CREATIVE SYNDICATE

A cat in the cold chamber.

Pilar Lastra is almost the cargirl next door — except that she was a Playboy Playmate and represents the Playboy Mazda MX-5 Cup Series. She loves fast driving, has shot the corkscrew at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, and she's friendly with Mario Andretti.

She also wrote the type of relationship manual that most men wish came in the glove box of every female they date — "Treat Me Like Your Car: A man's guide to how to treat a lady."

Go figure, even Playmates have troubles with boyfriends. Lastra, not married, has found clever ways to communicate with the opposite sex through simple terms, to which any male car enthusiast can relate. Even old married guys can benefit from the book, too. It is published by iUniverse.com, $13.95, 136 pages.

CREATIVE SYNDICATE

A Land Rover Freelander in its element.

Brits Testing in the Big Chill Jaguar Land Rover officially opened a new winter test facility in International Falls, Minn. The region is well known for extreme weather and cold temps — to minus-55 degrees. It is an inviting test spot to torture new models. The facility includes cold-testing chambers, snow-covered test surfaces, a (frozen) lake and a concrete test track.

Up to 25 engineers will be on site during peak season when the facility will be used from November to March.

The British carmaker, now owned by India-based Tata Motors, already has a range of business facilities in nine U.S. states, including a hot-weather test center in Phoenix. The new Range Rover earned its cool there.

"The United States is one of our largest global markets, and investing in a world class winter testing facility here is imperative to the success of Jaguar Land Rover in North America," said Engineering Director Martyn Hollingsworth.

The recently introduced Jaguar Instinctive all-wheeldrive system was developed primarily for the North American market, he said. 2013 Beetle Convertible Starts at $26,000 The Beetle convertible is back and is rolling into dealerships now — December 2012 — goes on sale this month with starting prices that range from about $26,000 to $33,000, including the $795 freight charge from Puebla, Mexico. The four-seater has the classic Beetle convertible silhouette, including some bustle of the folded soft-top. The top opens in 9.5 seconds and can be lowered or raised at speeds up to 31 mph.

There will be three engine options and three transmission pairings: 2.5-liter five-cylinder, 2.0-liter TDI diesel and 200- horsepower 2.0-liter directinjection turbo. A six-speed automatic is standard on the 2.5, and the diesel and Turbo have a standard six-speed manual or optional six-speed dual-clutch automatic.

There also are special edition models from three decades in American cultural history: the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The '50s edition is black with a tan interior, starting at $26,890. The '60s edition has groovy two-tone seats and denim blue paint, $33,190, includes the turbocharged engine. And the '70s edition has a toffee brown exterior and chrome-look disc wheels ($29,390).

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