

FALLCARGUIDE

the online revolution

Researching a car on the Internet could mean major savings

Let's say after years of driving your Cadillac Seville, you trade it in for a brand-new Lincoln LS, sticker price \$49,240. With considerable wrangling, you get the dealer to settle for \$500 over the invoice price of \$45,383 for a savings of \$3,357. You drive away feeling pretty smug. After all, your brilliant negotiating skills just saved you more than \$3,300.

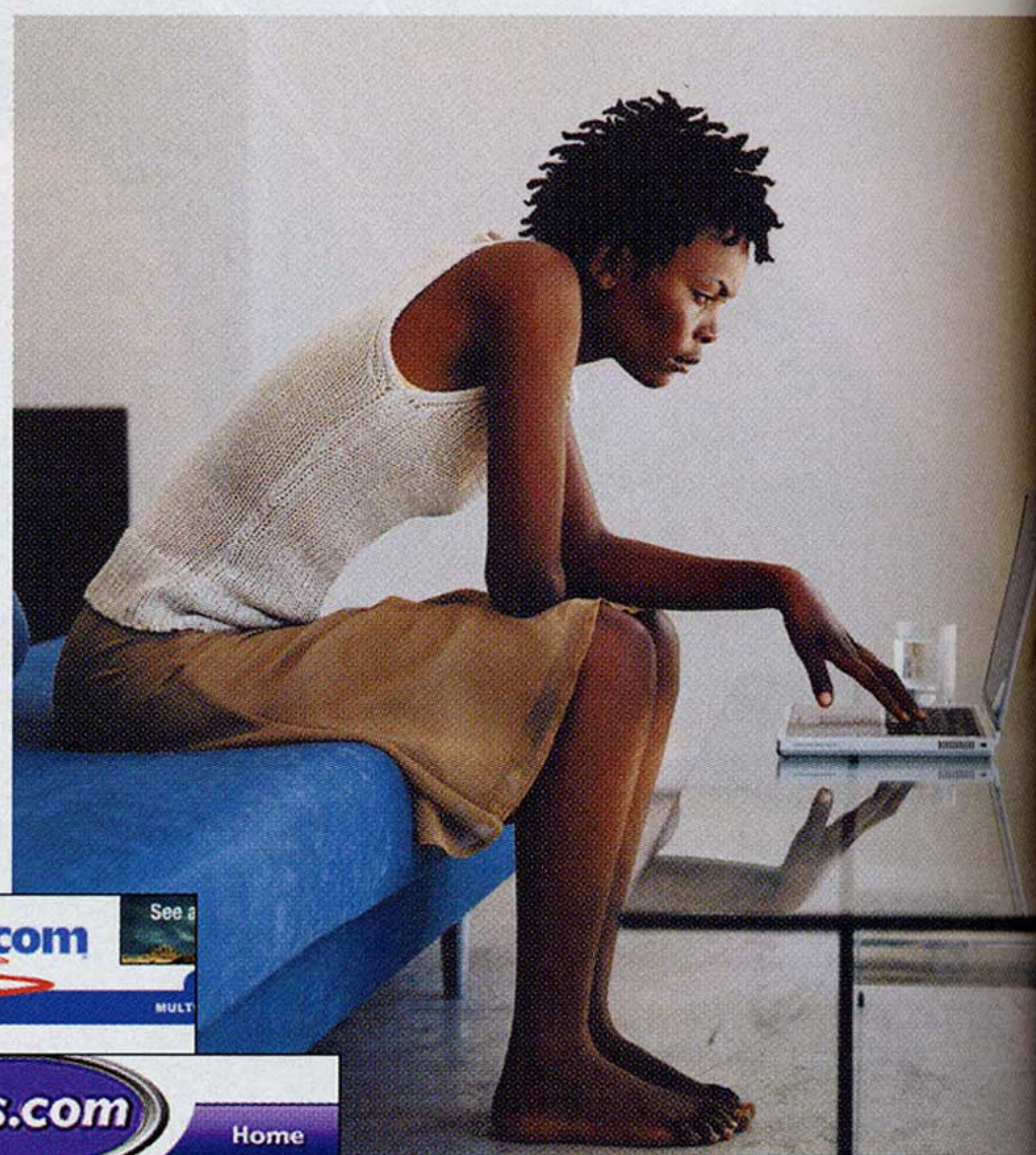
The next day at work, your girlfriend tells you she bought the same car for \$39,883! She, too, made the \$500-over-invoice deal, then trotted out \$6,000 worth of incentives and rebates she found on the Internet. And as a matter of fact, because you just happened to trade in a Cadillac, you could have taken another \$1,000 off her price, making yours \$38,883. Researching the Internet could have contributed to a total savings of \$10,357. Not researching costs you \$7,000. *Ouch!*

But online research is about more than invoice prices, incentives and rebates. It can also help you focus on what you want. "If your mind is made up before you go into a dealership, you reduce the chances of being talked into a vehicle you don't really want or need," says Brenda Moragne, publisher of the *Auto Industry Multicultural Network Newsletter*.

The three largest automotive Web sites, Autobytel, Cars.com and Edmunds.com, are packed with research material. In fact, there's so much, it can be overwhelming. That's why we consulted experts at those sites to learn how to best conduct research. Working your way through the following sections on these automotive sites will be time well spent. Not only will you have a firm idea of the best vehicle for you, but you'll also know how much to pay for it and where to buy it:

PAYMENT CALCULATORS They help you figure out how much car you can reasonably afford. Nearly any vehicle can be made to fit your budget if you stretch out the payments, but if you're considering a plan longer than five years, you're looking at too much car.

BUYING GUIDES Plug in your parameters (type of car,



size, features, spending limit) and the guides will help narrow your search to three or four vehicles that suit your needs and budget.

COMPETITIVE VEHICLE COMPARISONS They let you see features, pricing, current incentives and rebates as well as the cost to own a vehicle (fuel, insurance and so

on). You can also do a side-by-side comparison with other vehicles you are considering.

VEHICLE REVIEWS They allow you to see what the experts think about your choice.

PRICE QUOTES You can request these online from local dealers and compare prices. You can also schedule test drives online, but tell dealers you are only researching for now, and won't buy on the day you test-drive.

CREDIT RATINGS This info gives you an idea of the interest rate to expect on your car loan, based on your current credit standing. □

Lyndon Conrad Bell is the editor of *African Americans on Wheels* magazine.

Joe Foster of *Autobytel.com*, Mary S. Butler of *Cars.com* and Phil Reed of *Edmunds.com* also contributed to this article.

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