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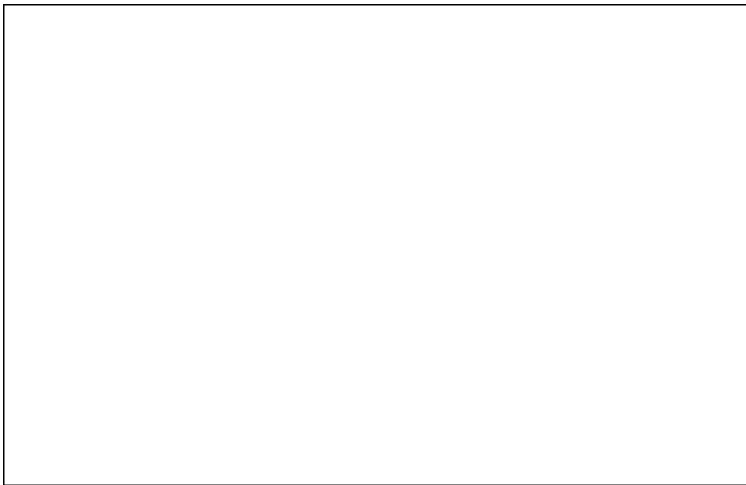
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### The (temporarily) old man and the Lambo

October 20, 2008 | 5:27 pm



The world is getting older. In many industrialized countries, such as the U.S. and Japan, the median age is rising fast, a fact that challenges car designers and engineers to accommodate an increasingly achy and inflexible clientele. It doesn't help that many car designers are young punks who think sciatica is some goth band. (Darn kids, get offa my lawn!)

To the rescue – slowly – comes Nissan, which has created a special “aging suit” to help designers better appreciate the infirmities of age.

“It's not always practical to recruit older motorists for product research,” said Nissan design engineer Etsuhiro Watanabe. “[The suit] allow[s] Nissan's engineers and designers to come up with solutions that make car use a safer and more positive experience.”

A couple of weeks ago Nissan sent me the suit – in a big Halliburton case – and invited me to try it out. The suit is actually a collection of ergonomic appliances designed to restrict movement and inhibit sensory acuity. To mimic a spreading middle-aged girth, for example, the suit uses a thick waist-belt with 11 pounds sewn into it. The belt makes it harder to enter or exit a car and can even cramp an engineer's movement behind the steering wheel in poorly designed seating.

Special raised-toe sandals simulate an older person's uncertain balance. Cloudy and tinted goggles simulate loss of peripheral vision and loss of color sensitivity. Large elastic bands around the knees and elbows simulate the loss of flexibility that comes with age. Gloves limit dexterity. Earplugs restrain hearing. In the 20 minutes that it took me to don the suit I aged from 48 to approximately 75 years old

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But it occurred to me that getting into a cushy Nissan Armada or even a Maxima wouldn't be much of a test. So I decided to try the suit out in the least elder-friendly car known to man: The Lamborghini Murcielago.

Lambo takes the same approach to ergonomics that Torquemada took to gentle persuasion. This car – a 632-hp, \$380,000 rocket ship – is only 44 inches tall at the windshield, about the height of a good cane. To gain access, drivers have to limbo under the scissor doors.

What happens next? Click the video to find out.

-- Dan Neil

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