

INSIDE RADIO

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

Road Warrior Living A Dream

by Mike Kinosian, Personality Editor

Some people can rattle off 12+ and demo numbers for every station in the market of your choice.

Others don't need websites or the morning paper to recite batting averages or earned run averages for every player on their favorite team.

Yet another group of folks can run through specifications and parts for every conceivable automobile on the face of the planet.

Alan Taylor falls in the latter category and knows he's one of the luckiest people around.

Active Test Driver

While his official title is Producer/Host of Car & Driver Radio, Taylor is really living a dream. "I'm a contributing editor, but don't actually have to write for the magazine," he remarks. "Some guys are road warriors. They don't write, but make sure everything is happening in and around the magazine that is supposed to happen."

Among the duties of this ultimate car enthusiast is to appear on television. When Regis & Kelly needed someone to talk about cars at the New York Auto Show, for example, auto show representatives suggested they check him out. "They liked my demo reel and had me on," Taylor notes. "Even though Car & Driver has a television arm, I don't do anything on their TV show; I'm like the outside guy."

That's just fine with him, because it's actually less work. The crazy part of Taylor's gig is that he gets to test-drive at least one new car every week, but even that aspect gets more intriguing. "In between that, I'll fly off to some crazy site in the world and test-drive a car for a couple of days," he remarks. "I typically test-drive about 150 different cars a year."

All In The Genes

As a kid growing up in the 1960s in car-crazy Southern California, Taylor would regularly observe his father coming home in exotic sports cars he'd pick up for a few hundred dollars. "I just remember riding around with my dad in these cool open-top cars," Taylor recalls. "He's an Englishman and Europeans love the whole spirit of driving. It just got into me – perhaps as part of my British heritage. Not as a collector, but my dad kept buying more cars. He'd keep one for a year and sell it. He ended up going through Mustang convertibles and GTOs."

Just as Taylor was reaching his 16th birthday, his father had a 1969 Chevelle convertible with a 396 four-speed. "I'd take that car out and realized the love for cars was in my blood. When I was in high school, I bought a 1954 Chevy for 100 bucks. It was really kind of a mess. A friend told me about a guy who – if you got your car prepped out – would paint it for 200 bucks. I'm watching this guy paint my car at 2am and thought it was cool."

Six weeks after getting the car painted, Taylor sold it for \$1900. The next thing Taylor knew, he was painting cars himself. "I'm painting Ferraris, Porsches and everything else under the sun," he remarks. "It was just kind of an accidental thing – a love affair."

From Wrecking Yard To Microphone

In his early 20s, Taylor bought a wrecking yard in Oregon for \$5,000. Several years later, a KOPE/Medford, OR talk show host invited him to be an on-air guest.

The host wanted to know how a \$1 an hour increase to the minimum wage law would affect businesses – like Taylor's wrecking yard – with minimum wage employees. "We were supposed to be on for 10-15 minutes and wound up talking for an hour," Taylor remarks. "When I left, the station's GM said I should have my own show."

That guest spot made such an impression Taylor took the GM's advice and launched "Auto Talk" in 1992. "We did that for seven years and had [about 100 affiliates] on Talk Radio Network," he explains. "I was getting invitations to drive new cars all over the place and started thinking I could have some fun with this."

Award Winner

The next step was to approach Motor Trend Magazine and ask why they didn't have a radio show. "They said they would if they had someone like me," Taylor says. "After six months of wrangling, we made a deal. I thought I should [submit some entries] for the International Automotive Media Awards and ended up winning five awards."

That recognition quickly drew Car & Driver's attention and the competing magazine inquired about Taylor's availability. "I was basically under contract with Motor Trend and said the only reason I'd leave would be to have [show] ownership. At the end of the second year, I turned in 10 [entries] and won nine awards."

Involved Process

One thing Taylor didn't want to do was live radio. "It really needed to be more like a magazine," he states. "I did these interviews and put them all together."

Working day and night trying to get the show ready for the weekend, Taylor concedes, "It was complete insanity. I'd sometimes put 100 hours in a show, but it's the best stuff I've ever heard."

Interested in catching the sound of the cars, he'd go to the plant where they built the engine for the Car and Truck Of The Year and talk to people as they built the car. "You could hear the assembly line in the background. I talked from everyone from the president of the company to the person putting in screws, as the car went down the assembly line. You put that together with music and sound effects and it's like making a TV show for radio."

On-The-Job Learning

It's particularly noteworthy that Taylor did this without prior radio background. "When we began the radio show for Motor Trend, it started off very simply," he recalls. "Then I decided I should be there when the show was being edited. One editor was an 18-year-old girl who didn't even have a driver's license. Someone who doesn't understand anything about cars is editing for the sake of time – not content. In order to make sure the show was good, I stood there as the producer/director."

Much as he did when he watched his car being painted, Taylor learned through osmosis and even invested several thousand dollars in editing equipment. "I delivered the content," the father of four notes. "All they'd have to do is mix the music. That began my quest for insanity. I worked throughout the night. I'd also fly to places like Iceland to drive a Land Rover on

a glacier. I'd travel all around the world; come home to put together the radio shows; try to be a husband and father; and then leave again."

Best Interest At Heart

Impressed with what he was doing, Car & Driver basically offered Taylor a license agreement. "I'd proven myself by winning awards and I could own [the show]," he comments. "It was in my best interest that I not work myself to death, so I went to work for Car & Driver, which is the world's largest automotive enthusiast magazine; 10 million people read it every month."

During his "Auto Talk" days, Taylor handed the show over to Motor Trend and the magazine dealt with the network. But when Car & Driver offered him this opportunity, Taylor explains, "I couldn't take my affiliates with me and had to walk away from eight years worth of work. I left with zero affiliates and told Car & Driver they'd have to trust me and they did."

Changing Partners

A seven-month barter deal was struck with Infinity Talk KLSX-FM/Los Angeles GM Bob Moore and PD Jack Silver. "[KLSX] gets \$5,000 an hour for its time, but I didn't pay them anything," Taylor notes. "They told me I'd have to figure out what I wanted to do when football season started, because my slot was going to [be replaced by KLSX's football commitment]. In September [2003], I was working with [Radio America COO] Mike Paradiso and he wanted to syndicate the show."

That's when Taylor departed KLSX and partnered with Radio America.

The bulk of Taylor's week is making sure he drives what all other Car & Driver Editors drive. "When [Technical Editor] Larry Webster is on the radio show, I've already driven [whatever car] he's written about," Taylor notes. "I might have on a representative of [that particular carmaker] and ask why it hasn't sold as well as they thought it would. Maybe it's overpriced or not styled the way America wants. My job is to bring all the pieces together and do a radio story on the same things the magazine has covered. If they mention someone in the magazine, I want them on the radio show."

Entertainment And Car Mecca

Considering Southern California is a car Mecca, it is only fitting Taylor does his show there every week.

It originates from The Museum Of Television & Radio/ Beverly Hills and as Taylor explains, "It's a beautiful \$25 million building with unbelievably beautiful architecture. We get the best guests from the entertainment world [like Jay Leno on June 26th]; all the right people are in the area."

A former employee of one of "The Big Three" Detroit automakers – "Home Improvement"'s Tim Allen – is a frequent guest. "Tim probably knows as much or more about cars [than I do] because he used to work for General Motors in the Art department," Taylor remarks. "He did the artwork for the instrument clusters. In the early-1970s, he was given a set of plans in a sealed tube, but being who he is, Tim just had to open it. He got a glimpse of what was going to be the next Camaro. Tim just bought a new Porsche Carrera V-10."

Car Number Three went to Allen and Jerry Seinfeld – of course – got car Number One.

Car & Driver Are King

To capitalize on racing's popularity, Taylor expanded his radio commitments at the beginning of the year to two shows.

In addition to Saturday's 10am-12 Noon (ET) "Car And Driver Radio" offering, he also hosts "Car & Driver Garage," which features an hour of performance upgrade and an hour devoted to motor sports. "Because we're Car & Driver, the car is king," comments Taylor, who has raced in the Baja 1000, Nevada 100 and Baja 500. "But the other king is the driver. It's really about the automotive experience lifestyle. I told Car & Driver that radio – first and foremost – is entertainment. My most important job is to be an entertainer. We have to deliver a message within the entertainment, but the message isn't most important."

Something that baffles even Taylor is the fact that the trivia contests receive more female than male participation. "It's the weirdest thing I've ever seen in my life," he remarks. "We have something like a [75%/25% male/female split]. You'd think it would be strictly for men. I don't know the answer to a question about the winner of a race in 1967, but these women will call and, many times, will win."

Captive Audience

Next time you're flying the "Friendly Skies," don't be surprised if you hear Taylor on one of the audio channels. Since joining Car & Driver, he's been doing special one-hour programs for United Airlines. "I called

and said they had the worst Talk programming I've ever heard. People are sitting in an electric chair, can't move and are dying to hear something. I'm sick of listening to music and want to hear people talk about something I'm interested in. The one channel they have for Talk is a horrible infomercial. I build a new show for them every two months. They don't let you put in commercials, so I take my best interviews and sew them all together."

Mini Yields Maximum Pleasure

Seven cars comprise Taylor's current collection, but most don't get driven. "My taste has changed over the years and I have some weird stuff," he states. "I used to love tinkering with cars, but my time is so splintered now. I'd rather get into something nice and comfortable. I am, however, in the process of restoring an old Chevy pickup. It's been in the body shop for three years. I go visit it once every week or two."

Many people will, undoubtedly, be quite surprised with the car that's most awed Taylor the past year. "Oddly enough," he says, "I'm overly impressed with the Mini Cooper. I drove the Mini Cooper S Works Package in England. This little car is just so much fun to drive. If one person drives up in a Ferrari and another drives up in a Mini Cooper, both people will get the same number of looks. I drove the car for 2,000 miles in eight days. My 14-year-old son was with me and we had the time of our lives. The car didn't wear us out the way you'd think it would. My kids fight to sit in it and don't care if they sit in the back. Of everything I've driven, it's the one car that's brought a smile to my face."

Much like The Blues Brothers when they said they were, "on a mission from God," Taylor declares, "I feel I've been given this gift only He can give. My job is literally four hours a week. I don't ever want to move – I want to stay right where I am until I die."



WHO: Alan Taylor
WHAT: "Car And Driver Radio" and "Car And Driver Garage"
WHERE: Radio America
WHEN: Sat 10am – 12 Noon ET ("Car And Driver Radio") and Sat 4 – 6pm ET ("Car And Driver Garage")