



In the Rings of Saturn

Joe Sherman

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In this compelling, readable narrative, Joe Sherman explores virtually every aspect of the Saturn project, America's biggest and most publicized industrial success of the last decade. Here is the whole story--Saturn's mysterious beginnings inside General Motors in 1982; the site hunt that involved 38 states and ended in Spring Hill, Tennessee; the plant's construction and the transfer of 5,000 UAW members to a historic Southern backwater; and finally the small car's triumph in the marketplace (*Consumer Reports* and J.D. Powers both dubbed Saturn a made-in-America breakthrough)--all woven together into a candid, panoramic tapestry.

In the Rings of Saturn has a striking immediacy: the reader sees almost first-hand GM's 1991 Annual Meeting at the Grand Ole Opry led by chairman Robert Stempel, as gadfly stockholders turn the event into a parody. We spend a week on the crankshaft machining line under the care of paternal, bearlike teamleader Bob Courtemanche, experiencing Saturn's revolutionary but troubled team structure. We even drive around with Spring Hill's flamboyant, tobacco-spitting mayor George Jones, who tells Sherman that the difference between a "Yankee" and a "damned Yankee" is "a Yankee comes here and goes home; a damned Yankee stays." Dozens of characters, from local farmers, to inspired assembly line workers, to "car smarts and gut feel" engineers, move across these pages. Through these flesh-and-blood portraits, Sherman brings to life a very American story of renewal and growth, of great hope and soured expectations, of greed and lost opportunities. And he reveals as well the downside of the project--that while the car itself is a triumph, the project has failed to provide either the learning laboratory General Motors needed or a model for positive redevelopment rural America yearns for.

In the Rings of Saturn is both the anatomy of a corporate triumph and an incisive commentary on industrial renewal in the United States. And it exposes the high hopes and earthshattering disappointments that occur when big business appears in rural areas. It is a volume that will enlighten business readers, inform the automotive industry, and entertain Saturn car buyers, many of whom will think: "My little car means all this?"

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Virginia Kang:

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