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JOHN SMYNTEK

GM lends cars to some big radio stars; ethics an issue

Limbaugh, Schlessinger, Hannity, O'Reilly among the takers

August 16, 2007

By JOHN SMYNTEK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The trade journal Automotive News reported Wednesday that General Motors has recruited several prominent radio personalities — many on a national scale but also in local markets — by providing the hosts with new cars and trucks to drive free for two weeks each month.

The deal also includes trips to Detroit to meet with GM executives and see the company's facilities.

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Among the hosts taking advantage of the deal are some of the biggest names in talk radio and a few who double on TV. Among them: Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Whoopi Goldberg, Sean Hannity, Ryan Seacrest, Glenn Beck, Michael Baisden, former Detroiters George Noory, Delilah, Laura Ingraham, Jim Rome, John Tesh, and Big Tigger, a former WJLB-FM (97.9, Detroit) morning host. Local hosts in Dallas were also mentioned in the story.

Limbaugh, Schlessinger and Hannity are heard locally on WJR-AM (760); O'Reilly airs on WKRK-FM (97.1); Baisden airs on WMXD-FM (92.3); Rome on WDFN-AM (1130). Ingraham is on WDTK-AM (1400), Noory on CKLW-AM (800) and Tesh on WMGC-FM (105.1).

The hosts are not required to mention GM but some, including Limbaugh, have done so, praising the vehicles' performance.

The disclosure raises anew the controversial issue of how electronic media figures are compensated. Radio has a long history of behind-the-scenes money being funneled to personalities, most notoriously during Payola scandals in the 1950s, '60 and '90s. In those schemes, disc jockeys and/or music directors received money, drugs or other premiums for airing specific records.

Noory, who hosts the syndicated "Coast-to-Coast A.M." show said "This story is inaccurate. In my case, GM provides us with several vehicles to test drive. I let my staff use them when they are provided. I will get comments from my staff or one will take me for a spin.

Noory, who grew up in Detroit, worked at WJBK-TV, Channel 2 and is a graduate of the University of Detroit added: "GM is an American company. I support them wholeheartedly and I personally lease a GM vehicle on my own accord with my own money!"

While broadcast networks (ABC, NBC, CBS etc.) tend to have stricter policies on what air personalities can accept, the syndicators who distribute the shows have less control over their talent, who often just provide a broadcast product as opposed to being an employee of the syndicator.

Tom Bender, who runs Greater Media's three Detroit stations — WRIF-FM, (101.1), WCSX-FM (94.7) and WMGC-FM said Wednesday via an e-mail inquiry that "at our stations, air personalities regularly do live commercials for selected clients. In the past, in order to do spots for those products in an informed manner, some of them have had test drives of cars or trials of other products. I am not aware of any local personalities currently driving GM autos. We do run the syndicated John Tesh show.

"All of this activity is covered by our standing policy concerning non-cash compensation for air personalities," Bender said. "There must be disclosure to station management, proper logging of commercial matter on the air, and we monitor live spots to ensure they run to proper length and that claims are not inflated. The facts concerning non-cash compensation (i.e.: 'I've been driving one for the past couple of weeks, supplied by...') are also regularly disclosed on air to the listeners in accordance with the FCC rules regarding sponsorship identification."

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Juggalotus

Who cares.

If they were handing out vehicles to Senators and Representatives in DC, then I'd be worried, unless it was reported as part of their lobbying income.

Handing some vehicles out to radio personalities so they can truthfully talk about the wonders of the vehicles rather than just reading the talking points off a sheet of paper is good advertising.

Besides, how many teeny-boppers will want a Chevy now because Ryan Seacrest drives one?

Posted: Thu Aug 16, 2007 11:44 am

TyDurden

Finally, a bipartisan issue -- freebies and kickbacks!!!

Posted: Wed Aug 15, 2007 11:23 pm

sage

This story was reported in Automotive News on August 6, not "Wednesday". Did John Smyntek just get around to reading an old issue of Automotive News?

Posted: Wed Aug 15, 2007 10:48 pm

loneranter

"GM borrows cars to some big radio stars"

The person that wrote that headline deserves to be fired!

Posted: Wed Aug 15, 2007 7:54 pm

dellkay

Sounds like sour grapes that no one from the publication received a free vehicle... I would rather see these folks drive around in a "free" American car than a foreign car they paid for!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! 😞

Posted: Wed Aug 15, 2007 7:18 pm

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