

Smart car can put the pedal to the metal

By **TAJA JONES**
Catch 22

The Jetsons had it right with their vehicle of the future, which was not only bio-friendly but also had no need for regular visits to the gas pump.

Although engineers haven't yet developed a flying car, they have made progress in the field of energy-efficient automobiles.

For years, Europe has fostered the development of cars that would appear chic while zipping through the streets of Paris or Rome and that would protect its citizens from high gas prices. With that in mind, the Smart Car — Swatch Mercedes Art Car — was designed in 1973 by Swiss watchmaker Swatch and well-known German car manufacturer Mercedes-Benz.

U.S. Smart Car sales associate Eric Bruno said of the unlikely pairing: "They were like, 'Swatch makes watches. What does Swatch know about cars?'"

Despite the odd collaboration, the car was a design success and production began in 1998 in a small French town that has since been renamed Smartville. The long European history of the Smart Car, however, begs the question as to why it took 10 more years before the car was formally introduced in the U.S.

The cute and compact two-seater, which is dwarfed by a typical SUV, scares most Americans. The thought of being in a little car surrounded by 18-wheelers on the highway makes some nervous, which may be why it took the Smart Car longer to catch on in the U.S.

"People were concerned about small cars and safety ratings," Bruno said. However, the Smart Car packs a mean punch.

Given a five-star safety rating by



Eric Bruno



Photos: Andrew Bjork

The Smart Car was designed by Swatch and Mercedes-Benz.

the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the Smart Car is safer than many SUVs and a lot more affordable — it starts at \$11,590. And it's much more energy-efficient, getting anywhere between 35-40 miles per gallon in the city and 45-50 miles per gallon on the highway.

"Every time gas prices go up, I smile," Bruno said. "It makes my job easier."

The Smart Car comes with four airbags (two front and two side) for maximum protection. Plus, in a time of global-warming concerns, the Smart Car is the least CO2-emitting vehicle of its kind.

The waiting period for the Smart Car is now seven months to 10 months (it was two years when it first came to the U.S.). But if gas prices remain high, the Smart Car could be the automobile of your future. ★

By **JESSICA DUNBAR**
Catch 22

Wireless Philly: No strings attached

If you confiscate your child's cell phone, laptop or iPod, you could probably guarantee they will be found rocking back and forth, emotionally distressed, in their room hours later. That right there tells you how much we depend on technology. But what is being done to keep us all connected?

In 2005, EarthLink brought a citywide wireless-Internet bundle to Philadelphia. Then it gave up on the venture in the spring.

Now, a group of local investors has stepped up and taken over, teaming up with a small nonprofit group named Wireless Philadelphia.

Greg Goldman, 45, has a history of helping people and communities without resources, like with the city's MANN A feeding program he ran for people living with AIDS. For the past two years, he has been the chief exec of Wireless Philadelphia, an ini-



Thomas Kim (left) and Greg Goldman discuss keeping Philly connected.



tiative with the vision to close the digital divide in the city.

"In Philadelphia, we have ... about 600,000 households, but more than 300,000 of them lack any Internet access at all and are mostly low-income," Goldman said. "Of the 300,000 households that do have Internet access, only 25 percent have a broadband connection."

The remaining 75 percent without broadband have a dial-up connection, which recent

studies suggest is actually as useless as having no Internet at all because it does not match up with all the rich content on the web these days.

So how can Philadelphians

keep up with only 75,000 of us able to access the Web properly? Standing in line and waiting for a computer at the library will not do the trick.

Despite EarthLink's pullout, the effort to see the whole city connected — especially low-

income families — is moving forward, Goldman said. He is optimistic about its future.

Wireless Philadelphia works with existing programs in the city that serve low-income families. Approximately 40 of these programs or establishments have partnerships with Wireless Philadelphia as they attempt to bridge the digital divide.

Right now the network is still free. Wireless Philadelphia hopes to see it stay that way,

said Thomas Kim, the organization's operations manager.

"Right now, because everything is so new, we are still in the planning phase of how we can work together so that everyone can benefit from the wireless network."

Wireless Philadelphia's network was originally approved under by the city's previous mayor, John Street.

But Mayor Nutter has nothing but good to say about it.

"The concept of having free Internet access and helping in a variety of ways to bridge and narrow the digital divide is certainly a goal of our administration," Nutter said.

"We really want people to start using the free network, and to tell us about their experiences," Goldman said. "This new partnership presents numerous and exciting possibilities that were never available to us before, and we want all Philadelphians to help make the most of these opportunities." ★