

HEARD ON THE STREET

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One of the world's richest men in Davos, Switzerland, at the World Economic Forum explains the difference between socialism and capitalism: In socialism, you nationalize and then you destroy. In capitalism, you destroy then you nationalize.

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We all know Detroit's Big Three are struggling, but what about the little guy?

New numbers show he is on the floor. In the fourth quarter, auto dealers sampled by Sageworks reported a 14% drop in sales compared with the prior three months. Net profit margin fell to just 0.4%. That suggests the dealers' profits fell by three-quarters year on year.

To pile on the pain, inventories are rising faster than sales. On that front, crammed car lots reflect the broader economy.

The fourth quarter's 3.8% contraction in gross domestic product would have been a scarier 5.1% were it not for the buildup in inventories that few want to buy.