

Dispatch Central



"Our community is comprised of several small neighborhoods, called **Villages**, which explains how our hometown got its' name."

In 2018, the median age for both sexes in **The Villages** metropolitan statistical area is 67.4, with this being 29 years older than a typical American, and five years older than the median age of residents in the next-oldest county in the United States, which is on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. Between 2010 and 2017, the population of The Villages area grew almost 33 percent, from 94,279 in 2010 to 125,165 in 2017. According to U.S. Census data released in March 2018, The Villages was the 10th in the annual list of fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the United States.

1. Ready or Not, Here Comes the Waymo Taxi Robot. **THE DISPATCHER**, November 2018.

2. PAUL EVANS: "Seven Little Girls Sitting In The Back Seat"

*Seven little girls sittin' in the back seat
huggin and a'kissin with Fred.*

*I said, why don't one of you come up
and sit beside me, and this is what the
seven girls said:*

*Keep your mind on your drivin', Keep
you hands on the wheel,
Keep your snoopy eyes on the road
ahead.*

*We're havin' fun, sittin' in the back
seat,
Kissin' and a'huggin with Fred.*

Driverless Power to the Geezers

A 'geezer' is defined by Merriam-Webster as an odd or eccentric person, used especially for older men. Well, in the sense that the term 'guys' was always used to refer to boys when I was growing up, but now can be used to refer to either sex, I will take the liberty to extend the term 'geezer' to everyone who is past middle age, regardless of sex.

I AM ON RECORD as stating that it is a shame to see Google wasting so much of our money (Where did you think its \$illion\$ came from?) on having its Waymo taxi division developing a driverless chauffeur service for rich kids and their parents in wealthy suburbs.¹ I was therefore pleased

to see that there is a company working almost exclusively with people at the other end of the age spectrum. VOYAGE AUTO is convinced that the real market



for driverless personal vehicles is in large retirement communities, like *The Villages* in Central Florida (see sidebar). The company has given several reasons in published interviews why it believes retirement communities will be the major market for self-driving vehicles:

- Retirement communities usually are in places where it doesn't snow, so self-driving car sensors will have an easier time functioning;
- The communities are self-contained, with the roads controlled and owned by the community organizations, generally have lower speed limits and less traffic;
- Demand has fewer peaks because everyone is retired;
- The owners of the communities can share in the income of providing ridership.
- Retirement communities are among the fastest growing residential areas in the U.S.

All of these conditions could also apply to a taxi service, but the cost would be higher due to the driver. More

importantly—and this is not stated in the articles—it would add another pair of eyes in the vehicle.² Retirement communities in general, and *The Villages* in particular, are places where ‘still active’ seniors retire to have fun. Smooching in the back seat of a car was fun as a pre-adult; why not as a post-retiree? I think VOYAGE and *The Villages* are on to something with eliminating snoopy chauffeurs.

VOYAGE AUTO was formed in 2017. It is a spin-out of UDACITY, the company formed in 2012 by Sebastian Thrun (2005 DARPA Grand Challenge, founded Google X and led Google self-driving car team). Thrun, a serial professor and start-up maven, is somehow involved in VOYAGE. UDACITY began as a company offering massive open online courses (MOOCs). When it started to offer a self-driving car curriculum, some employees decided to attempt a 32-mile drive in one of their self-driving test cars on busy El Camino Real during rush hour and without human intervention. Reportedly, after five months of failure, the team finally completed the route. They decided to start a new company as a result and called it VOYAGE AUTO. They raised an initial \$5.6 million from investors.

This is serious; we have to do something

No, it's not the POTUS talking about a wall. It's the Millennial socialists calling for a revolution and promoting their *Green New Deal*. Instead of a sixteen-year-old fronting this plan (see Musings) there is a twenty-nine-year-old, newly elected Democratic member of the House of Representatives, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (her adorers have started calling her AOC, like FDR and JFK, get it?), along with Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass. Ocasio-Cortez's credentials for getting elected were serving as an intern to Senator Ted Kennedy (although she must have been very young because the Senator died in 2009) and working as an organizer on Senator Bernie Sander's presidential campaign in 2016.³ She was a bar tender for four years before she quit to run for Congress. Ms. Ocasio-Cortez was elected on a Sanders-like socialist platform, and calls herself a Democratic Socialist.

The “Green New Deal” is the opposite of the real “New Deal”. While the “New Deal” was intended to put people to work again after the ***Great Depression*** and to offer relief to the massive numbers of unemployed by creating public work programs, the “GND” is intended to compensate people who are to be put out of work by the closing of workplaces as a result of GND laws. These laws would drastically cut allowed emissions and thereby quickly reduce them by shutting down fossil-fuel-based electricity

The New Deal - “The domestic program of the administration of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt between 1933 and 1939, which took action to bring about immediate economic relief as well as reforms in industry, agriculture, finance, waterpower, labour, and housing, vastly increasing the scope of the federal government's activities. The term was taken from Roosevelt's speech accepting the Democratic nomination for the presidency on July 2, 1932. Reacting to the ineffectiveness of the administration of President Herbert Hoover in meeting the ravages of the Great Depression, American voters the following November overwhelmingly voted in favour of the Democratic promise of a “new deal” for the “forgotten man.” Opposed to the traditional American political philosophy of laissez-faire, the New Deal generally embraced the concept of a government-regulated economy aimed at achieving a balance between conflicting economic interests.”

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3. Senator Sanders is a darling of the European Social Democrats, and a soul mate of a true socialist, U.K. Labour Party's leader, Jeremy Corbyn. He was born in a New York City borough, Brooklyn, attended college in Chicago and decamped to Burlington, Vermont in 1968 at the age of twenty-seven because he was “captivated by rural life.” He still lives there when he's not in Washington, DC.

Full Disclosure: I have been a registered Social Democrat in Sweden, although I am presently not a member of any political party.

generation and coal extraction. This will obviously also result in substantial layoffs. Democratic Party leadership has not welcomed this initiative since purposely putting people out of work has not been a pillar of its policies. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi refused to commit to holding a vote on the Green New Deal, saying Congress needs something that is “evidence-based.”⁴

Republicans are not missing the chance to call out the authors of the GND as enemies of democracy. Vice President Pence in a speech to a political action committee made an inevitable comparison to Venezuela as proof of the dangers of the socialist model.⁵ He said “... the only thing green about the so-called Green New Deal is how much green it’s going to cost taxpayers if these people ever pass it into law. The truth is, we want people to make poor people richer; they want to make rich people poorer. We want to make poverty more rare (sic); they want to make poverty more comfortable. That’s the choice we face today: between freedom and socialism, between personal responsibility and government dependence.”

The Sander’s phalanx of the Democratic Party is congratulating themselves on crafting a concept that they feel can gain the acceptance of unions and workers in the industries that will be most affected by actions they will take to combat global warming.^c Most Democrats are trying to create an alternative that will have a significant effect on reducing global warming while being able to gain support among their constituencies, the majority of their own party’s legislators and enough members of the opposition Republicans to ensure passage. The current administration is sitting in the catbird seat watching it all, convinced that pasting a socialist label over the GND and its backers will ensure its defeat, and that it can water down any centrist proposals. Unfortunately, the loser in this comedic tragedy will be the climate.

When is a Mustang not a Mustang?

ANSWER: WHEN IT’S AN AVIAR R67. I’m not sure Bill Ford would agree in this instance that, as Oscar Wilde said: “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness.” A Russian automobile company named AVIAR plans to build a battery electric vehicle that looks like a 1967 Ford Mustang Shelby GT500. Not satisfied with one rip-off, AVIAR has designed its instrument panel to look like a *schlocky* version of the Tesla Model 3. It is not clear whether the vehicle actually exists in prototype form or is still a Photoshop creation. As Oscar Wilde also said: “The truth is rarely pure and never simple.”

4. The proposed GND promises universal health care—beyond what is included in the current provision of health care under what has been known as ‘Obama-care’—and affordable housing. It has become a collector of everything on the wish list of the Democrat’s left wing, rather than a focus for climate change efforts. This is what the Millennium socialists see as its attraction and the rest of the party see as its unpassability.

5. The reference to Venezuela’s President Nicolás Maduro and the connection to Ocasio-Cortez, whose parents were both from Puerto Rico, was not inconsequential.



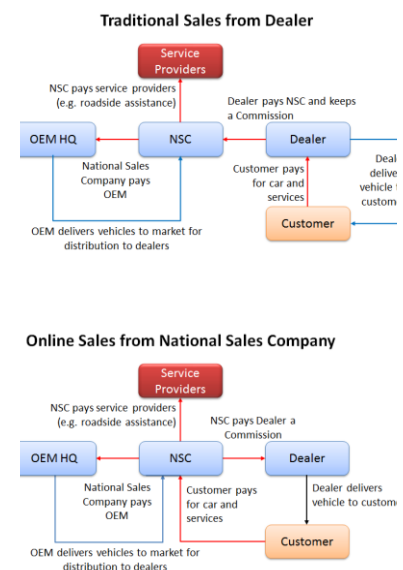
An OEM blinks (sort of) on speed

VOLVO CARS announced on the eve of the 2019 Geneva Motor Show that it would be limiting how fast its cars could be driven to 112 miles per hour (180 kilometers per hour) beginning in the middle of 2020. The top speed limit in Volvo's home market is 120 km/hr. The top speed limit in its biggest market, China, is also 120. In the U.S., Volvo's second largest market, the top speed allowed is 65-70 mph (100-112 kph) where it sells the most cars and 85 mph (136 kph) in the middle of Texas where if you aren't driving a pick-up, and especially if you are driving a fer'n car, you're probably going to get a speeding ticket even if your speed is under the limit. So why make a fuss about this announcement? Because even though it is totally ridiculous that motorized road vehicles can be driven at speeds that exceed the legal limits, nothing has prevented them from doing so. Nothing.

So let's look at this as a first step in the direction of correcting a huge error that both the auto industry and the world's governments have committed ever since there were motorized road vehicles and speed limits on roads. A little 'Hurrah' for VOLVO CARS. It would have been bigger if the limit was at least closer to the speed limits on the roads on which the cars travel. The really big 'Hurrah' will come when cars drive no faster than the speed limits everywhere.

...while another OEM blinks on sales

Mercedes-Benz, a division of DAIMLER AG, announced on the eve of the 2019 Geneva Motor Show that it would start a trial of selling its cars online. Sweden has been selected as the test market because the company determined that Swedes in general are more open to Internet services than people living in other countries. Moving to online sales for a car company that has depended on dealers for all customer contacts has not been easy. Negotiations in Sweden began a year ago with the dealer network comprising twenty-three franchise owners, some having multiple stores. The principal negotiating partner for MB with the dealers has been the general sales agent for Sweden, also known as a national sales company or importer. It will be from the general sales agent that customers will purchase their vehicles online for fixed prices. In other words, no haggling. Dealers will serve as the places where prospective customers can test drive vehicles and from where purchased vehicles will be delivered. This will establish the point of contact for warranty services, parts and accessories sales.

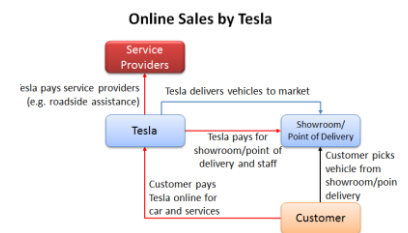


This approach seems to be totally reasonable. Dealers are still very much part of the customer experience. If customers are used to purchasing their cars and then using them as part of the trade-in for a new car, they can still do this with the dealers, but instead of receiving money off the purchase price, they will receive cash or in-kind payments for accessories or services. MB will evaluate the results of the test and decide whether it will roll it out in other markets. How the dealers react, and whether they believe it is a positive move for them will be part of the decision process.

MB's move to online sales is significantly different from Tesla's approach. Tesla has never had dealers or national sales companies. There have been showrooms where prospective customers could kick tires, get help from a human being to make the limited choices of exterior colors and interior finishes, organize a test drive and have a place where they could pick up their cars. At the same time as Mercedes-Benz was announcing its online sales test in Sweden, Tesla was telling its prospective customers that all sales in the near future would be online only. This is after it had made opening showrooms a major part of its sales process. Less than a week later, Tesla backed off its 'closing all stores' statement, saying that it would only be closing one-half of its showrooms. It found out that reneging on all of its leases was not possible, so it would be forced to stay put in half of its stores until the leases expire.⁶

Veoneer: After the hype, reality hits—and bites

"There is a growing understanding that it is going to take a longer time and cost more than we expected before completely self-driving vehicles become a reality," ruminated VEONEER's CEO, Jan Carlsson, in a Valentine's Day article in Sweden's premier business newspaper.⁷ The company had just reported a fourth quarter loss of SEK 800 million (\$80 million). The stock price had fallen from a high in August, 2018 of SEK 500 to SEK 200 in January. Falling car sales in China and dampened outlooks in Europe and the U.S. were part of the cause for the company's share price falls, but lower expectations for self-driving cars, a principal focus for VEONEER, was seen as the major culprit. Fast forward three weeks, and the same newspaper, but a different author, Robert Triches, put a different spin on VEONEER's prospects. He said the company is poised for major growth precisely because self-driving cars are not on the immediate horizon. VEONEER's strengths are in non-LiDAR technology (radar and cameras), and this is where the growth will be. Veoneer's order book is full and it has SEK 800 million in the piggy bank. The short-term looks bleak, but good times are ahead, thinks Triches.⁸



6. The reason Tesla gave for closing its showrooms was to reduce its costs in order to deliver on its promise of having a maximum price of \$35,000 on the base Model 3. Since it cannot close all of its showrooms, it will increase the price of its Model X and Model S. Tesla's stock price has fallen during the past month due to a fall off in orders for the Model 3 after the pre-ordered vehicles at higher prices were handed over to customers. On the positive side for Tesla, it has started construction of an assembly plant in China. It is the first car OEM that will not require a domestic joint venture partner in order to manufacture cars in China.)

7. Lundstedt, Mats. *After hajpen-nu bromsar Veoneer*. Dagens Industri. 14 February 2019.

8. Triches, Robert, Mats. *Veoneer får stöd*. Dagens Industri. 9 March 2019.