological Style”, in: *Technology and its Impact on Society*, Symposium No 1 (Stockholm: Tekniska Museet, 1977), 211-234.

While American manufacturers stressed production efficiency, Europeans seem to have relied on product performance. These differences are also related to the preferences of automobile users with an American inclination for comfort and appearance that excelled in the 1950s with tail fins and chrome. Size was another important element made possible by a higher standard of living and income in the U.S.A. as well as lower running expenses due to lower fuel costs and taxes. Thus, the situation and preferences of consumers were important conditions for the different technological styles. Taken together, the differences of automobiles manufactured on the two continents can be described as an American technological style involving both demand and supply resulting in an inclination for production efficiency and driver comfort while a European accentuated product performance and driver control.<sup>15</sup>

### *Driving environments*

Apart from financial explanations to the differences, another factor mentioned in the literature, although only very briefly, is the rather thinly populated American landmass. It would be easy to analyze the differences in automobile design between America and Europe in the light of presumed differences in driving environments. To put it in blunt figures, there were 16 Americans per square kilometre in 1950 compared to 24 Europeans, which together with the car density of 3 persons per car in U.S.A. would imply a car density of approximately 5 cars per square kilometre compared to figures for Europe implying less than one car per square kilometre around the same period, thus in fact higher car density in America than in Europe.<sup>16</sup>

But these demographical exercises are purely academic. A measure more to the point would be cars per road kilometre, but such data is very hard to obtain, at least historical figures. And in the end, aggregate information of this sort is only of doubtful use since there are indeed very densely populated areas in the United States as well as desolated areas in Europe without this leading to regional variations in car design within the two continents.

Continuing along this track, there are specific European features that may be taken to favour function of smaller cars compared to the United States. For instance the layout of European towns and cities

<sup>15</sup>Mom, "Translating Properties into Functions".

<sup>16</sup><http://esa.un.org/unpp/>, September 6, 2007. Regarding car statistics, see: Jaroslav Purš, "The Internal Combustion Engine and the Revolution in Transport: The Case of Czechoslovakia with Some European Comparisons", in: *The Economic and Social Effects of the Spread of Motor Vehicles: An International Centenary Tribute*, ed., Theo Barker (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1987), 194-213.

are more often tighter than in the United States with narrower streets. This may have well have influenced automobile design in Europe until the 1930s when programs were started to build highways on the continent.<sup>17</sup> But again, the reasoning seems far-fetched due to high variations on the two continents.

There are indeed several problems with geographical-demographical explanations as these. First, they exclusively address the issue of vehicle size leaving the issue of other design differences out of the picture. Secondly, they cannot explain the lack of regional variation in car design within the continents, for instance why are not cars in New York smaller than in Idaho? Thirdly, the fact that many European urban centres seem ill adjusted to car society is much more likely an effect of the greater political influence of car manufacturers in the U.S. than in Europe, making American cities less and less densely populated in comparison to European.<sup>18</sup>

Despite European manufacturers' interest of constructing roads and establishing inns to make car tourism possible, perhaps best exemplified by the French *Guide Michelin* published from 1900, it has been harder for the automobile industry in the old world, to pave the way for their products into the old cities and towns than in America. In fact, French automobile supporters defended and cherished the typical villages with their castles and churches.<sup>19</sup> Town planning as result of mass-motorization is very much an American phenomenon only imported to Europe on a larger scale after WWII and then with mixed success.<sup>20</sup> In addition, American interests were active in planning an interstate highway system for Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Taken together, neither aggregate geographical-demographical data, nor cramped city space can explain the size and appearance of European cars in comparison to American. In addition, there are no known records where representatives neither for car manufacturers nor consumers have

<sup>17</sup>Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love of the Automobile: Looking back in the history of our desires*, German orig. 1984 (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992), 3-62.

<sup>18</sup>Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Pietro S. Nivola, *Laws of the Landscape: How Politics Shape Cities in Europe and America* (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 4-34.

<sup>19</sup>Catherine Bertho Lavenir, "How the Motor Car Conquered the Road", in: *Cultures of Control*, ed., Miriam R. Levin (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 113-134.

<sup>20</sup>Ueli Haefeli, "Urban Transport Policy: Actors and Discourse in Germany and Switzerland", in: *Road History: Planning, Building and Use*, eds., Gijs Mom and Laurent Tissot (Neuchâtel: Editions Alphil, 2007), 163-186.

<sup>21</sup>Pär Blomkvist, "Roads for Flow—Roads for Peace: Lobbying for a European Highway System", in: *Networking Europe: Transnational Infrastructures and the Shaping of Europe, 1850-2000*, eds., Erik van der Vleuten & Arne Kaijser (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2006), 161-186.

communicated preferences for smaller cars due to lack of space. Thus, these types of demand factors can be dismissed, at least in the 1950s and 60s when European road projects were well underway.

### *American preferences for largeness*

The size differences between American and European cars align well with a more general notion of American products such as foodstuffs, meal portions, white goods etc. being bigger in general. This idea may easily be generalized further observing the size of power dams, skyscrapers, cities, freeway systems etc. Whether these observations actually hold also after closer scrutiny is perhaps doubtful. There is however no question about the strong popular belief, almost consensus, regarding American preferences for size.

Ideologically, size in America can be attributed to a stronger interest in material conditions. Such notions often depart from early settler ideology, when success was rated after the size of land, cattle etc. If this reasoning is accepted, the size of things in America can be attributed to the material interest of European settlers escaping famine and poor conditions in the Old World. Many think such ideas still form American culture, characterized as it often is by the size of for example consumer products. In American culture, the conclusion goes, size is still often enough viewed as a positive cultural element.

Again, many of the things bigger in the U.S. can perhaps to some extent be attributed to settlers and immigrants reporting back to Europe, thus forming a strong and historically persistent view on American circumstances in general. In accordance with this view on America, it seems as if Americans retrospectively have adopted the idea that the U.S.A. is a home of the big, especially when it comes to consumer products where producers seem to compete about size regarding everything from furniture to groceries. If so, American automobiles simply conform to an American ideology of largeness. But the size element of American automobiles may be a foundation of these ideas just as much as their consequence.

### *Different perceptions of automobiles*

Car society and mass-motorization originated in America and had taken on proportions there already in the early 1920s that could not be matched in Europe even 30 years later. Simultaneously, European automobiles were originally, and for a longer period of time compared to America,



produced for a more limited, socially homogenous and financially wealthier clientele of gentlemen to be used both for leisure and transportation. When the markets were to be expanded also in Europe in the late 1920s and 30s, the depression put a halt to initiatives of manufacturers.<sup>22</sup> Mass-motorization did not arrive in Europe until well into the 1950s.

These very different social conditions for automobile use and manufacture have been connected to financial factors already develop in this paper—different living standards and incomes on the two continents as well as running costs depending on different tax systems and fuel costs. In addition, an oligopolic situation in the American automobile industry and government policies for the protection of domestic markets from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards conserved and developed the differences in technological style. The result has been a European focus on product performance and driver control while the American stress has been on production efficiency and driver comfort.

To continue, the next step is to discuss what the differences in automobiles developed on the two continents have meant for the use of cars and, furthermore, how automobiles have been perceived. For anyone doubting that uses of automobiles have, at least historically, been very different in Europe and America it should suffice to give two examples of all-American features of car society that never quite made it to Europe, drive-in cinemas and drive-in restaurants.

As has been mentioned, there were of course close relations between automobile industry and the tourist business in Europe to be sure, *Guide Michelin* perhaps being the best example. But in America, these types of back-up services were taken one step further. Drive-in cinemas were started as private initiatives on the American east coast in the late 1920s. In the 1930s, around 20 theatres were established. The boom came in the 1940s with 820 operating cinemas in 1948 and the real heydays were in the 50s with almost 5.000 drive-in theatres in operation in 1958.<sup>23</sup> During the same period, 1948 to 1958, 5.000 regular indoor cinemas closed reducing their number from 17.000 to 12.000.

Another American business demanding the consumer to be car-borne was the drive-in restaurant in operation from the 1930s. Drive in restaurants, where food is delivered to a parked car by a waiter, are not to be confused with the more recent drive-thru restaurants where (fast) food is ordered and

<sup>22</sup>Sachs, *For the Love of the Automobile*, 32-46.

<sup>23</sup><http://www.driveintheater.com/history/>, November 8, 2007.

picked up at a window. The history of drive-in restaurants is more complicated than its cinematic correspondence, quite a few different restaurants and diners have claimed historical precedence. There seems to be no question, however, that drive-in restaurants were established in the 1920s and expanded together with drive-in cinemas in the 1950s paralleling the expansion of automobile culture and its foothold among younger generations, a process simplified by a legal framework with famously low age limits for driver's licenses in America. Of course this was also connected to the rise of fast food consumption. In sum, both drive-in cinemas and drive-in restaurants surrounded by a fast food culture (together with a third American feature, the motel) went hand in hand with a precedence of automobile comfort to control.

Simultaneously in war-stricken Europe, the situation was very different regarding possibilities to develop business targeted for car-borne customers. Automobiles were simply not available to most Europeans. In order to change the situation, Ford targeted production for small and cheap cars in England and Germany.<sup>24</sup> The same reasoning was valid in France reflected by a statement made in 1946 by the president of Renault, Pierre Lafaucheux, when introducing the famous Renault CV4:

The idea of the automobile as a luxury product reserved for the wealthy is really outdated and must disappear [...] as far as passenger cars are concerned, our entire effort will be directed [...] toward a car that will be pleasing, of course, but with low price, its reduced cost of maintenance, and its meagre fuel consumption, will be available to levels of consumers that will grow larger and larger as French purchasing power expands.<sup>25</sup>

Lafaucheux indeed recited the rationales for a small and well-engineered European car as they appeared after WWII.

So while Americans began to demand ever larger, more comfortable automobiles after WWII, European car manufacturers were planning for smaller and cheaper cars. Simultaneously, the European technological style of product performance and driver control seems to have lingered on within given financial limits. In sum, comfortable American automobiles used not only for transportation, but also for pastime activities such as eating out and watching movies, connected the concept of automobile society at least partly to leisure. The European idea of automobile society was

<sup>24</sup>Steven Tolliday, "The origins of Ford of Europe: From multidomestic to transnational corporation, 1903-1976", 174, <http://beagle.u-bordeaux4.fr/ifrede/Ford/Pdf/Tolliday%20vol%201.pdf>, November 8, 2007.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted from: Jean Jacques Chanaron, "The Universal Automobile", in: *The Automobile Revolution: The Impact of an Industry*, authors, Jean-Pierre Bardou, Jean Jacques Chanaron, Patrick Fridenson & James M. Laux, transl. James M. Laux (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 171-207, on p. 173-174.

more instrumental signalling economic progress as more and more families could afford to buy a small Fiat or Renault.

These features of American automobile society in comparison to a European have led to some interesting observations. Best known are perhaps the insights about American driving habits given by Jean Baudrillard in 1986:

Gigantic, spontaneous spectacle of automobile traffic. A total collective act, staged by the entire population, twenty-four hours a day. By virtue of the sheer size of the layout and the kind of complicity that binds this network of thoroughfares together, traffic rises here to the level of a dramatic attraction, acquires the status of symbolic organization. The machines themselves, with their fluidity and their automatic transmission, have created a milieu in their own image, a milieu into which you insert yourself gently, which you switch over to as you might switch over to a TV channel. Unlike our European motorways, which are unique, directional axes, and are therefore still places of expulsion (Virilio), the freeway system is a place of integration (they even say that there are families who drive round on these roads in their mobile homes without ever leaving). It creates a different state of mind, and the European driver very quickly gives up his aggressive, every-man-for-himself behaviour and his individual reactions, and adopts the rules of this collective game. There is something of the freedom of movement that you have in the desert here, and indeed Los Angeles, with its extensive structure, is merely an inhabited fragment of the desert. Thus the freeways do not de-nature the city or the landscape; they simply pass through it and unravel it without altering the desert character of this particular metropolis. And they are ideally suited to the only truly profound pleasure, that of keeping on the move.<sup>26</sup>

The vast differences between European and American automobile use described by Baudrillard are of course as impressionistic as empirical observations of a French philosopher are supposed to be. It is still intriguing however, to note their accordance with notions presented here.

### *Conclusion*

Already from the early days of automobile manufacturing, there were two parallel paths of technological styles. A burgeoning automobile society in America can be characterized by driver comfort and production efficiency, perhaps with Ford's Model T from 1913 as the most well known exponent. In Europe, automobile use was dominated wealthy and adventurous gentlemen throughout the inter-war period leading to a technological style characterized by product performance and driver control.

<sup>26</sup>Jean Baudrillard, *America*, transl. Chris Turner 1988, orig. 1986 (London: Verso, 1989), 52-53.

Automobile society expanded rapidly in times of economic prosperity, 1920s in the U.S.A. and 1950s in Europe. In these processes, the two paths of technological style on the two continents manifested themselves in different uses and perceptions of cars. In American, comfort made cars a suitable place to snack away, watch movies and even make out. In Europe, the use of automobiles seems to have been more basic. Here, the most pressing issue among manufacturers seems to have been to construct automobiles that post war-Europeans could afford, making them smaller and thus less comfortable.

To take the analysis a step further, it is easy to couple automobile use in America characterized by drive-in cinemas and drive-in fast food to notions of a seeming careless life of younger generations. In combination with the space bridging capabilities of cars, the result has been an almost unbeatable symbol for rejuvenation as well as a vehicle for freedom and escape. In short, the car-borne American was born to run. In contrast, the symbolic European car driver has been a male individual on his way to or from work, often caught in a rush-hour jam. Or perhaps behind the wheel surrounded by an alienated family on their way to a resort. Trapped and without alternatives, he has lost control despite all the efforts of European automobile industry. In this way, he has become the opposite to his American motorist, a slave. In conclusion, American motorists are free to go where they please while the Europeans are chained to their cars.

### *Epilogue*

When younger Swedish generations of the 1950s, being from a country which had remained out of the war, made use of their comparatively advantageous financial situation in post-war Europe and accessed American cars to aimlessly cruise around, this was often viewed as a social problem more than anything else. Using big, lavish American cars as pastime became a way to provoke the European views and visions of what automobiles were and what they were supposed to be. Thus, to socialize in spacious cars, chromed in and out was not only a way to mimic American youth. Simultaneously, the behaviour challenged the traditional views of the car as a luxury in post-war Europe still plagued by material scarcity, while also challenging the small, cheap and fuel-efficient European-made car as a way to create a European automobile society.