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Lifestyle



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A Classic Convertible Is Just Like A Chanel Suit

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by **Ralph McGill Jr.**

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A woman in a convertible sports car is the classic iconic symbol of glamor, freedom and liberation. Cybill Shepherd launched a career simply driving down the street in "The Last Picture Show." Audrey Hepburn in her Hermès scarf looked quite at home in her Alpha Romeo convertible - even without Cary Grant in "Charade." Susan Sarandon made the convertible a symbol of freedom from gender discrimination.

Everybody wants one.

But which one?

You might want to take whatever male advice you obtain with a grain of salt. Most men gravitate to what can only be described as bad-boy racers (cars that are macho, powerful, difficult to drive and eminently impractical). I once purchased a Corvette that looked quite racy but did not have a trunk. Other bad-boy racers are the Shelby GT 500, the Dodge Viper and even the highly rated BMW M3.



If one were to choose a convertible sports car, one should look for a balance of performance, comfort, convenience and luxury. A little prestige thrown in can't hurt.

Let's go with the Porsche Boxster, a classic, proven timeless design, like a Chanel suit.

Here's some great news for bargain-hunting sun-worshippers with a need for speed: the 2007 Boxster, which starts at \$45,600, now has a more powerful engine. In fact, the engine is the same as Porsche's stunning Cayman and Cayman S. The Boxster gets the Cayman's 245-horsepower, 2.7-liter engine along with VarioCam for extra oomph at the stoplight. It also has variable valve timing and lift to meet California's strict ULEV II standards. The Boxster's cousin, the Boxster S, had its 3.2-liter engine replaced with the Cayman S' 3.4-liter engine, adding 15 horses. Fuel economy is up for both Boxsters. Note that: more power - better gas mileage. I was getting close to 30 miles per gallon in the city and even more on GA 400.

Near the top of sports car design, suspension and setup, the Boxster, which got a major redo for 2005, restores and invigorates one's faith in the "entry-level" Porsche. The cagey Teutronics proved this point when a test drive was taken from Northridge to Roswell Road on twisty back roads, down hills and around hairpins. Some might want the suspension to have more power for tighter second-gear curves. But for me, on this type of road, no other sports car is more balanced, more rewarding or more fun.

Balance is the watchword in the Boxster. It is a mid-engineered car. The engine is placed right behind the front seats, in the middle of the car. The weight is perfectly balanced with 50 percent in front and 50 percent in the rear. Steering is neutral and easy. Large 18-inch tires grab the asphalt, and the Boxster will probably outperform your courage to press its limits.

With the engine in the middle, Porsche has created trunk space in the front and the back, which adds to the car's functionality. The interior is simple - leather and brushed aluminum. Controls are easy to find and are created with Germanic logic. The audio system is difficult to operate, a minor flaw.

Cup holders, which for years have been skimped on in German cars, now are ingeniously designed and will secure everything from a can of soda to a Big Gulp.



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My son insisted that we keep the top down all the time, but when the rain poured down, the top came up at the press of a single button. When up, the top seemed to be well padded for warmth and sound insulation. When down, wind deflectors built into the roll bars behind the seats acted as silencers for the considerable turbulence generated by freeway speed.

The top opening and closing mechanism requires one clamp and one motorized push button. When the top is stored in the rear, the area behind the seat is flush with the deck and behind the driver is a door that closes, enclosing it all.

In the 1960s, U.S. automakers took a car term from the Italians called Gran Turismo, which was then shortened to GT. The GT is a car, often a convertible, which is capable of carrying two passengers on a weekend trip with speed, elegance, comfort and style, and with enough luggage space to allow the fashionable couple to dress for dinner when arriving at the resort. Alas, the Americans have done their best to remove the meaning from the GT car.

But fear not, the 2007 Porsche Boxster upholds the grand tradition at an exceptional price.

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