



The Ultimate Buying Experience!

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For those of you that have read my other white papers, you know at times I am prone to rant. Be forewarned, this is another.

I have long been a fan of cars manufactured by the German Car company that promises the “Ultimate Driving Experience.” It is a weakness, I think my only one, but their cars are wonderful to drive. They do represent an “Ultimate Driving Experience.” I only wish that the buying and service experiences were half as good. Unfortunately, they are among the worst.

The dealer sales people do an OK job. I have a difficult time faulting them, after all, they are trained by the German Car company and must implement their programs. Also, it’s not difficult to sell to a person who has already made up their mind to buy a very expensive car at list price. Basically, their job is manage the transaction as efficiently as possible. My sales person did that reasonably well and was friendly in the process. I had some minor aggravations, but I’m a tough person to please.

As the transaction ended, the Ultimate Driving car was mine, I was handed a customer satisfaction survey. It didn’t surprise me, I had been handed the same survey when buying previous models and when picking them up after service. The survey said: “We want to be known for providing Excellent service. You will be called to ask your opinion of our service. Please respond Excellent to all their questions.”

Hmm, that’s interesting, I am being instructed what my buying experience was and how to respond to the survey. As I mentioned, I’ve received the same survey from other dealers for this German Car company before. They are the same, each survey instructs me that the proper answer for my buying or service experience must be “excellent.”

Clearly, they really don’t really care about my opinion or want to learn about how to improve the buying or service processes. It seems they just want to “stuff the ballot box” for the JD Powers survey. Also, they don’t appear to have much respect for the ability of their customers to have independent and well formulated opinions about their buying and service experiences.

While annoying, I didn’t think much of it, I had seen these before, it wasn’t annoying enough to waste my time on ranting. I wrote it off as another “clever idea” from a marketing person for this German Car company. It is unfortunate when they really don’t care about the customer, I guess when they sell the Ultimate Driving Experience, they don’t have to care.

A couple of weeks went by, I was enjoying the Ultimate Driving Experience. Then, I receive a letter from the financing division for the German Car company. The letter states that I owe the company a large sum of money for damaged to the leased car I turned in. I was shocked, the car I turned in was pristine. There was not a scratch on the car. The inside and outside of the car were immaculate, the mileage was very low, friends laughed saying the new car smell was barely gone. It could not have been my car.

As you might expect, I immediately called the finance division of the German Car company. In speaking to the agent, I was told there was serious body damage to the car, damage to two fenders, a door panel, the roof was pushed in, and so forth.

After some time, the agent said there was a possibility that the damage had been caused by the transporter, taking the car to the wholesaler. He said it wasn't unusual and that he would waive the charges. I was grateful and relieved, he handled the situation fairly. I did have some closing charges for the car and asked if I could pay them immediately by credit card. He completed the transaction, gave me the credit card transaction codes, saying that he would send me paperwork saying the matter had been closed.

Well, problem resolved, but how could they make such a big mistake? I was happy that the agent was reasonable and averted a potentially serious misunderstanding, but concerned that it could have been a potentially very serious problem.

I was upset with what had happened. Where was the dealer inspection, showing no problem? Why did I have to go through all this unnecessary work to resolve a problem that was the result of errors between the dealer, the finance company, and their wholesaler, and the contracted transporter? I called my sales person and told her my experience. She was shocked, she said something like that should never have happened. She would immediately look into it and get back to me. I thanked her and told her I would look forward to her response.

A couple days passed, then I received four letters from the finance company. Actually, they were two copies each of two letters. I guess they really wanted to make sure I got their message since they sent each to me two times. Each letter was dated the day after I had spoken to the agent for the German Car company finance division, cleared the matter and paid the outstanding balance. Each letter was signed by the person I had spoken to.

The first letter was an invoice for the new amount that I had paid the previous day. The second letter was a seriously worded notice demanding payment:

“Dear Mr. Brock:

As of August 27, 2002, the balance on your account at ALV¹ Financial Services is \$X,XXX. At this time, we will accept \$XXX as settlement in full. If payment is not received by September 26, 2002, this offer is null and void.”

WOW!! This had gotten really interesting! I was being threatened on something that I have already resolved and paid², more importantly, for a problem I didn't cause. What are they doing? Is this the way they treat their customers and then demand reviews of excellent service? It was even more upsetting, considering that in the past 5 years, I have bought and financed about \$200,000 in automobiles from them.

As you can imagine, I was more than a little angry. Again, I call my poor sales person to ask what is happening. She again expresses her shock, says that some dreadful mistakes have been made and promises to look into it. She asks what can be done to make me happy. I respond that I want the issue resolved and an apology from the company... yes, I am a little demanding, I did say the president of the finance division should call to give me an apology, but I was angry.

Well, over two weeks have passed. I am still enjoying the Ultimate Driving Experience. I have heard nothing from the dealer, the German Car company, or their finance division. Frankly, don't expect to hear from them, I don't think they really care about their customers.....except...

Maybe they will send me a customer satisfaction survey....

“We always want to deliver EXCELLENT customer service. When a representative calls you to ask about your experience with this transaction, please indicate your satisfaction by responding EXCELLENT to each question.”

So much for the Ultimate Buying Experience!

¹ I have opted to keep the name of the German Car company promising the Ultimate Driving Experience disguised.

² By the way, the time lapse between the date the original invoice was mailed and the resolution and payment with the German Car company financial services agent was 3 days.