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Why pay more to export cars?

Justin Barnes and Anthony Black defend the Automotive Production and Development Programme (APDP), which will have cars costing 25% more than they should until 2020 (Good case for keeping foot gently on pedal of support, November 5). This attack on consumers should be worth 30 pieces of silver, at least, to the motor manufacturers.

Barnes and Black fail to show how gouging consumers benefits us. Why should a mid-sized population with a mature manufacturing sector, a growing market and no public transport system to speak of need tariffs at all?

Why should Africa — and especially far-away Nigeria — buy cars from us when our prices already mean neighbours like Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique and Botswana import used and new cars from Japan direct?

Why do motor manufacturers deserve superprofits at public expense? We need cities crossed by bikes, buses, taxis, trains and trams, not rent-seeking legislation that prioritises cars — to the agony of my grandfather who drafted the cancelled plans for Johannesburg's underground railway in the 1960s and 1970s.

Barnes and Black miss the point that tariffs insulated SA from switching to niche-marketing when the tide of mass-production passed us by.

In the long postwar boom, there was money in low-cost high volumes; high-value low volumes; or the unusual. We avoided all those roads, though we had the materials, engineering and topography to inspire a vehicle the world would want.

Maybe infant industries need tariffs, but too much price protection for too long has meant manufacturers make money by working hard and not smart. The APDP passes on the costs of a dumbing-down in local auto manufacturing to buyers and employees.

Barnes and Black would never argue that a house should cost 25% more simply so construction companies can ship more abroad.

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