

WDeye Online

by Vivien Santana Hughes



Note: interview subjects' last names have been deleted from Imagineering pieces written for internal publication.

It's A Car's World After All

New vehicles and an expanded track have given *Autopia* at Disneyland new life. But the biggest change may be that this attraction's story is told from a *car's-eye* view.

"You are what you drive, like you are what you eat," says senior vice president Tony ██████.

You might say that philosophy was one of the driving forces behind the new *Autopia* at Disneyland, a renovation that combined the Fantasyland and Tomorrowland tracks into one attraction. But the team had to tread carefully when tampering with the last remaining attraction from the 1955 land of the future.

"With the *Autopia*, we had a nice little attraction that everybody loved and grew up with," says Tony. "And for every 12 year old, it was the quintessential experience of what adolescence is all about—driving a car."

"We were changing one of Walt's original Disneyland attractions," adds show producer Bruce ██████. "So when we were done we wanted to make sure we had something better than when we started."

Of course, no one said there would be a smooth road ahead. "It's been a huge amount of work and a tough 18 months," says project manager Kevin ██████. "Everyone had to do more than just what their title states—as well as have a combined vision—to accomplish our goal." But there were light moments as well. "Most every week one of the team members came up with some comment or joke that carried us through, but it's been a blur from beginning to end!"

"That's what it's all about when you're an Imagineer!" exclaims Bruce.

Which brings us back to where Imagineers always start: the story. "People look at driving as a chance to extend their own personalities by what kind of car they choose," continues Tony. "When we were rethinking the *Autopia*, it wasn't so much about getting out on the freeway—a lot of people don't like that aspect of driving anymore. What's really exciting to people today is picking a car that is almost another character in the household, an extension of their personality."

But in the case of the new *Autopia*, the cars have their own personalities and guests just go along for the ride. "We have the cute car, which is a friendly shape, we have a sports car that's the aggressive car that zips around the track and the off-road vehicle with a design inspired by a dune buggy," says Jason ██████, the car designer.

And just what are their personalities like? The *WDeye* has invited the three "spokescars"—Suzy, Sparky and Dusty—to share their thoughts on what drove Imagineers to renovate the original "automobile utopia" and what's in store for human visitors. Click on Suzy, at left, to find out.

Suzy

I'm Suzy, the cute and cuddly car, and you'll find me and the other coupes in the bright, true colors of yellow, orange or blue.

In the new *Autopia*, Imagineers didn't have to make up a story. They're telling it like it is: *Autopia* is our place and humans, well, you're just visitors. It all started with our sponsor. . . .

"Chevron wanted to bring something to Disneyland that celebrates the personality of cars," says Tony.

And what with Chevron's very engaging ad campaign (in case you've had your head in an oil pan, it features the talking Chevron cars), the timing couldn't have been better.

"It's the parallel universe, the world according to cars," says senior concept writer Kevin ██████. As guests walk over the four-lane track on an elevated walkway, they can view our giant video screen—it's the cable channel cars watch, says Kevin. "For

example, people watch a news channel to get a traffic report, but a car gets a *driver* report, of course.” (That Kevin has street smarts!) “We had a lot of fun creating these warnings, like Hands-off Hannah who takes her hands off the wheel and bumps back and forth or Nervous Ned who doesn’t know where he’s going.” There are ads there too, like “Is your clutch engaged? Honeymoon at the Transmission Inn!”

And speaking of road jams (did you hear about the spilled load of strawberry preserves?), as the queue winds around through the tower, three, 3-D animated vignettes depict a car’s life. Created with Theme Park Productions, “They’re fun discoveries that guests will encounter in the preshow that set up the cars’ personalities,” says Kevin.

We got to team up with those cute Chevron cars for these.

Then comes the best part, a ride in one of us! Click on Sparky (at left) for “Building Car-acters.”

Sparky

A stylish sportscar—that’s me, Sparky, the only car model painted with ChromaLusion™, a sparkly metallic that makes my body look as though it’s encased in an “ever-changing palette of colors.” (The blue, purple, green and gold go through a range of the color spectrum when sunlight hits the cars.)

Now, our three unique styles of cars may look very different than the old vehicles, but actually they’re on the very same chassis. Original *Autopia* car designer Bob ██████ knows all about those. “The idea for the chassis came to me when I was driving home one day,” says Bob, a Disney Legend who consulted with the current team.

And the old cars were sporty, like me! “One of the things Walt had in mind for Disneyland was that Tomorrowland would showcase transportation of tomorrow,” recalls Bob. “So I began to do some sketches for a sportscar to fit the chassis.”

But while the old version was a classic, it didn’t allow for much, well, individuality. “Automobiles today have their own character,” says the new cars’ designer Jason ██████. “You look at certain cars and they have eyes with the headlights, and grills making up their mouths. So we wanted to play up that idea and exaggerate shapes and surfaces to emulate more of a personality.”

And the changes continue under the hood. “The new engines are environmentally friendly now that we’ve significantly reduced emissions,” says associate technical staff Greg ██████, an environmental engineer. There’s a 75 percent reduction in hydrocarbons, 70 percent reduced carbon monoxide and 50 percent better gas mileage. “In fact, fuel savings will pay for the cleaner-burning engines within a year,” says Greg.

So with cleaner engines and more stylish bodies, a car can’t help but be in a good mood. “The cars are upbeat and optimistic like Tomorrowland,” says Kevin of the 124 vehicles, plus 10 spares. “They have a great road ahead of them.” And, speaking of which, now its time to hit the road. . . click on Dusty (at left) for “On (and Off) the Road Again.”

Dusty

As the Sports Utility Vehicle of the group, I live for the open road. Which inspired my name, Dusty, and my colors, “Eddie Bauer”-like naturals of khaki, green and navy.

Now, this new *Autopia* road really makes my engine roar. “We tried to make the roadway look a little less like a freeway,” says Bruce. “It’s a little softer, more in keeping with Tomorrowland.”

To make up the entire new roadway, the two *Autopias* were combined into one big ride with four different tracks. “The challenge was to keep them all the same length so the guests all get an equal experience,” says Tony.

Explains principal dimensional designer Doug ██████, who designed the track, “We’d put a design together, go back and realize one track is 100-feet longer and then we’d have to throw that plan out,” says Doug remembering it took about 10 different versions of the layout to get it right, and he even managed to save 40 percent of the original tracks.

Other existing elements posed challenges as well, like working with the *Monorail* beam, the *Rocket Rods* track, the *Submarine* lagoon and a car with constraints on going up and down grades and not having a tight turning radius.

But they managed to work around those factors (these Imagineers are *roads scholars*!) and now the track is a lot more interesting. “We added ups and downs the cars could handle, turns, a tunnel and some show elements,” says Bruce. “And we’ve created an off-road area so the pavement ends and you’re actually riding on the muddy ruts of a dirt road.”

(In the expert opinion of this off-road vehicle, that’s the most fun part of the track and senior landscape architect Julie ██████ has given it just the right look.) “We went for a naturalistic, DAK feeling, laying the plants out but making them look like they’re not planted,” says Julie. “We used redwoods, pine and junipers to extend the alpine Matterhorn look and the area paving is the color of soil to appear like you’ve gone off-road.”

And there are other show elements along the drive. "It's a car's world, so they have a car park," says Kevin.

Your human parks would have famous human beings, like George Washington. But our hero is an original bronzed *Midget Autopia* car and bronzed *Mr. Toad's Wild Ride* car, both up on a pedestal. Even the fountain is made up of cars and the vending cart sells "hot rusted nuts." Great with a side of bolts!

Along the road there are billboards just for us, like the robot service station attendant saying "HUNGRY?" and carrying a platter of motor oil and spark plugs, or the animated sign for the Birdbath Car Wash (you know what birds do to cars. . .).

All in all, each track is over 2,500 feet and it takes guests about four minutes and 15 seconds to complete a lap. And one last thing: Look closely before you leave, I heard a rumor that the license plates have the Imagineers' initials on them!