

Research: Aggressive-looking cars most in demand

People generally tend to see human faces in all sorts of objects; not only car grilles, but also in clouds, for example. This psychological phenomenon is called *pareidolia* (a compound of the Greek 'para'/ alongside, and 'eidolon'/ image), an illusion involving a human interpretation of a vague or random stimulus. This phenomenon also drives us to ascribe character traits to the object in question.

Researchers at the University of Vienna had 20 men and 20 women form an opinion on 38 different car models that were launched between 2004 and 2006. The cars in question were judged on the following variables: childlike vs. grown up, subservient vs. dominant, arrogant, friendly vs. hostile, angry, manly vs. feminine, scared, upbeat, surprised, assenting, open, happy, excited, shy, outgoing, disappointed, neurotic, meticulous and 'I like the car'. Respondents were also asked whether they could discern a human face in the car's front.

Cars that are strongly associated with power were preferred. Such cars - including the BMW 5 series - are generally lower and wider, have pointy headlights and a large grille. The Toyota Prius was considered too friendly, leading to it being the preferred option for few people.

Reference(s)

Windhager, S., Schaefer, K., Thorstensen, T. (2008), Face to face; the perception of automotive designs. *Human Nature*, vol.19, p.331-346. *

*: available in the EURIB library.