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## **Wheels and the Web: Forbes keeps track if it's upscale or hot on the lot**

**By Mark Glover -- Bee Staff Writer**

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Successful business people --the kind who keep up with the business world through Forbes magazine --like to buy cars, too. Which is why Forbes last spring launched an automotive Web site tailored to its business-oriented audience -[www.forbesautos.com](http://www.forbesautos.com).

Billed as "geared specifically for the luxury automotive buyer," the Forbes auto site includes an extensive menu of services, including motor vehicle reviews, decision guides, year/make/model research and photo galleries.

Helpful hints include how to negotiate with dealers, how to do a thorough test drive and the ins and outs of financing and insurance. Online stories run the gamut, from coverage of faraway auto shows to lighter features, such as the top cars in James Bond movies.

Not surprisingly, the New York City-based Forbes auto site gets a lot of crossover traffic from those who peruse the company's bedrock site, [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com). In fact, that was one of the key reasons for starting [www.forbesautos.com](http://www.forbesautos.com).

"We have such a large business audience and a lot of people who are interested in lifestyle content," said Mary S. Butler, editor of ForbesAutos.com. " ... Naturally, many of these people are interested in luxury cars, or they want to get more vehicle product information."

Butler is no stranger to overseeing automotive Web sites. From 1998 to 2004, she was managing editor of the nationally popular [www.cars.com](http://www.cars.com) site, which provides information on thousands of new and used motor vehicles.

ForbesAutos.com's focus is narrower, geared to consumers seeking high-end vehicles. And instead of dealing with a wide range of model years, current vehicle selections span 2005-07 models.

Generally, Butler said the following criteria qualify a vehicle for inclusion on ForbesAutos.com:

- \* Vehicles with a base manufacturer's suggested retail price of \$30,000 or higher.
- \* Vehicles purchased by buyers with an average household income of \$100,000-plus.
- \* A "heat" factor, basically a demand measurement determined by wait lists, largest percentage of cash buyers, shortest number of days on dealer lots and other factors.
- \* Consumer perception: A model might be priced below \$30,000, but the make is perceived to be near-luxury or luxury level based on assorted variables.

In a nutshell, ForbesAutos.com visitors will not find every make or model sold in the United States, but they might be surprised by some of the vehicles encountered on a site geared to high-end auto purchasers.

For example, the Forbes automotive site includes vehicles made by Scion, the deep-discount

division of Toyota that markets to youthful motorists.

Butler explained that demand for Scion models tends to be high, and the general Forbes audience might typically include households with a prospective Scion buyer - a driving-age son or daughter, perhaps.

"Some of these cars spend very limited time on dealer lots, and the kids might want to buy as well, so there is high interest," said Butler, who noted that a regular ForbesAutos.com visitor might have one very pricey car in his or her multi-car garage, along with two other autos of comparatively moderate value.

Butler added: "Anyone interested in the hottest cars of any price point will probably find something of interest on the site."

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