

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BEFORE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

In The Matter of)
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)
HERB GORDON AUTO WORLD, INC. dba)
HERB GORDON AUTO WORLD,)
HERB GORDON DODGE,)
HERB GORDON MERCEDES-BENZ,) DOCKET NO. C-3734
HERB GORDON NISSAN,)
HERB GORDON OLDSMOBILE,)
HERB GORDON VOLVO, and)
HERB GORDON USED CARS,)
a corporation.)

COMPLAINT

The Federal Trade Commission, having reason to believe that Herb Gordon Auto World, Inc. dba Herb Gordon Auto World, Herb Gordon Dodge, Herb Gordon Mercedes-Benz, Herb Gordon Nissan, Herb Gordon Oldsmobile, Herb Gordon Volvo, and Herb Gordon Used Cars, a corporation, ("respondent") has violated the Truth in Lending Act ("TILA"), 15 U.S.C. §§ 1601-1667, as amended, and its implementing Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. § 226, as amended, the Consumer Leasing Act ("CLA"), 15 U.S.C. §§ 1667-1667e, as amended, and its implementing Regulation M, 12 C.F.R. § 213, as amended, and the Federal Trade Commission Act ("FTC Act"), 15 U.S.C. §§ 45-58, as amended, and it appearing to the Commission that a proceeding by it in respect thereof would be in the public interest, hereby issues this complaint and alleges:

PARAGRAPH ONE: Herb Gordon Auto World, Inc. dba Herb Gordon Auto World, Herb Gordon Dodge, Herb Gordon Mercedes-Benz, Herb Gordon Nissan, Herb Gordon Oldsmobile, Herb Gordon Volvo, and Herb Gordon Used Cars, is a corporation organized, existing, and doing business under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Delaware, with its principal office and place of business located at 3121-3161 Automobile Blvd., Silver Spring, Maryland 20904.

PARAGRAPH TWO: In the ordinary course and conduct of its business, and at least since January 1, 1994, respondent has been engaged in the dissemination of advertisements that promote,

directly or indirectly, credit sales and other extensions of other than open end credit in consumer credit transactions, as the terms "advertisement," "credit sale," and "consumer credit," are defined in the TILA and Regulation Z. In the ordinary course and conduct of its business, and at least since January 1, 1994, respondent has been engaged in the dissemination of advertisements that promote, directly or indirectly, consumer leases, as the terms "advertisement," and "consumer lease," are defined in the CLA and Regulation M.

PARAGRAPH THREE: The acts and practices of respondent alleged in this complaint have been and are in or affecting commerce, as "commerce" is defined in the FTC Act.

COUNT ONE

PARAGRAPH FOUR: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances including but not limited to Exhibit A, has disseminated or caused to be disseminated print advertisements that state initial, low monthly payment amounts, such as "\$163" per month, and promote the "luxury of low payments" ("Gold Key Plus advertisements"). In fine print, respondent's Gold Key Plus advertisements, inter alia, state an initial number of payments, a downpayment and another amount described as a "purchase option." Respondent's Gold Key Plus advertisements misrepresent that the additional amount is optional and fail to disclose that the financing to be signed at purchase requires the consumer to make a substantial balloon payment at the conclusion of the initial payments, which is a mandatory obligation.

PARAGRAPH FIVE: Respondent's aforesaid practice constitutes a deceptive act or practice, in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

COUNT TWO

PARAGRAPH SIX: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances including but not limited to Exhibit A, has disseminated or caused to be disseminated Gold Key Plus advertisements that state initial, low monthly payment amounts and promote the "luxury of low payments." In fine print, respondent's Gold Key Plus advertisements, inter alia, state an initial number of payments, a downpayment and another amount described as a "purchase option." Respondent's Gold Key Plus advertisements fail to accurately state the terms of repayment, by failing to disclose that the additional amount is a final payment and by inaccurately stating that the amount is optional

when, in fact, it is mandatory, based on the financing to be signed at purchase.

PARAGRAPH SEVEN: Respondent's aforesaid practice violates Section 144(d) of the TILA, 15 U.S.C. § 1664(d), and Section 226.24(c) of Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. § 226.24(c).

COUNT THREE

PARAGRAPH EIGHT: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances including but not limited to Exhibit A, has disseminated or caused to be disseminated Gold Key Plus advertisements, inter alia, that state initial, low monthly payment amounts and promote the "luxury of low payments." Respondent's Gold Key Plus advertisements fail to disclose the annual percentage rate for the financing, using that term or the abbreviation "APR".

PARAGRAPH NINE: Respondent's aforesaid practice constitutes a deceptive act or practice, in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a), and a violation of Section 144(d) of the TILA, 15 U.S.C. § 1664(d) and Section 226.24(c) of Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. § 226.24(c).

COUNT FOUR

PARAGRAPH TEN: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances including but not limited to Exhibit A, has disseminated or caused to be disseminated Gold Key Plus advertisements that state initial, low monthly payment amounts and boldly promote the "luxury of low payments." In fine print, respondent's Gold Key Plus advertisements, inter alia, state an initial number of payments, a downpayment and another amount described as a "purchase option" (the "disclaimer"). The disclaimer in respondent's Gold Key Plus advertisements is virtually unreadable and incomprehensible to ordinary consumers because of the extremely small typesize and is not clear and conspicuous.

PARAGRAPH ELEVEN: Respondent's aforesaid practice constitutes a deceptive act or practice, in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a) and a violation of Section 226.24 of Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. § 226.24, as more fully set out in Section 226.24-1 of the Federal Reserve Board's Official Staff Commentary to Regulation Z ("Commentary"), 12 C.F.R. § 226.24-1, Supp. 1.

COUNT FIVE

PARAGRAPH TWELVE: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances including but not limited to Exhibits B-1, B-2 and B-3, has disseminated or caused to be disseminated print advertisements that boldly state "\$95 down with low monthly payments for the first 12 months" and radio and televised advertisements that boldly state "\$95 down and payments as low as \$155 a month for the first 12 months" ("Drive For 95 advertisements"). Respondent's Drive For 95 print, radio and televised advertisements also state various initial, low monthly payment amounts, such as "\$155" a month. Thereafter, respondent's Drive For 95 print, radio and televised advertisements, inter alia, state "balance of 48 payments will be higher than 1st 12 months" and "cost per \$1,000 borrowed \$20.52." Respondent's Drive For 95 advertisements misrepresent and fail to accurately disclose the amount of the second series of installment payments required at the conclusion of the initial payments, based on the financing to be signed at purchase.

PARAGRAPH THIRTEEN: Respondent's aforesaid practice constitutes a deceptive act or practice, in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

COUNT SIX

PARAGRAPH FOURTEEN: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances including but not limited to Exhibits B-1, B-2 and B-3, has disseminated or caused to be disseminated Drive For 95 print advertisements that state "\$95 down with low monthly payments for the first 12 months" and Drive For 95 radio and televised advertisements that state "\$95 down and payments as low as \$155 a month for the 1st 12 months." Respondent's Drive For 95 print, radio and televised advertisements also state various initial, low monthly payment amounts, such as "\$155" a month. Thereafter, respondent's Drive For 95 print, radio and televised advertisements, inter alia, state "balance of 48 payments will be higher than 1st 12 months" and "cost per \$1,000 borrowed \$20.52." Respondent's Drive For 95 advertisements fail to accurately disclose the terms of repayment, by failing to accurately state the amount of the second series of installment payments required at the conclusion of the initial payments, based on the financing to be signed at purchase.

PARAGRAPH FIFTEEN: Respondent's aforesaid practice violates Section 144(d) of the TILA, 15 U.S.C. § 1664(d), and Section 226.24(c) of Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. § 226.24(c).

COUNT SEVEN

PARAGRAPH SIXTEEN: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances including but not limited to Exhibits B-1, B-2 and B-3, has disseminated or caused to be disseminated Drive For 95 print advertisements that state "\$95 down with low monthly payments for the first 12 months" and Drive For 95 radio and televised advertisements that state "\$95 down and \$155 a month for the 1st 12 months." Respondent's Drive For 95 print, radio and televised advertisements also state various initial, low monthly payment amounts. In fine print in the print advertisements, in fine print for a short duration in the televised advertisements, and orally for a short duration in the radio advertisements, respondent's Drive For 95 advertisements, inter alia, state "balance of 48 payments will be higher than 1st 12 months," "cost per \$1,000 borrowed \$20.52," and an annual percentage rate (the "disclaimer"). The disclaimer in respondent's Drive For 95 advertisements is virtually incomprehensible to ordinary consumers and is not clear and conspicuous because of the small typesize in the print and televised advertisements and because of the short duration in the radio and televised advertisements.

PARAGRAPH SEVENTEEN: Respondent's aforesaid practice constitutes a deceptive act or practice, in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a), and a violation of Section 226.24 of Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. § 226.24, as more fully set out in Section 226.24-1 of the Commentary, 12 C.F.R. § 226.24-1, Supp. 1.

COUNT EIGHT

PARAGRAPH EIGHTEEN: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances has disseminated or caused to be disseminated advertisements that state the amount or percentage of any downpayment, the number of payments or period of repayment, or the amount of any payment, but fail to state all of the terms required by Regulation Z, as follows: the amount or percentage of the downpayment, the terms of repayment, and the annual percentage rate, using that term or the abbreviation "APR."

PARAGRAPH NINETEEN: Respondent's aforesaid practice violates Section 144(d) of the TILA, 15 U.S.C. § 1664(d), and Section 226.24(c) of Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. § 226.24(c).

COUNT NINE

PARAGRAPH TWENTY: Respondent, in the course and conduct of its business, in numerous instances has disseminated or caused to be disseminated advertisements that state the amount of any

payment, the number of required payments, or that any or no downpayment or other payment is required at consummation of the lease, but fail to state all of the terms required by Regulation M, as applicable and as follows: that the transaction advertised is a lease; the total amount of any payment such as a security deposit or capitalized cost reduction required at the consummation of the lease or that no such payments are required; the number, amount, due dates or periods of scheduled payments, and the total of such payments under the lease; a statement of whether or not the lessee has the option to purchase the leased property and at what price and time (the method of determining the price may be substituted for disclosure of the price); and a statement of the amount or method of determining the amount of any liabilities the lease imposes upon the lessee at the end of the term.

PARAGRAPH TWENTY-ONE: Respondent's aforesaid practice violates Section 184 of the CLA, 15 U.S.C. § 1667c, and Section 213.5(c) of Regulation M, 12 C.F.R. § 213.5(c).

For these reasons, the Federal Trade Commission this fifteenth day of April, 1997, has issued this complaint against respondent.

By the Commission.

Donald S. Clark
Secretary

SEAL

[Exhibits A and B1 are attached to paper copies of the complaint, but are not available in electronic form, while Exhibit B2 is an audio tape, and Exhibit B3 is a videotape.]