Passage II

SOCIAL SCIENCE: Passage A is adapted from the book *Seabiscuit: An American Legend* by Laura Hillenbrand (©2001 by Laura Hillenbrand). Passage B is adapted from the article "The Flop Heard Round the World" by Peter Carlson (©2007 by The Washington Post).

Passage A by Laura Hillenbrand

The horseless carriage was just arriving in San Francisco, and its debut was turning into one of those colorfully unmitigated disasters that bring misery to everyone but historians. Consumers were staying away from the "devilish contraptions" in droves. In San Francisco in 1903, the horse and buggy was not going the way of the horse and buggy.

For good reason. The automobile, so sleekly efficient on paper, was in practice a civic menace, belching out exhaust, kicking up storms of dust, becoming hopelessly mired in the most innocuous-looking puddles, and tying up horse traffic. Incensed local lawmakers responded with monuments to legislative creativity. The laws of at least one town required automobile drivers to stop, get out, and fire off Roman candles every time horse-drawn vehicles came into view. Massachusetts tried and, fortunately, failed to mandate that cars be equipped with bells that would ring with each revolution of the wheels. In some towns police were authorized to disable passing cars with ropes, chains, and wires. San Francisco didn't escape the legislative wave. Bitter local officials pushed through an ordinance banning automobiles from all tourist areas, effectively exiling them from the city.

Nor were these the only obstacles. The asking price for the cheapest automobile amounted to twice the $500 annual salary of the average citizen—some cost three times that much—and all that bought you was four wheels, a body, and an engine. "Accessories" like bumpers, carburetors, and headlights had to be purchased separately. Navigation was a nightmare. The first of San Francisco's road signs were only just being erected, hammered up by an enterprising insurance underwriter who hoped to win clients by posting directions into the countryside, where drivers retreated for automobile "picnic parties" held out of the view of angry townsfolk.

The first automobiles imported to San Francisco had so little power that they rarely made it up the hills. The grade of Nineteenth Avenue was so daunting for the engines of the day that watching automobiles straining for the top became a local pastime.

Passage B by Peter Carlson

In the mid-1950s, Ford Motor Company was building not one, not two, but 18 varieties of Edsel, including a convertible and a station wagon. The designers came up with some interesting ideas. They created a push-button transmission and put it in the middle of the steering wheel, where most cars have a horn. And they fiddled with the front end: Where other cars had horizontal chrome grilles, the Edsel would have a vertical chrome oval in its grille. It was new! It was different!

Unfortunately, it didn't work. It couldn't suck in enough air to cool the engine. "They had to keep opening up that oval to get more air in there," says Jim Arnold, who was a trainee in Edsel's design shop. "And it didn't look as good."

Edsel didn't have its own assembly lines, so the cars were produced in Ford and Mercury plants, which caused problems. Every once in a while, an Edsel would roll past workers who were used to Mercurys or other Fords. Confused, they sometimes failed to install all the parts before the Edsel moved on down the line. Cars without parts can be a problem, of course, but other aspects of the Edsel juggernaut worked perfectly—the hype, for instance. The Edsel PR team touted the glories of the cars, but wouldn't let anybody see them. When they finally released a photo, it turned out to be a picture of . . . the Edsel's hood ornament. And hundreds of publications actually printed it!

On September 4, 1957, proclaimed by Ford as E-Day, nearly 3 million Americans flocked to showrooms to see the Edsel. Unfortunately, very few of them bought the Edsel. "We couldn't even get people to drive it," says C. Gayle Warnock, Edsel's public relations director. "They just didn't like the car. They just didn't like the front end."

But styling was hardly the worst problem. Oil pans fell off, trunks stuck, paint peeled, doors failed to close and the much-hyped "Teletouch" push-button transmission had a distressing tendency to freeze up. People joked that Edsel stood for "Every day something else leaks."

Another major problem was caused by bad luck: The Edsel was an upscale car launched a couple months after a stock market plunge caused a recession. Sales of all premium cars plummeted.

Before E-Day, Edsel's hypemeisters promised to sell 200,000 cars the first year. Actually, they sold 63,110. Sales dropped below 45,000 the second year. And only 2,846 of the 1960 models sold before Ford pulled the plug.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.

Questions 11–13 ask about Passage A.

11. Which of the following statements about automobiles in San Francisco in 1903 is best supported by Passage A?

- **A.** They were affordable for the average citizen but unpopular nevertheless.
- **B.** They were used more by tourists for sightseeing purposes than by citizens for practical purposes.
- **C.** They failed to capture the public imagination in spite of huge public relations efforts.
- **D.** They were considered a public nuisance by all but a small segment of the population.

12. Which of the following terms in Passage A is used more figuratively than literally?

- **F.** Puddles (line 11)
- **G.** Monuments (line 13)
- **H.** Bells (line 18)
- **J.** Hills (line 39)

13. The purpose of the quotation marks around the word *accessories* in line 29 is most likely to:

- **A.** suggest that the features were actually essentials.
- **B.** indicate that the word appeared in legal documents.
- **C.** emphasize that the word was widely misunderstood.
- **D.** clarify that inexpensive automobiles had some luxury features.

Questions 14–17 ask about Passage B.

14. Which of the following statements best captures how Passage B characterizes the failure of the Edsel?

- **F.** It happened gradually and went unnoticed at the time by the public.
- **G.** It happened quickly despite promising initial sales.
- **H.** It was on a huge scale, occurred swiftly, and was a public event of sorts.
- **J.** It occurred when other automakers were doing well and therefore embarrassed Ford all the more.

15. The statement in lines 43–45 is typical of Passage B in the way it:

- **A.** contrasts data about the Edsel with data about other cars of the 1950s.
- **B.** conveys the obligation that Ford executives felt to involve consumers in the design of the Edsel.
- **C.** combines an industry perspective on the Edsel with that of the typical consumer.
- **D.** suggests the entire Edsel enterprise was marked by extremes.

16. Which of the following events referred to in Passage B occurred first chronologically?

- **F.** E-Day ended.
- **G.** The stock market plunged.
- **H.** Edsel sales dropped below 45,000.
- **J.** Edsel sales reached 2,846.

17. As it is used in the passage, the term *premium cars* (line 86) serves primarily as a:

- **A.** reference to what Edsels have become now that they are valued antiques.
- **B.** name for a type of car that was ushered in by the makers of the Edsel.
- **C.** label for a category of cars that the makers of the Edsel intended it to belong to.
- **D.** derisive term used sarcastically by Edsel owners who were disappointed in their purchase.

Questions 18–20 ask about both passages.

18. A similarity between the two passages is that they both:

- **F.** examine their topics from a significant distance of time.
- **G.** reveal the author's professional background as a way of lending credibility to the text.
- **H.** assert that automobiles have contributed little that is worthwhile to society.
- **J.** incorporate information about traffic and road conditions into a discussion of automobile design.

19. An element of Passage A that is not present in Passage B is a reference to what aspect of the automobile culture?

- **A.** Related legislation
- **B.** Public opinion
- **C.** Economics
- **D.** Quotations from industry experts

20. If publicity experts had been assigned to build enthusiasm for the cars mentioned in Passage A using the methods described in Passage B, the experts would most likely have first released photos to the press that showed:

- **F.** cars going up Nineteenth Avenue in San Francisco.
- **G.** a single detail such as a gleaming headlight or a polished door handle.
- **H.** the meticulous work done along the assembly line to ensure the quality of the new car.
- **J.** an attractive young couple smiling as they enjoy a car ride past horses grazing in pastures.