

# SMART SHOPPING

## One Woman's Way To U.S. Automotive History

(NAPSA)—What do the Pony Express and the Internet have in common? They both made communications history in St. Joseph, Missouri.

It was in St. Joseph, birthplace of the Pony Express, that Beth Richardson became Autobytel's 10 millionth customer when, with the simple click of a mouse, she ordered a new Hyundai Accent for her college-bound son. The milestone underscores the sweeping impact of the Internet on America's car-buying habits. Autobytel is the site that is credited with inventing online car buying, offering comprehensive consumer resources for vehicle research, purchasing, ownership, safety and maintenance.

With her landmark purchase, Richardson joined the nearly 70 percent of consumers who are no longer making a dealership showroom their first stop in shopping for a new or used car. In fact, the solid majority of Americans are turning to the Internet and automotive Web sites like Autobytel.com, Autoweb.com and CarSmart.com to research and shop for vehicles.

"The Internet has changed the way cars are bought and sold," said Autobytel Inc. CEO Jeffrey Schwartz. "With up-front pricing and information so readily available, what once could be an intimidating experience has become a 'win-win' for everyone involved."

But the positive changes aren't just psychological. The Internet has helped deliver measurable benefits for consumers, both in terms of pricing and opportunity. Recently, the University of California's Haas School of Business and the Yale School of Management studied Autobytel and found that buying a car online can actually save a consumer between \$400 and \$500. Additional data from the study showed that while women and minorities traditionally pay more for a car, they can often get a better price online.



**A growing number of people are using the Internet when they shop for cars and trucks.**

The Internet has also helped many car shoppers overcome traditional distribution problems, especially in less densely populated regions—case in point being Beth Richardson, who lives in a rural area, miles away from a Hyundai dealership. Thanks to the Internet, however, she was able to use Autobytel to research her car online, submit a purchase request, and receive contact from a dealer within 24 hours with a no-haggle, no-hassle price.

"I work full time and we have four children to take care of, so I don't have a lot of time to waste," said Richardson, who volunteers at a local free health clinic. "Buying on the Internet saved me time and money—and the dealer even delivered the Hyundai right to our doorstep."

Autobytel celebrated its 10 millionth customer milestone by donating a community-based computer lab (complete with 30 new computers) to St. Joseph's Neely Elementary School. Appropriately enough, the gift was delivered via Pony Express.

"It was really cool to be able to visualize the progression of our communications through history—from the Pony Express to the Internet," adds Richardson. "This event is an example of the importance of the Internet, which will only continue to grow for our generation, and generations to come."