



Dispatch photo by Fred Squillante

Car dealer Fred Ricart sings at home with his wife, Lynne, and their children, from left, Ricky, 7; Regan, 1; Rachel, 3; and Renay, 8.

## Dealin' on the ceilin' sends profits through the roof

By Lee Stratton  
Dispatch Staff Reporter

Dealin' on the ceilin' may have some viewers climbing the walls, but it's music to Fred Ricart's ears.

The upside-down, guitar-wielding car dealer has serenaded central Ohio with *We're Dealin' on the Ceilin'* and *This Van is Your Van, This Van is My Van*.

His singing may strike a sour chord with some people, but the bottom line shows that singing commercials sell lots of cars, Ricart said. Why does the same commercial please some and pain others?

"Central Ohio has a real broad social structure," Ricart said.

Ricart, 35, portrays a down-home, fun-loving country boy in the commercials because that's what he is, he said.

"Most of what you see on TV and most of what happens is real. I'm no high-brow. It's not a gimmick."

**HE TRAINS** his salesmen to follow that fun-guy theme at the dealership at 4255 S. Hamilton Rd.

"Customers want to have a good time," he said. "They want a salesman who's fun. Why spend \$60,000 and be miserable doing it?"

Ricart pokes fun at himself in his ads by having his crew beg, "Anything, Fred. Just don't sing."

That seems to stick with people.

Last October, Ricart had a skin graft operation on his back after being burned in a racing accident. When he awoke, a doctor greeted him with the good news that the operation was a success. The bad news: "Unfortunately, your voice will sound the same as it always did."

Ricart jokes about his singing. But he takes his music seriously.

Serious enough to sing with his wife, Lynne, and their four children nearly every day.

Serious enough to jam with bluegrass and country musicians Saturdays at a S. High St. music shop.

Serious enough to have a recording studio in

his house and a safe to store his collection of guitars and mandolins.

**AND — BRACE** yourself — serious enough to think about cutting a record.

Ricart, a Canal Winchester native, was brought up in the car business. His parents wanted him to be a doctor. He earned a bachelor's degree in natural sciences from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland and worked in a research program.

In the summer of 1973, he returned home to help the family sell cars.

"It was so much easier," Ricart said. "I got lazy and ended up staying. I made a lot better car dealer than I would have a doctor."

From test tube to car lot, Ricart carried his music along. "I was brought up in country music," he said.

While working in the college research program, he performed nights at the Olive Tree, a Cleveland coffeehouse.

Still, he had to be persuaded to use music to sell cars.

**WHILE WAITING** to film a standard, stand-still-and-talk television commercial, Ricart said, he was "playing the guitar, dancing around and acting silly."

Jim Black, Ricart's advertising consultant, taped the shenanigans and put together an off-beat ad.

Black told Ricart the ad would portray the human qualities of Ricart's business.

"I was almost embarrassed," Ricart said. "I said, 'You can't put that on TV.'"

But Ricart has changed his tune.

He now says he owes it to the public to perform when he invades the privacy of their living rooms. "They've made me a wealthy man. When I show up on TV, it's my job to entertain them."

Other dealers, in their own ads, are taking swipes at Ricart's style. But he doesn't plan to change.

He's opening a van dealership in Atlanta.

"I'm going to sing in Atlanta," he said. "And I'm going in upside down."