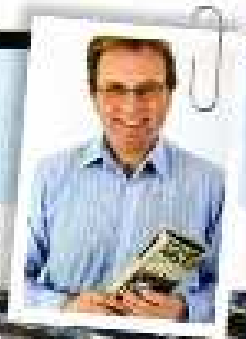


# James Ruppert



**Trade secrets** Is it time we were able to get Astras at Asda?

Like car showrooms, but I can't help thinking the way cars are retailed could do with a shake-up. I love the independent and prestige sectors, which are usually highly enthusiastic, but the mass-market sellers can be a little underwhelming and not always that helpful. Clearly, some showrooms are a waste of space.

To that end and, incidentally, not wanting to upset the UK fuelled Motor industry, I have found myself wondering out loud why Americans can't buy a Chevy, along with all the usual groceries, at Wal-Mart.

I was not alone. Industry veteran Peter Dantzer and his team at Automotive Research Solutions also thought the logical solution to the ongoing car sales crisis lay in rethinking how cars should be sold. With a huge marketing and retailing structure already in place, surely it wouldn't be much of a stretch to get a Chevy seen as an impulse buy at the discount.

Compared with short-term and costly wrappage schemes, it made all sorts of sense. Dantzer also had the air miles and burnt the midnight oil and few could argue that he was wrong. Except that it took one clever academic to point out that it was actually illegal for Detroit to sell new vehicles directly in the American public, because



Real stop on from here lets you buy a new car with your groceries

**'Mass-market sellers can be a little underwhelming and not always so helpful'**

manufacturers and dealers carve up the nation into designated sales areas.

Tony Polito is associate professor at the Department of Marketing & Supply

Chain Management, College of Business, East Carolina University, so he spoke from a position of colonial authority. He revealed the complex legal reasons why you can't

buy direct on the net in the US, even though dealers know it is an efficient way of working, because many re-market used cars this way.

Even so, post-bankruptcy GM piloted a scheme with 225 of its 250 Californian dealers on eBay. Customers could bid on vehicles and there were 950,000 searches in the first week but just 45 cars sold. Apparently, people enjoyed fiddling out as much

as they could online and then ending up at the dealer for a test drive anyway.

This may prove that selling cars really is a special case. Then again, selling cars in a no-bazooka, familiar retail environment – one where every car maker competes for your cash – must be tested. Given this brave new option, customers could pretty well head down the aisle...

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## I couldn't help noticing... Ruppert's secondhand obsessions this week



### Renault Kangoo 1.5 dCi 68

**What?** 2004, 36,000 miles, £1695  
**Details:** Authentic cabin, lots of space and super bike in city. A warranty costs extra, but insurance is not group four. **Call:** 020 8669 0928 (dealer)

### Ford Focus ST170

**What?** 2003, 69,000 miles, £2950  
**Details:** Not an RS, but any hotter than average Focus is good. Half-leather seats. A main dealer part-ec. **Call:** 01943 505006 (dealer)



### Lamborghini Gallardo

**What?** 2004, 21,000 miles, £16,995  
**Details:** F-gear paddle-shift Lambo with proper history and all the usual extras, including 16-wheel headlamps. **Call:** 01530 249628 (dealer)

### Maybach 57

**What?** 2004, 40,500 miles, £80,000  
**Details:** For £500 is the ordinary. How about this, which has had one previous high-profit owner? **Call:** 01982 371000 (dealer)

