

# THE MIDSHIP REPORT: WORLD CARS

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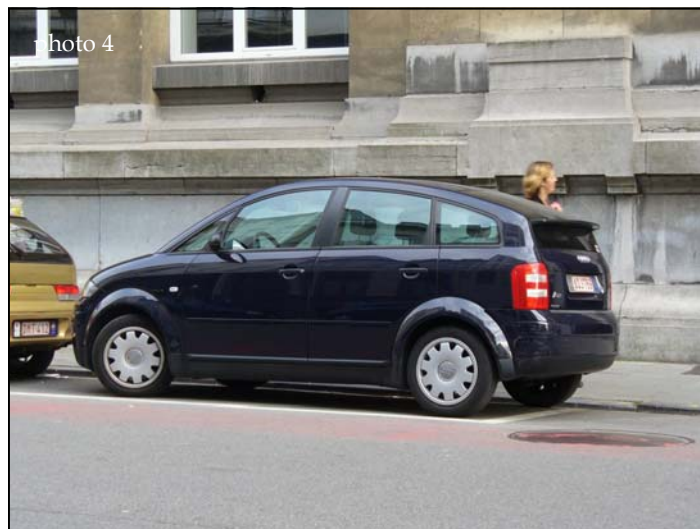
We just don't get it. Pick a car manufacturer. Any of them. Domestic or foreign. Doesn't matter. Large or small, there's something that stands out among all but one of the car manufacturers of the world: WE DON'T GET IT. Would you know a Nissan Micra if it pulled into your driveway? What about a Ford Ka? An Audi A2? What about the Smart CDI?

As I mentioned in last month's MIDSHIP, I'm on 'short time' at the office - my department is being outsourced, perhaps as soon as January, and I've decided it's my obligation to live like there's no tomorrow. I'm using my remaining airline days to fly to far-off

destinations in search of interesting automotive attractions. This past weekend found me in Brussels, Belgium where I took in cars in a museum and cars on the streets. The streets were better. This isn't a put-down of the Autoworld Museum ([www.autoworld.be](http://www.autoworld.be)) - they have over 300 cars with many notable examples, but all are in static displays ... whereas the streets of Brussels come alive with cars - even when parked. And thus my conclusion: *We don't get it.* Take a look at these photos - you'll concur. All the major auto makers market a number of completely different vehicles for the European market. All but one. Any guesses? ... starts with a P ... Peugeot? No. Po ... Not Pontiac.

Porsche. In my 4 days of strolling the streets of the E-U capital, I spotted 5 Porsches: three 911's (993 and 996 variants), and two Boxsters (986). These are 'world' cars - no second looks are necessary. The model line that Porsche sells in Europe is the same model line available in the USA. No so for the rest, as you'll see.

You're probably familiar with the SMART car (photo 1) by now. Daimler-Chrysler was expected to bring it to the US in the next year or two, but has officially backed out of that plan. It may not be the perfect urban car, but look at what it offers: 2 seats; can be parked anywhere short of a bicycle rack; has unique



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looks; and it's available as a cabrio. There's even a 4 door edition (photo 2). But we just don't get it (in the US).

Look at some of the others photos. The manufacturer names are all commonplace, but these cars aren't likely to ever be spotted at your neighborhood carwash. Photo 3: Ford Ka. Photo 4: Audi A2. Photo 5: Peugeot 206. Photo 6: Nissan Micra. Photo 7: An interesting illusion---this Renault resembles a US minivan. But note the figures in the background that are taller than the roofline of this micro car ---those are grade school children.



My favorite of this recent adventure is this VW (photos 8&9). This 'crossover' VW is a Golf (or Polo) from the front half, and a minivan from the back half. It's a weird combination that seems to work. And if you thought buying a *Caddy* means purchasing a General Motors product, think again (photo 10).



So? What's this all mean? As noted, Porsche doesn't market different cars for different (world) markets. It has four different model lines (911, Boxster, Cayenne, and Carrera GT) and a 5<sup>th</sup> line (Cayman) due shortly. And if you haven't been following the news, yet another model line is in the works: a 4 door variant that, from initial sketches released from Porsche (image 11), carries over many of the lines of the 911.

A lot of the Porsche faithful are starting to grow concerned over the direction Porsche is taking. More than once, I've heard: "What's next? A station wagon?". So let me be the first to say this: **The 4 door Porsche Panamera will be a success for the very reason the Cayenne is not.** And save the arguments that the Cayenne is a financial success or an engineering marvel. It is an exceptional truck. And it has NO BUSINESS being in the lineup of Porsche --a sportscar company. Period. So why will the Panamera work? For the same reason that you can travel to any corner of the world and spot the same Boxster that you can drive here in the US. It's the Porsche lines. Just as with



the 911, and just as will be with the Cayman. Consistent, identifiable, sporting lines. A truck can never possess those lines. The 4 door (as drawn) does it easily and ... successfully.

I've read that the current Cayenne line comes to an end in 2010. Wouldn't be a bit surprised it Porsche AG freshens it up a bit and re-markets. Everywhere, but the US.



photo 9



photo 10

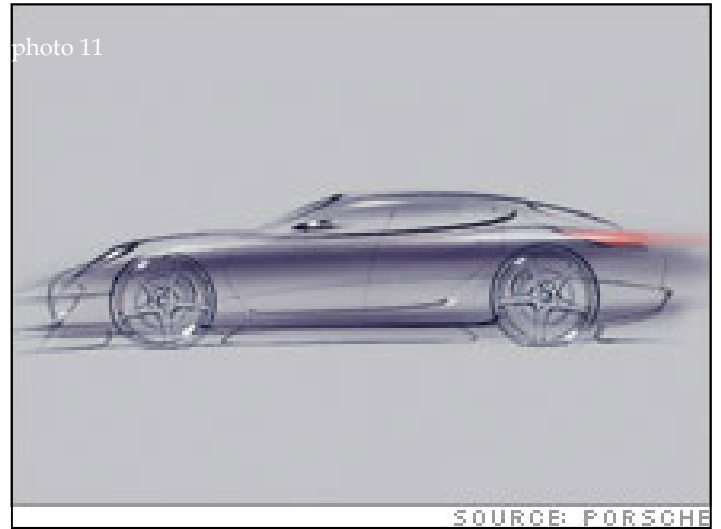


photo 11

SOURCE: PORSCHE

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