

19a

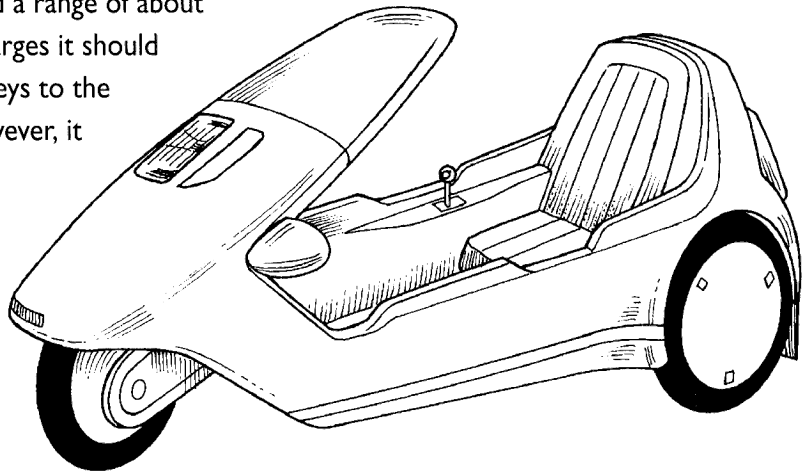
Failure

Cars that didn't sell

The Sinclair C5

In 1985 Sir Clive Sinclair, the British inventor and entrepreneur, launched the Sinclair C5. Sir Clive had put several new products onto the market with great success, including the digital watch and one of the first home computers, so the launch was accompanied by a lot of media attention. The Sinclair C5 was an electric car. It was large enough for one person and was open to the elements. Rather than a steering wheel, it was controlled by a joystick and was simplicity itself to drive. It was a three-wheeler built of fibreglass, light and close to the ground.

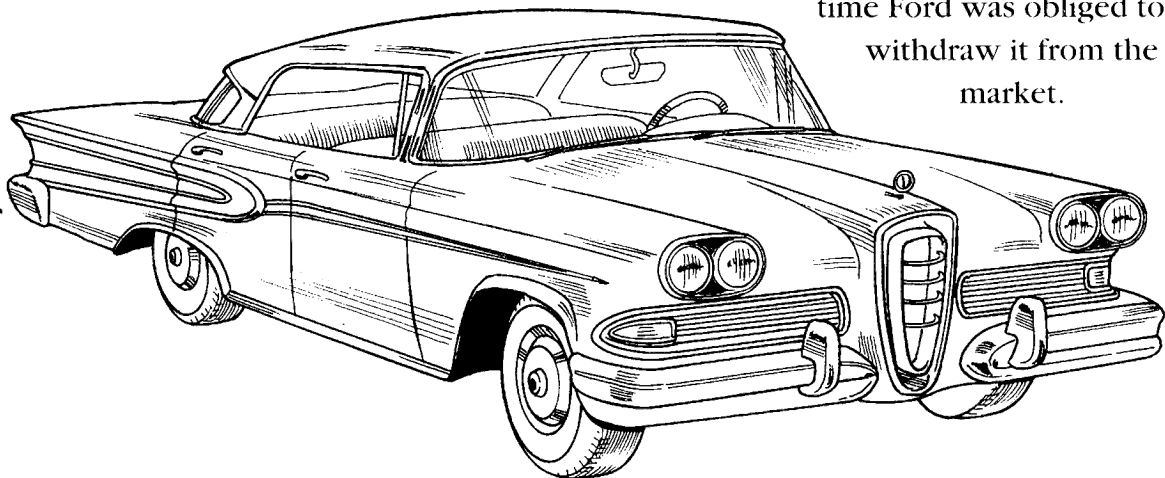
With a top speed of 20mph and a range of about two hours between battery charges it should have been ideal for short journeys to the supermarket or the office. However, it sold in tiny quantities. Within a few months it was possible to pick up a brand new C5 for a third of its original asking price, and it was soon withdrawn from sale.



The Ford Edsel

In 1957 the Ford Motor Company launched the Edsel, named after Henry Ford II's father. It was one of the largest private cars ever produced, and one of the most expensive and extravagant family cars on the market. Unfortunately it became the best known failure in the history of the automobile industry: nobody wanted to buy it. One business writer claimed that there was only one recorded case of an

Edsel being stolen, and within a short time Ford was obliged to withdraw it from the market.



Failure Worksheet 19a

ACTIVITY

Pairwork and groupwork: reading, speaking

AIM

To speculate about why two cars failed in the market.

GRAMMAR AND FUNCTIONS

Speculating about the past
Reminiscing

VOCABULARY

inventor, entrepreneur, launch, to put a product on the market, brand new, failure

PREPARATION

Make one copy of the worksheet for each pair of students and cut it up as indicated.

TIME

20-30 minutes

PROCEDURE

- 1 Tell the students they are going to talk about failed products.
- 2 Divide the class into pairs.
- 3 Give out the worksheets: in each pair give one student the text about the *C5* and the other the text about the *Edsel*.
- 4 Ask the students to read the texts.
- 5 Tell the students that there are two different texts: both about vehicles which failed to sell. In each pair, each student must tell the other about the text that she/he read. The two should then think of as many reasons as they can for the failure. Allow 10-15 minutes.
- 6 When the discussions in pairs finish, bring the class together and elicit reasons from the different pairs and write them on the board. For example: *Maybe people didn't want a vehicle for just one person. People must have disliked the looks of the car.*

The *Sinclair C5* probably failed largely because it did not appeal to a definite market segment: it was too small for housewives with children and shopping, too limited in range for commuters, too cold and uncomfortable for older people and had the wrong image for younger people.

The *Edsel* failed because at the time it came to market there was a fashion for smaller and more economical cars. It was also plagued with production problems: over half of all the *Edsels* produced had serious defects including non-functioning brakes, boots and bonnets that stuck, horns that would not turn off after they were used, paint that peeled and transmissions that failed.

FOLLOW-UP 1

In groups, students brainstorm a plan to relaunch the *Sinclair C5*.

FOLLOW-UP 2

Write the following question on the board: *What do you consider most important when you are buying a car: performance, price, safety or good looks?* Divide the class into groups of four to discuss the question. Then bring the class together for a discussion on what the five most important features are in a car.