

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I was delighted to have accepted your invitation to go car-hunting last Saturday, but, Oh! what an experience it was at the treatment that we received at some of the motor-car showrooms. I thought that I was dressed to kill, but, evidently, at the Mercedes Benz showroom in Causeway Bay, the salesmen must have thought that we were beggars ... or worse. Perhaps, if we had spoken in the dialect of Beijing or Shanghai, we would have been treated better because Hongkong salesmen, these days, have become very snobbish, thinking that only people from the North have money. Never, in my life, have I witnessed how a person, considering spending more than \$HK1 million on a motor car, was treated so shabbily. It was shocking! I wonder whether or not that is the manner in which salespeople in the employ of Mercedes Benz in other countries treat prospective customers. I recall that really rude salesman who, when you asked: 'Are these all of the models of Mercedes Benz that you have?' he responded with words to the effect: 'Isn't it enough?' And, when you explained that you could not find the 500 Series on the showroom floor, he asked, with that funny smirk on his face, reminding me of the description of the Cheshire Cat in the story of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: 'You didn't ask about that car! Anyway, it's the same as that car, over there (pointing to a car on the showroom floor) with a bigger engine. If you want to buy one, you just ask me and I'll do the paperwork for you.' He, then, told you to look at the car and to make up your mind before bothering him again, or something like that. With those statements, he picked up his mobile telephone and called his girlfriend as he walked away to a quieter part of the showroom. I was glad that you suggested that we leave the Mercedes Benz showroom in order to go to the BMW showroom, just down the street. As I left the Mercedes Benz place in Causeway Bay, I could not help but think that the so-called salesmen were completely redundant because all that appeared to be required were photographs of the motor cars if one goes along with the view of that very rude and surly man who did not have the time to talk to us, but plenty of time to talk to his girlfriend.

What a difference was the treatment that we received at the BMW showroom, however! The salesman, even though he was busy, explained all about the various models of motor cars, the choice of colours of the cars, the type of leather for the seats, etc, the various costs, and the likely delivery dates. The difference, as I see it, between the Mercedes Benz showroom staff and the BMW showroom staff in Causeway Bay is that, at Mercedes Benz, the salespeople just don't care to serve you, at all. All that they want to do is to get you to sign a sales and purchase agreement and, then, on to the next customer, post haste. This is something like a supermarket where one loads up one's cart with whatever one wants and then wheels the cart over to the cashier in order to know what is the cost before one carries the goods out of the shop. Mercedes Benz people, it seems to me, don't care about prospective customers because the motor vehicles, produced by the German company, are so good, and are known for the quality of the motor cars, that they sell themselves. This, undoubtedly, is true, but, come the day of reckoning, who wants to be treated like scum by a half-educated, motor-car salesman? Anyway, I am glad that you decided not to purchase a Mercedes Benz. For what reason should you suffer such insults from those people?

It was at the Bentley showroom and the Maybach showroom that the most courtesy was shown to us, wasn't it? But, then, again, those motor cars will cost between \$HK5 million and \$HK6 million, each. However, is there a difference that should be afforded to a prospective customer of a new car just because one motor car is more expensive than another? When we walked into the Maserati showroom in Wanchai, I was taken aback by the beautiful motor cars on the showroom floor. The salesman was not very attentive to us, mind you, at the beginning of the visit, but it did not take long for him to warm up when he learned that we were

genuinely interested in one of the motor cars at a cost of a little more than \$HK1.62 million. One of the first things that he suggested was a test drive of the motor car. It contrasted, markedly, with the horrible way in which the Mercedes Benz people treated us. At the Porsche showroom in Causeway Bay, we were, also, treated very politely, and I thoroughly enjoyed being shown the motor cars and their various attributes. Interestingly enough, the cost of a Porsche, at about \$HK1.60 million, is not dissimilar to the cost of a Mercedes Benz 500 sedan and the quality and reliability of both cars is, just about, equal.

You may, at this point, wonder as to the reason that I am writing this letter to you on the subject of purchasing a motor car. It is because, My Dear Grandchild, I want you to understand the implications of what is happening in Hongkong, these days. In a nutshell, Hongkong is shooting itself in the foot by offering little to no service to its customers. In time, Hongkong will get a very bad reputation for being a territory of rude salespeople who are uneducated, ignorant, and/or very stupid. In every economy, there are swings and roundabouts and, when things go from good to bad, the people, who have been poorly treated, will recall past events and turn their backs on those who were rude to them. If you translate the events of our car-hunting day to eating in a swank restaurant, it is obvious that we shall never return to an establishment where the service is poor and the service staff is insensitive to our needs and aspirations. For the most part, the business people of Hongkong are not polite, generally, but that is the product of the environment, the hustle and bustle of trying to do business in a very competitive marketplace and the requirement to fill every day with 25 hours in order to get everything accomplished at a very rapid pace. However, when a prospective customer enters a shop, no matter what kind of shop and regardless of the amount of money that is involved, one does not like to be treated as a beggar or an idiot. Good manners will always be appreciated; rudeness will be rewarded in like currency.

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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