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SUV-ing America, (Axis of Logic Exclusive), by John N. Cooper, December 9, 2003

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A Malcolm Gladwell article in the 12 Jan. 2004 New Yorker reports that buyers of SUVs generally do so for two reasons: they think they will be safer, more secure, behind all that steel and rubber; and they think that size and power promote respect.

The first is demonstrably false. Seattleans speak of SUVs-turned-turtle on slick icy roadways as Silly Upsidedown Vehicles. Market research indicates that buyers of SUVs tend to be "insecure, vain, self-centered ... self-absorbed, frequently nervous about their "relationships, and "lack confidence in their driving skills". They buy SUVs to re-enforce their self-image, seeking the illusion of security and prestige rather than its fact.

Further the result of such an individual's being behind the wheel of an awkward, bulky, massively unwieldy automotive missile is often more recklessly aggressive driving: If there's a problem it won't be this driver's! Statistics show that drivers and passengers in SUVs, and occupants of vehicles they hit, are often put at needless risk owing to the driver's unwarranted overconfidence. Like installation of ABS, which resulted in more accidents not less, SUVs create the illusion, not the fact, of invulnerability.

There seems to me a parallel with this country's behavior toward other countries: insecure, vain, self-centered, self-absorbed, nervous about relationships with other peoples, lacking confidence in our ability to lead by example and persuasion, we choose massive, awkward, unwieldy 'solutions' to international problems, pursuing the feeling of security rather than its substance. We have, for the last three years, been making enemies abroad faster than we can kill them, while fanning the fires of hys-terror-ia at home and trompling the principles upon which this country was founded.

What has become us as a nation? Maybe we should change our initials to SUA .. Sad, Upsidedown, America.

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