

With driverless cars seemingly just around the corner, it's hard to believe that just three short decades ago the last of the East German "people's car" -the Trabant, rolled off the assembly line in the town of Zwickau in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR). Powered (or underpowered more accurately) by a two-stroke 30 HP motor, the smoke-belching Trabant struggled to reach highway speed even under perfect road conditions. Made from recycled waste, the body of the Trabant -affectionately known as the "Trabi"- used a material called Duroplast, which is a mixture of Formica and Bakelite and similar to the table tops you would find at Tim Hortons. Gassing up the car was in itself a challenge, because there was no fuel hatch, and drivers were required to lift the hood and put gas directly into the tank. Step two of this was to add oil to get the right ratio of oil to gas -as one would a push lawnmower or a chainsaw. What's more is that the Trabant had no tachometer, no turn signals, no seat belts, and to spray the windshield required manually pumping a mechanical lever, as one would when putting air into a beach ball before a day of fun at the lake. Oh, and the car had no fuel gage (I'm not making this up) and was equipped with a dipstick to determine how much fuel remained. Read [here](#).



Karin

*"I don't know what's wrong, but, if you open and close the hood like this, it looks like your car is talking."*



Despite being a dreadful automobile, quite possibly the worst ever produced on a mass scale, East Germans considered themselves lucky just to get one, with an average wait time of ten years. The reason for this was the horrendous inefficiencies of the centralized command economy that characterized the Communist era. Simply put, there wasn't anything else and production levels averaged a mere 100,000 vehicles a year over the three and a half decades the car was made. What's more, is that the vehicles were essentially unchanged over their entire production period. Notably, this meant there was no improvement in vehicle emissions, and the Trabant was a significant source of air pollution with nine times the hydrocarbons and five times the carbon-monoxide of the average car today (not counting electric vehicles of course). Affectionately called a "spark plug with a roof", the Trabant was the result of a planning process which had been intended to design a three-wheeled motorcycle (hence the two-stroke engine). Incredibly, the lifespan of an average Trabant was 28 years, as citizens of East Germany paid particular attention to maintenance, given the length of time it would take to receive another.

Unencumbered by the engineering process, the lowly Trabant was nonetheless a cult classic and astonishingly, there are still about forty thousand of them sputtering around Germany today. With production ceasing three decades ago this month, the Trabant is a reminder of how Capitalism benefits us all. Competition between companies results in more innovation, greater efficiency and productivity, better quality, more choices and variety and lower prices for goods and services. As a system of economic organization, it has given us the highest standards of living in history. The capital Markets are the nexus which brings together people, ideas and capital for the benefit of all. Companies that deliver are rewarded with greater market share and their stock price rises accordingly. Those that don't, fail, and their customers shift their buying to their competitors. The Trabant could rest on its laurels, as it had no competition and was a powerful symbol of the failings of Communism. Indeed it has been referred to as "the car that gave Communism a bad name". So in that regard, there was value to it after all, and may the memory of the Trabant live on forever. Have a watch of this short YouTube video [here](#) for a closer look at this iconic car.



Be safe, be well!

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