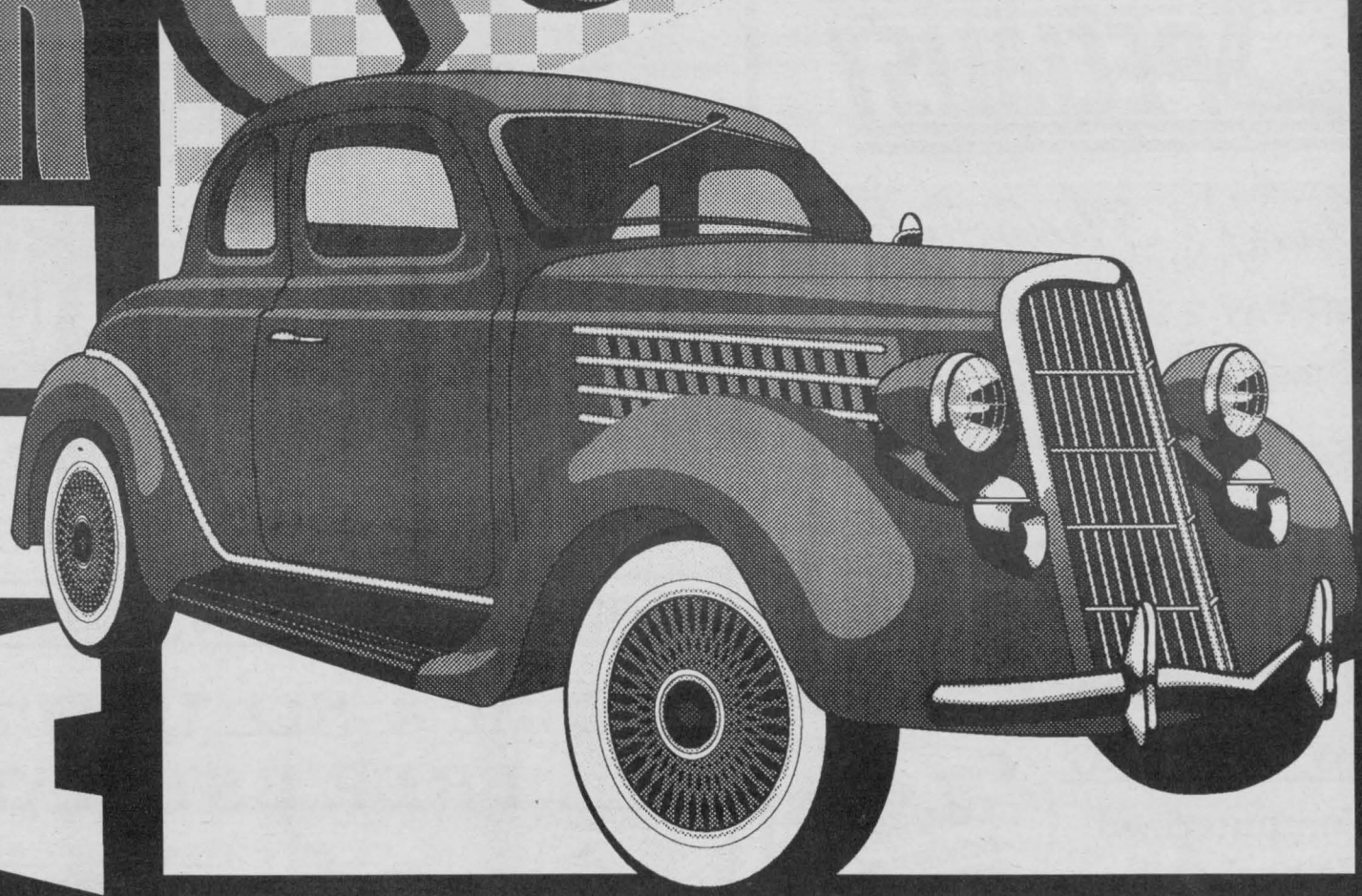
FALL CAR CARE & Buyer's GUIDE



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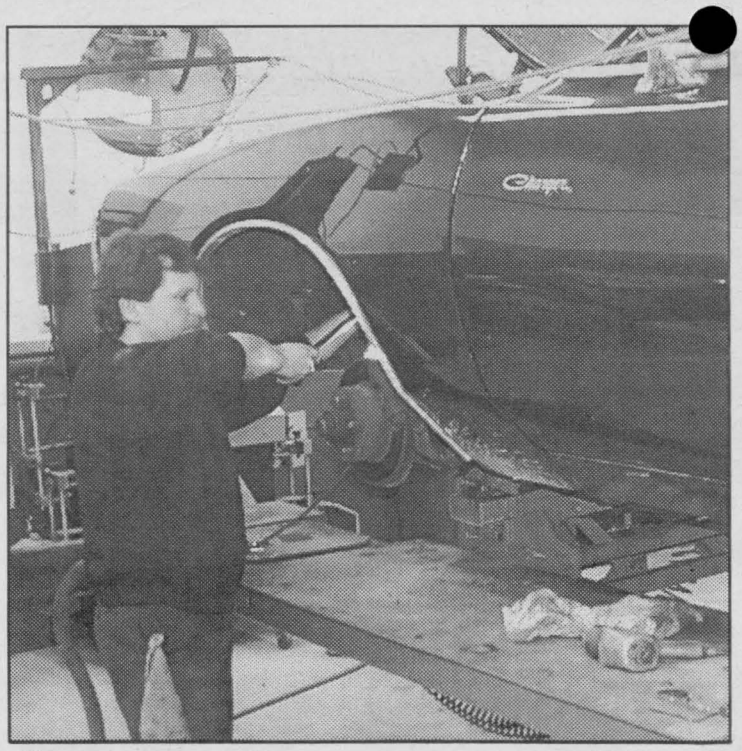

Gary at work

Gary McInnis is self-employed in Morrisburg. Here he attends to a wheel bearing check as he also deals with the brakes and ensures that a satisfied customer will drive this vehicle home secure in the knowledge things are all taken care of in a timely matter and with expertise.

Perform a monthly vehicle check

Remember the old saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure"? When it comes to your vehicle, routine preventive maintenance is a key to safe, fuel-efficient driving.

Even minor mechanical problems can cause fuel consumption to soar - and with today's gasoline prices, that's not a welcome thought for any motorist. But needless fuel consumption does more than waste money. It also produces pollution that contributes to climate change, urban smog and acid rain.

With today's sophisticated engines and computer systems, most maintenance should be left to the professionals. Still, performing the following inspection once a month can help you identify and avoid problems that could cost you fuel and money down the road.

~ Check tire pressures and look for signs of uneven wear or embedded objects that can cause air leaks.

~ Check around the car and under the engine for fluid leaks (if you detect a leak, get your vehicle to a garage as soon as possible).

~ Check fluid levels, including the engine oil, engine coolant, transmission fluid and power steering fluid.

~ Check the engine compartment for cracked or split spark plug wires, cracked radiator hoses or loose clamps and corrosion around the battery terminals.

~ Check for problems with the brakes or alignment (for example, is the vehicle pulling to one side or the other?).

For more information on the benefits of preventive maintenance, visit the Auto$mart Web site at http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/vehicles or call 1 800 387-2000 toll-free.

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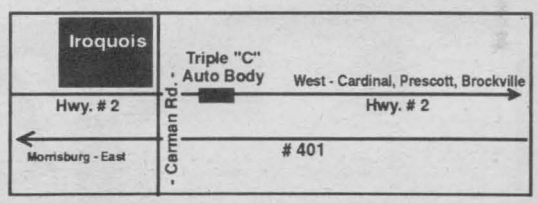

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Fall Clean Up

Chieftain photo by S.L.Johnston

It is wise to clean your vehicle before winter strikes and the job becomes combersome. Wheels and wheel wells suffer salt damage as do body sides, lower doors and fenders. The undercarriage should be clean before oiling. A wax job helps defray the ice and snow when they pile on that finish too.

Natural Gas- A viable alternative car fuel

Over the past decade, natural gas has become a practical and economical alternative transportation fuel. Motor vehicles using natural gas contribute less to global warming, urban smog, acid rain, particulate pollution and other environmental problems.

Natural gas is a viable transportation fuel for fleet operators and individuals who drive their vehicles extensively (over 25,000 km a year). In terms of automotive performance, there is only a small power loss when compared to gasoline.

Safer than gasoline?

Natural gas has several safety advantages over gasoline:

* It must be present in high concentration in the air before it will ignite.
* It requires a much higher temperature than gasoline to ignite.
* It is lighter than air, meaning it dissipates quickly if a leak occurs.

A good investment

Most natural gas vehicles currently operating in Canada have been conversed from conventional gasoline-fuelled vehicles. The $3,000 to $4,000 conversion cost can usually be recouped by high-use vehicles such as taxis, delivery or service vehicles and school and transit buses within a year or two through much lower fuel costs.

Proper tire care and wheel alignment will save you money and tire wear

Proper maintenance of tires and wheel alignment can help to reduce the costs of operating your vehicle. For example, tires under inflated by only eight pounds can reduce gas mileage by five per cent and cut tire life by 25 per cent or more. The amount of money we pay for gas and tires today, makes it worthwhile to check tire inflation. And ensuring your vehicle is running at peak efficiency is environmentally friendly too.

How do you check your tire pressure? You may want to own a tire gauge, which is available in most automotive stores, such as a retailer, department store, or automotive parts wholesaler for under $10.00. Also, when your vehicle is on the hoist or lift for regular vehicle maintenance or repairs, ask your automotive service technician to check the tires for abnormal wear.

More fuel is consumed as a result of incorrect alignment, which can result in at least a two

Please turn to page 4

The humble spark plug

How can something so small and plain be so important to your engine? It delivers the spark of life to your cylinder. No spark, no explosion, no motion. It's worth spending a little time to make sure your spark is reaching each cylinder at the right time, and is hot enough to ensure efficient combustion.

Your owner's manual will tell you how often to change your spark plugs, and will also tell you what type, size and heat range are best for your engine. Some new types have platinum electrodes that will practically eliminate electrode wear, improving vehicle performance and fuel economy.

If you are a do-it-your-selfer, changing your spark plugs is easy:

1. Carefully remove the wires by twisting gently one quarter turn and lifting straight off. Be careful with the wires, and always pull by the boot, not the wire. Each wire should be numbered on the insulating surface. If not, or if the numbers are hard to read, use masking tape to number them yourself.
2. Loosen each spark plug, and blow area clean so no dirt can get into the engine. Special spark plug wrenches or sockets are available from all automotive stores, as are cans of compressed air for blowing the area clean. If necessary, use a little penetrating oil to help ease the threads--don't use excessive force, or you might break the plug off in the cylinder.
3. Remove each plug in turn, and wipe the plug hole seat clean with a dry cloth, wiping from the inside out to keep dirt from falling into the engine. Put the old plugs in order on a piece of newspaper or a rag for inspection--the condition of the plug can warn you of impending engine problems. Look for excessive white or grey deposits (ash), black gooey deposits (oil), or worn or cracked electrodes (need tune-up).
4. Plugs are gapped at the factory, but it's a good idea to check them with your own gapping tool to make sure they're right for your engine.
5. Screw the new plugs in until finger tight. Use a torque wrench to tighten to the manufacturer's specifications. If you have no torque wrench, your best move is to get one--they cost between $15 and $100, depending on quality, much less than the cost of the engine work you might require through improper spark plug installation.
6. Replace the spark plug wires in order. Check each wire for cracking or corrosion, and replace if necessary. The order of the wires is important. Each cylinder has to fire in the right order, or you could cause severe engine damage. If you are in any doubt, check your owner's manual.

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Garry of GT Auto inspects brake shoes.

Fall tune-up provides peace of mind

Vehicle breakdowns are never a pleasant experience, but they can be particularly inconvenient and even dangerous in winter. That's why it is a good idea to have your vehicle tuned up this fall for peace of mind this winter.

A typical fall tune-up will include an oil and filter change and checks of the vehicle's tires, brakes and fuel, ignition, cooling and exhaust systems. It is a good idea to have this work done by an automotive professional - a family member or friend who is mechanically inclined may mean well, but do they really understand today's sophisticated engines?

Regular tune-ups do more than help prevent nasty surprises; they also reduce your vehicle's fuel consumption and exhaust emissions. Studies have shown that a poorly maintained vehicle can consume up to 50 percent more fuel than one that is running properly. And every litre of wasted fuel means that unnecessary pollution is being released into the atmosphere, where it contributes to problems such as climate change, urban smog and acid rain.

For more information, visit the Auto$mart Web site at http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/vehicles or call 1 800 387-2000 toll-free.

- News Canada

Ethanol-transportation through fermentation

Although ethanol is the best known basis of alcoholic beverages such as spirits, beer and wine, it also has many uses in the production of industrial chemicals and pharmaceuticals and, more recently, as a transportation fuel.

Various uses

Ethanol burns more completely than gasoline and diesel fuel and can be used in several ways as transportation fuel:

* In gasoline vehicles--It is becoming a common practice in North America to blend ethanol with gasoline at concentrations of seven to ten per cent by volume. This high-octane fuel often called gasohol can be used in most gasoline-powered vehicles without any engine modifications.

* In special factory-produced vehicles--A mixture of 83 per cent ethanol and 15 per cent gasoline (E85) is currently being used as a viable fuel for a growing number of light-duty vehicles in the United States. These vehicles can operate on a proportion of ethanol mixed with gasoline up to the 85 per cent limit, as well, some buses and trucks powered by modified diesel engines can run on nearly pure ethanol.

* As a gasoline component--Ethanol may be used to manufacture ethyl tertiary butyl ether (ETBE), which can be blended with gasoline to reduce air pollution and boost octane ratings (to prevent engine "knock").

Environmental benefits

As well as its cleaner emissions, the ability to reduce ethanol from plants (through fermentation of wood waste and grasses, as well as grains such as corn, wheat and barley) is particularly appealing from an environmental perspective. Plants trap carbon dioxide, one of the principal greenhouse gases, so growing plants for the purpose of reducing ethanol fuel could actually help reduce carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere.

A viable alternative?

The high cost of producing ethanol continues to be a barrier to widespread use. Its future as a transportation fuel will depend primarily on competition between it and other fuels in the marketplace and more importantly, on our ability to produce it at a cost that will make ethanol economically attractive.

Free pamphlets and booklets on alternative transportation fuels are available by calling toll free at 1-800-387-2000. Fax: (819) 994-1498. You can also visit Natural Resources Canada's web site on alternative transportation fuels at http://alt-fuels.nrcan.gc.ca.







Cindy Wolfe of Morrisburg Auto Pro works on all types of vehicles in her daily routine of vehicular repair.

Chieftain Photo by N. Zandbergen

Motorists' Rights

It's your car -- It's your choice!

•Choosing a Collision and Refinish Centre

As the owner of a motor vehicle damaged in an accident, you have the right to choose the shop where you wish to have your vehcile repaired. This is the law!

•Do I Need More Than One Estimate?

Do not waste your time getting estimates. Select a repair facility that you feel comfortable with. Notify your insurance company, or ask the shop to make the call on your behalf. Your insurance adjuster may have to inspect the damage. This can be done at an insurance drive-in claim centre or at the shop you have chosen.

•Notify Your Insurance Company

Before authorizing any repairs, notify your insurance company or agent, and tell them where the damaged vehicle can be inspected.

•Is the Work Guaranteed?

Most repair centres guarantee their collision work to some degree, which may not include the paint job. Ask to see a copy of the shop's guarantee and have any information you do not understand clarified.

•Qualified Collision and Refinish Centres

Look for signs that indicate repair technician certification. Membership in professional trade associations and the Better Business Bureau indicate that the shop is keeping up with the latest repair procedures.

•Know Your Shop

Make sure the shop you choose maintains a professional reputation, is properly equipped, maintains specialized equipment at peak performance and has technicians that are thoroughly trained and certified.

•Inspect the Repairs

Before driving away, check the appearance of the repairs--close up and from a distance. Examine the paint for colour match, texture etc. Take a test drive to check mechanical repairs. If you are not satisfied, mention your concerns immediately.

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Bill Smith

Continued

Tire Care

Continued from page 3

per cent tankful energy loss as well as reducing tire life. Of course, incorrect alignment accelerates tire wear to an even greater degree.

There are two easy ways to detect incorrect alignment of tire balance, indicating the need for cost saving wheel and front-end service:

1) Looseness or excessive play in steering, or difficulty in controlling the vehicle over bumps and around curves are indications of problems which need correcting.

2) Vibration or the slightest shimmy are also indications of a problem.

When vehicles are on the hoist, they should be checked for front end and steering looseness, and shock absorber leakage. A good automotive service technician can determine the corrective measures needed for steering and suspension systems...or advise that ball joints, steering, linkage and shock absorbers or struts are dependable, but wearing to the point where replacement would be advisable in the near future.

Careful attention to steering, suspension and tires are among the major considerations to keep vehicle maintenance costs low.

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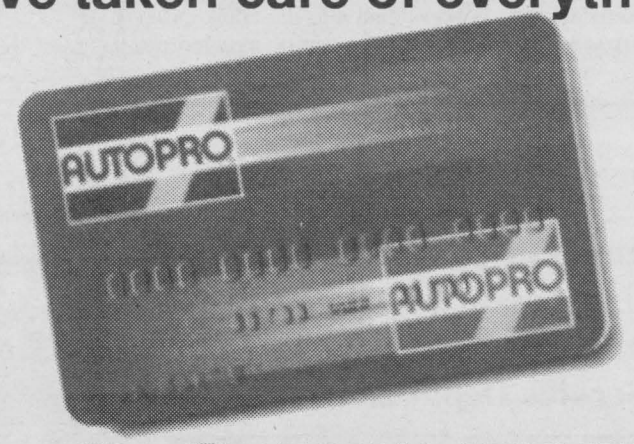

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Learn the basics of prolonging your engines life

An early warning sign of engine wear is excessive oil consumption, which is usually accompanied by blue-black exhaust smoke. A common reason for this condition is worn valve guide seals. The valves in a typical engine may open and close as often as 100,000 times per hour at highway speeds. The stem of the valve, sliding up and down in its guide, is fitted with a special seal designed to permit only a limited amount of oil to pass. (Some oil is necessary for lubrication).

When these seals wear or harden, oil burning begins. Many of the conditions which cause an engine to burn oil prematurely are due to vehicle neglect. Piston rings, for example, can wear out prematurely if you do not change the oil and filter regularly. Worn rings lead to excessive oil consumption.

There's only one satisfactory cure for worn piston rings: Major engine work, which normally is accompanied by replacement of bearings, timing belt or chain, valve guides and other worn internal components. At that time valves are ground or replaced. This procedure, combined with a complete tune-up, usually will return the engine to nearly new performance.

Today's vehicles are driven for more than 225,000 km and last up to 12 years, compared with being driven only 150,000 km and lasting less than 10 years in the 1970s. So it is worth it to properly maintain your vehicle and its engine. Check your engine oil regularly. If oil is over-full or smells like gasoline, it may be diluted with gasoline, thereby having lost some of its lubricating qualities.

If you have to pump the accelerator to keep the engine from stalling, you may be pumping raw gasoline into the crank case. This situation can be avoided by keeping the engine properly tuned.

Misfiring spark plugs can aggravate a situation such as this because they permit raw, unburned gasoline to wash into the crank case. Not only does this create hard starting, it also accelerates wear due to diluted engine oil.

Another factor in oil burning is a malfunctioning positive crank case ventilation (PCV) valve, which is intended to route oil vapours through the combustion chamber rather than permitting them to escape into the atmosphere. If the PCV system is not in proper working order, it can be the cause of oil burning.

Remember, excessive oil burning is a condition that gradually worsens and can affect other aspects of the engine. Like so many other car troubles, early detection and correction are essential, and can save you a great deal of money in the long run.

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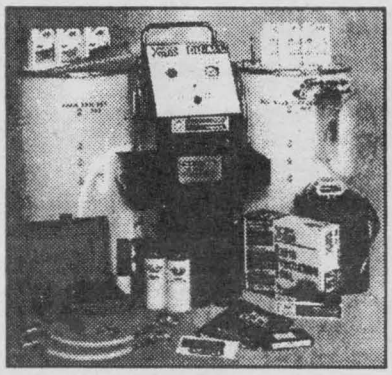

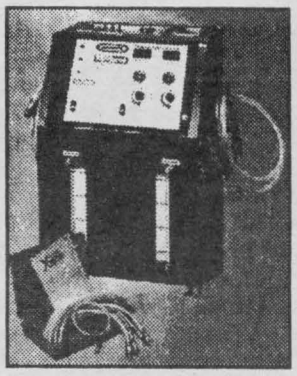

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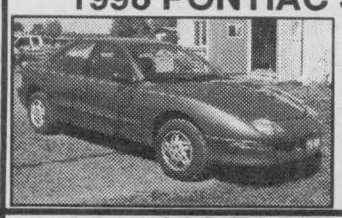

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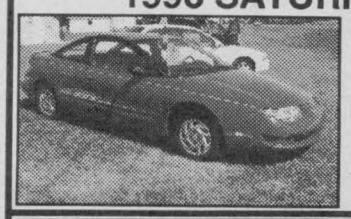

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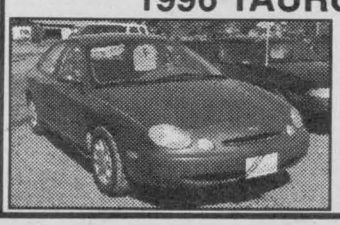

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EnerGuide label an excellent tool

Fall is a popular time of the year to buy a new car. Dealers are showcasing all the latest models, and manufacturers are hyping design, technology and comfort enhancements. If you are trying to sort through all the hoopla, one piece of information you know you can count on is the fuel consumption rating provided on the EnerGuide label.

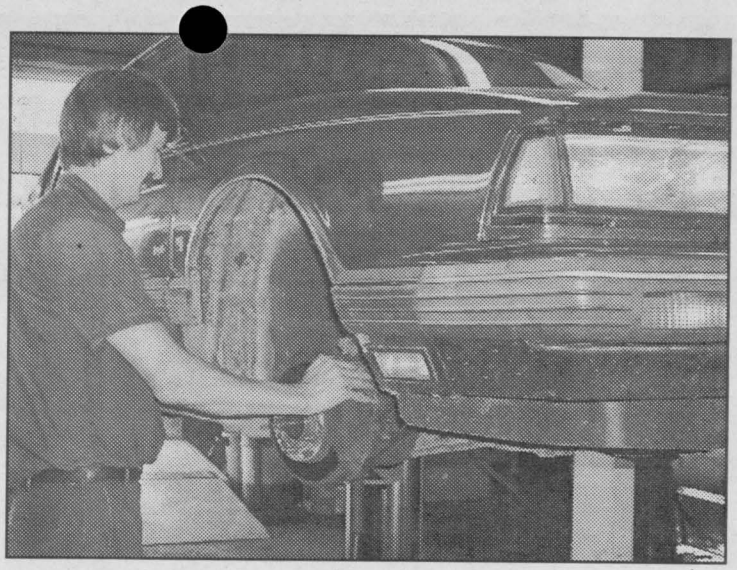
EnerGuide labels are now attached to all new light-duty vehicles sold in Canada. The label provides two important pieces of information: the vehicle's fuel consumption rating and its estimated annual fuel cost.

The fuel consumption rating on an EnerGuide label has been determined in a controlled laboratory setting, using government-approved methods, to ensure that all vehicles are tested under identical conditions. That makes these ratings an excellent tool for comparing different vehicles on the basis of how much fuel they will use under typical operating conditions.

Purchasing the most fuel-efficient vehicle that meets your needs could save you hundreds of dollars a year in fuel costs. It will also reduce your impact on the environment - the less gasoline your vehicle burns, the fewer greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants it produces.

Fuel consumption ratings for almost all new light-duty vehicles sold in Canada are also published in Natural Resources Canada's annual Fuel Consumption Guide. You can order a free copy or view it on-line by visiting the Auto$mart Web site at http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/vehicles. The Guide and other free Auto$mart publications can also be ordered by calling 1 800 387-2000 toll-free.

- News Canada



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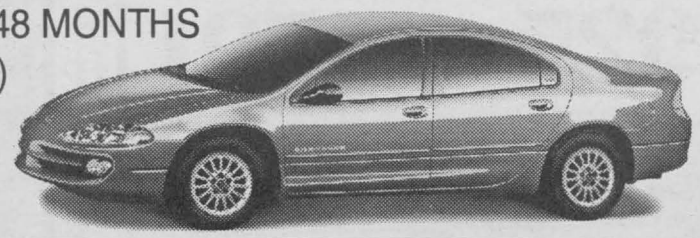

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