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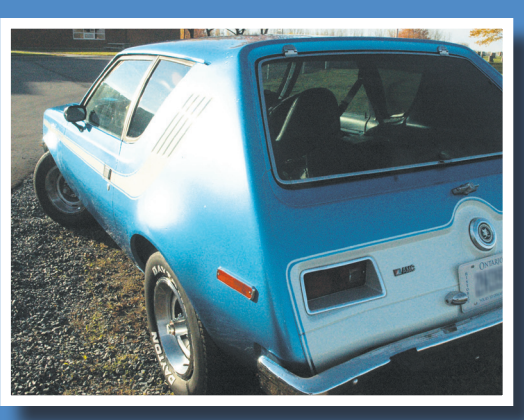
Fall CAR CARE



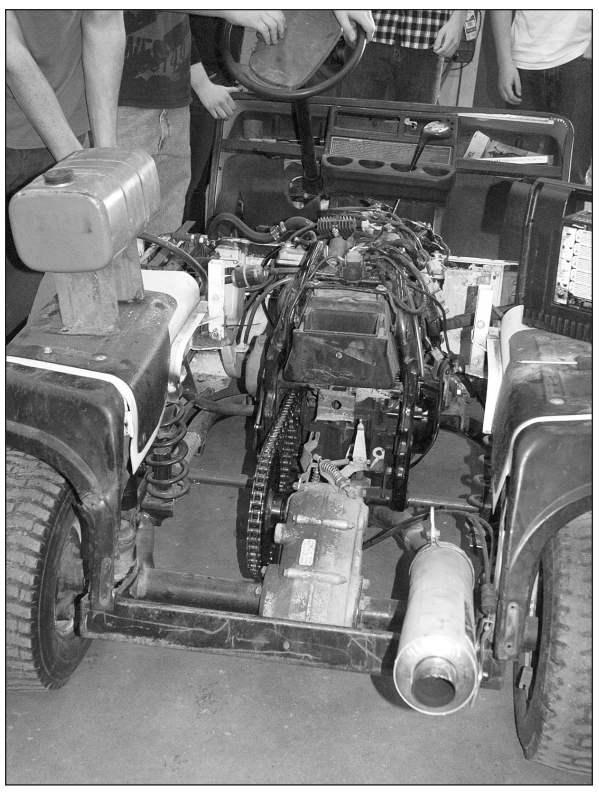






NOVEMBER 2010





On course

Always looking to increase power and performance, the transportation technology students at North Dundas District High School have been looking to give the common golf cart a little more gusto. So, it was decided that a 1989 Kawasaki Ninja 600 motorcycle engine would supply the power. The motor was installed in the middle of the golf cart so the wheel base had to be extended. A grill was also fabricated to contain the radiator. A nine iron serves as the clutch pedal and a two wood will be fitted as the gear shift handle. Future modifications will include hiding all evidence of the power train with golf bags, a canopy and a beverage cooler that will cover the gas tank. The students, under the guidance of teacher Andrew Whitton, are currently trying to devise a drive system which will propel the cart from one hole to the next at a snappier pace. Dan Lillico (above, left), Corey Stone and Luke Mollema work on starting the Kawasaki power mill.
Press Photos – Van Bridger

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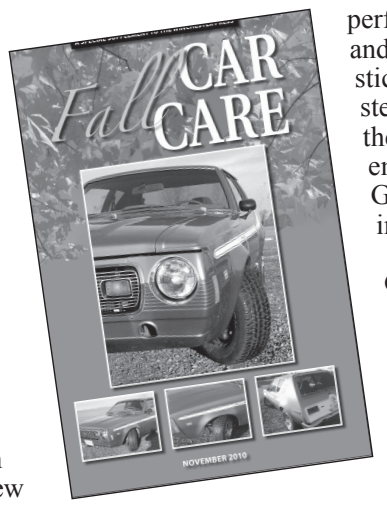
It's a Grrr...emlin

The automobile featured on the cover of this issue of *Fall Car Care* is now considered a rare 1970s muscle car.



The American Motor Corporation (AMC) manufactured this 1974 Gremlin X and marketed it as an everyday driver, with drag strip racing capabilities. This model came with a 360 cubic inch, 335 hp V8 power plant and a four-speed manual transmission and a factory 3.54 twin grip model 20 rear axle.

North Dundas District High School transportation technologies teacher Andrew Whitton purchased it on eBay and entrusted his students with various restoration tasks. During the dismantling of the Gremlin X, Whitton discovered it had been drag raced in New Jersey years before and found time slips in the glove box indicating it had covered the quarter mile in 13.2 seconds. Upon that revelation, the objective of the project, started in the school's shop several years ago, was to restore the AMC as a road-worthy weekend racer.

During the rebuild, students removed the transmission and replaced the clutch with a high-performance model, removed the exhaust headers and resealed them, replaced the upper ball joints, front springs, front disc brakes (conversion from drums) and door pins.

The group then turned its attention to body repairs. The rocker panels were sourced from Parcoll Products Ltd. – NAPA Auto Parts. After installation, the Gremlin was sent to Fender Menders Autobody Specialists in Bonville where owner Claude Parisien and Tagwi co-op student Travis Fournier performed a complete body and paint job. All the original stickers were made to stencils and repainted on the car, including the Levi's emblems that indicate this Gremlin has the denim interior.

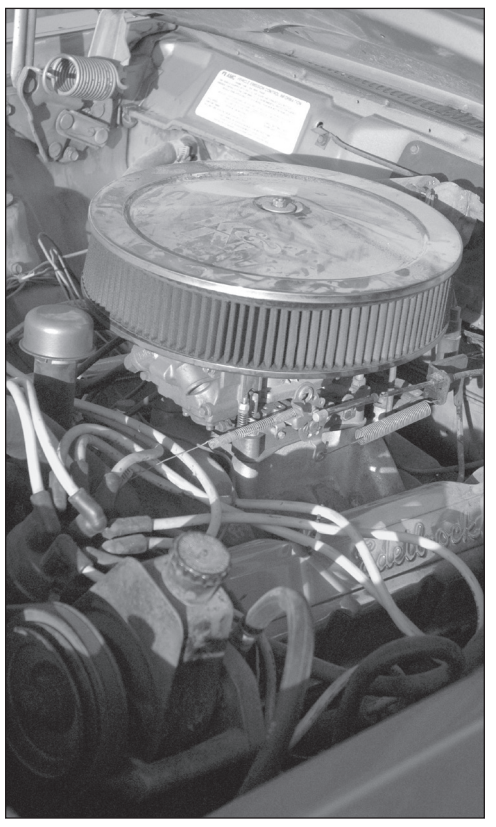
Whitton drives the Gremlin to school every day and recently tested it at Luskville Dragway where the best time recorded was 13.9 seconds, due to carburetor bog. He and his student pit crew continue to work on getting quicker start times and refit the interior as close to original as possible.



The exterior of Andrew Whitton's 1974 AMC Gremlin X has been restored to almost original condition. The engine, which powered the classic to a 13.2 second time at 1/4 mile drag strips in New Jersey, is now driven every day. The refurbishment of the interior is next on the to-do list.

Press Photos – Van Bridger





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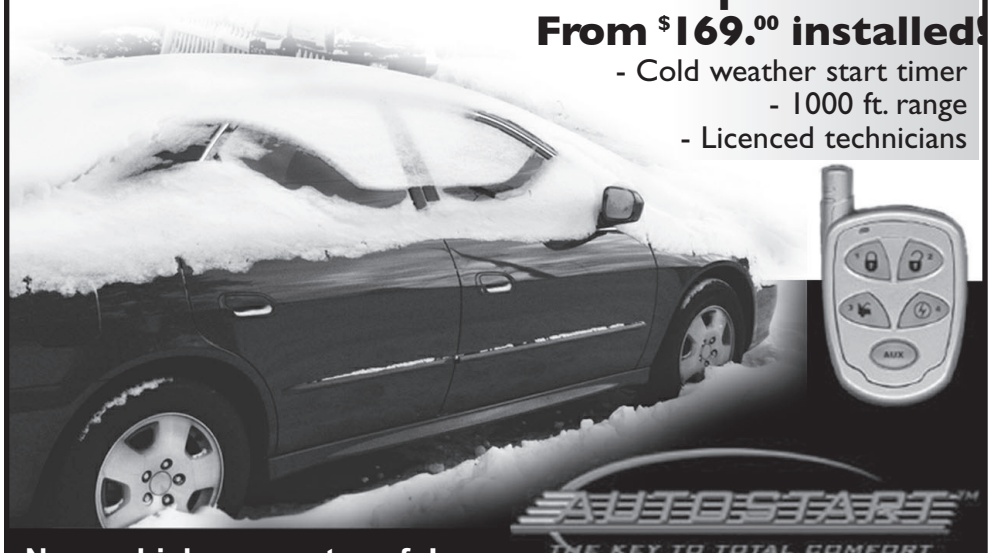

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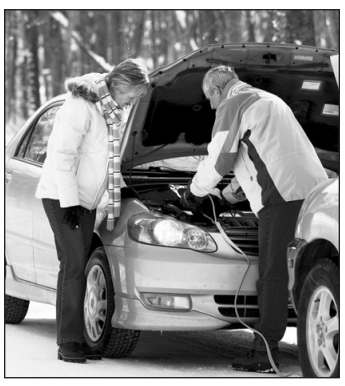
Stocking vehicle roadside repair kit

Regardless of a vehicle's age, a roadside emergency can occur at any time. Drivers should be prepared with a basic kit of tools and equipment to get the car back on the road as soon as possible.

At the very least, a roadside emergency can be an a minor inconvenience. At the worst, it can compromise the safety of the driver and passengers. Anything from a blown-out tire to an overheated engine can necessitate pulling over for a quick fix. Having the right tools can make the process go far more smoothly and help drivers avoid the seemingly endless wait for service personnel to arrive.



Stocking a roadside repair kit requires some necessities. It's also a good idea to routinely check the stock of the kit to be sure everything is in working order. Here are the items to keep on hand.

First aid kit: Handling major or minor emergencies may require a first aid kit to mend scratches, abrasions or minor burns. Become familiar with the kit before it is needed.

Cellular phone: It's never a good idea to talk on a cell phone while driving. However, a mobile phone can prove invaluable if there is an emergency. Simply call for assistance instead of having to seek out a phone or flag down a motorist.

Flares or warning light: A breakdown at night or when visibility is poor can be dangerous. Keep a warning light, caution triangle or flares in the trunk to illuminate the location of the vehicle.

Inflated spare tire: Always keep a spare tire on hand, as tire blowouts or leaks tend to be one of the most common causes of breakdowns. Be sure to have a tire iron, jack, and lug wrench.

Spare fuses: A burnt-out fuse may be responsible for an electrical problem. Replacing the fuse is an easy fix.

Jumper cables: A dead battery can be revived with jumper cables, provided another car is available to offer the jump. A portable battery booster is another handy tool in case there are no other cars to recharge the battery.

Flashlight: This simple tool can be invaluable at night, especially if keys or tools are dropped.

Gloves, cleaner and rags: Cars are full of oils, fluids and grease. That means even a simple repair can get a person dirty.

Pen and paper: Ideal for leaving a note or taking down information in the event of an accident. A disposable camera can also be handy to take photos of an accident scene.

Money: When travelling, always carry cash for emergencies. Not every place takes credit or debit cards.

Snacks and water: A roadside emergency may mean some time spent stranded. Keep a stash of non-perishable items in the car to alleviate hunger pangs and keep riders quenched.

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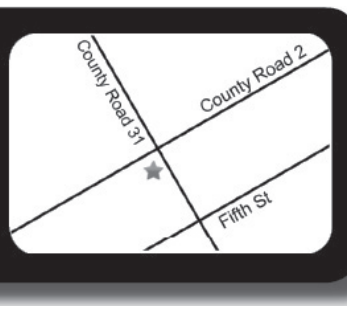

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Leaving Chrysler behind, W.J.L. Boyd takes on OK Tire brand

Although W.J.L. Boyd and Sons Ltd. are no longer a Chrysler dealership, the business is still working hard to be a notch above the rest through a new venture.

As a change that's meant to lead the local automotive shop into the future, they signed their name to the OK Tire brand in February.

"The transition has been different," said Jeff Boyd, owner and operator of the local shop, along with his wife, Trudy. "It's certainly changed the focus of the company, but it's still about serving the customers."

It was September 2009 when they ended their 73-year relationship with Chrysler Canada. But, just three weeks later, OK Tire was on the phone with an offer, said Jeff.

"It was somewhat of a surprise," he said. "We weren't looking for it, but the opportunity arose."

OK Tire has been operating in Canada since 1953, first starting in British Columbia, when a group of independent tire shops joined forces to increase the selection of products they could offer to customers.



Today, there are more than 250 locations scattered across the country.

"It's a very good company to work with, so far," said Boyd. "The availability of tires is endless, from personal vehicles, to industrial and agriculture."

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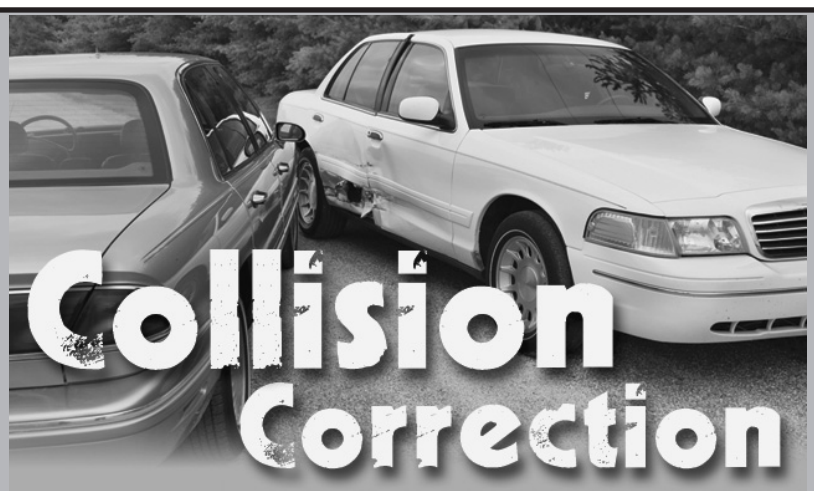
According to the OK Tire website, owners live and work in their local community, which makes them friends and neighbours. That is why OK Tire affiliates invest in things like rodeos, sports teams, car races, mud bogs, and community barbecues. Owners are also actively involved in local charities and work with groups fighting breast cancer, stamping out hunger, and promoting community wellness.

The focus now is on the future for Boyd and his staff.

"You've got to grow," he said. "The focus has been change, but now we move forward after Chrysler, and we've got to grow again as OK Tire."

The service package at W.J.L. Boyd includes air conditioning, alignment, batteries, brakes, computer diagnostics, electrical systems, emission repair, centre exhaust, oil change and lube, provincial inspections, shocks and suspension, tune-ups, and a warranty approved maintenance centre. The local shop also sells new and used vehicles.

For more information, contact W.J.L. Boyd at 613-774-2520 or visit www.oktire.com.



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Word on the Street

We asked upper-year North Dundas District High School students who are considering attending a post-secondary institution in Ottawa next year this question:

Are you thinking about commuting to school? Why or why not?



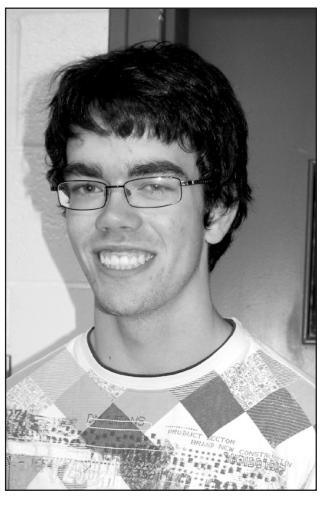
***Jade Chupik** doesn't think she'll drive to school. "It's just too much gas money," she said.*



***Jenna Moore** hopes to drive to Algonquin College. She figures that choice will save her money overall. "I have to pay my own way in college," she explained. "And I'm not a city person. I like the country."*



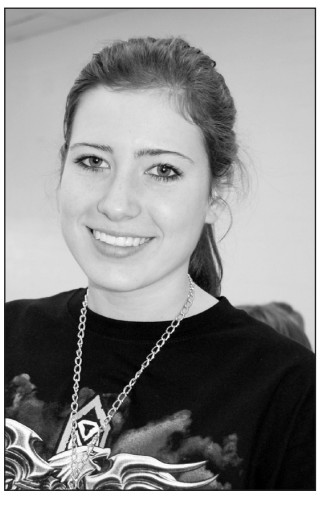
*"I will for sure," said **Amber Ladouceur.** She took a look at the residence fees for Algonquin College and found them to be too high.*



***Logan Coulter** plans on studying fitness and health in college. But right now, he's planning on living at home with his parents and commuting to Ottawa. "It's just too expensive, really," he said of the residence fees.*



***Sam Shelp** is planning on living in residence if she attends an Ottawa university. "You get to meet a lot of new people," she explained.*



*"I'm going to stay in residence," said **Holly McIntosh,** adding that she wouldn't like to drive back and forth.*

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To commute or not to commute?

That is the question – on the minds of Grade 12 students who plan to stick around town

by Amanda Smith-Millar
Press staff

If Taylor Lytle didn't love driving so much, his commute to Cornwall might be unbearable.

Before the Barrhaven resident began studying to become a paramedic at St. Lawrence College this fall, Lytle did some budgeting. He decided it would be smarter to stay at his grandmother's house in Morewood and commute the roughly 120 kilometres roundtrip to school.

"Residence was a bit too expensive," he explained. "I love driving. So it's a good thing for me."

Lytle is missing out on the rowdy residence life. But with exams every week, the 18-year-old relishes his peaceful study time in Morewood.

"Plus, my grandma's really quiet, so it's a good place to study," he acknowledged.

Lytle's 1999 Mercury Sable – lovingly nicknamed "Layla" – has held up reasonably well so far. She did, however, leave her owner stranded in Cornwall the other day. (The culprit turned out to be a fried alternator.)

Having recently celebrated her 104,000th-kilometre "birthday," Layla is no spring chicken. Lytle recommends using synthetic oil and performing regular maintenance to keep an old vehicle running smoothly.

"I take care of my car. It's my child!" he joked.

Lytle was in the same boat as most local Grade 12 students who plan on completing their post-secondary education in Cornwall or Ottawa. Many choose to study at one of the "big three" – the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, or Algonquin College.

These teens face a major decision: Should I move into residence or rent an apartment off campus? Or, should I live at home with Mom and Dad, and drive to class?

North Dundas' mayor-elect, Eric Duncan, lived in residence at Carleton for his first year of university but decided to commute for the rest of his political science degree.

"I'm a big homebody; I like living in the rural area," said the 22-year-old.

The access to transportation allowed him to work at part-time jobs, such as a councillor position with the Township of North Dundas; caucus co-ordinator on Parliament Hill; and executive assistant to Stormont, Dundas, and South Glengarry MP Guy Lauzon.

"It was convenient to be back home every night," he said.

There are downsides to commuting, though, Duncan noted. There's the winter weather, gas prices, and insurance. But the drive does give you downtime to clear your head and listen to the radio, he pointed out.

Beware of hidden costs

Residence fees might seem high, but a car isn't cheap, either.

There are repairs, maintenance, gas, and of course, the outright purchase of a vehicle. Not to mention car insurance (which is disproportionately higher for young men), parking passes, and smaller but nonetheless notable costs like windshield wiper fluid and oil.

Phil Van Noppen of Winchester Automotive Services agreed that it's important to invest in a good car in the first place.

He suggested going beyond the standard safety check and taking your car to a mechanic you trust for a thorough inspection before opening your wallet.

"Is it going to be a money pit? We can't tell the future, but we can certainly do the best to predict these things," said Van Noppen.

After all, a safety doesn't necessarily include items like transmission, the battery, or the heating system.

Van Noppen pointed out that any vehicle has "wear items" and will need regular maintenance. Many of these – such as new brakes – can be anticipated by following the manufacturer's maintenance schedule.

Van Noppen suggested Canadians always follow the "severe" schedule, due to our cold winters and inclement weather.

"You just need to budget for 'x' amount of money per month for car maintenance," he said.

Van Noppen noted that teens often get hand-me-down cars from their parents, who in turn buy a new vehicle.

"I think that is probably the most common thing [for] students," he said. "They get Mom or Dad's old car. And that can be okay."

However, he pointed out that sometimes, students are putting more kilometres on their vehicle than their parents. An older car might not be much of a gift at all, if it needs many expensive new parts or hasn't been maintained well.

Winter: Just around the corner

Students in Winchester, for example, will face driving 50 kilometres or more, each way, every day – sometimes in the rain, snow, and ice.

Besides a cell phone and an emergency kit, winter tires are a must.

Lynn Kirkwood of R/T Auto Center in Winchester said that her own children must have snow tires.

"As a parent, the first thing is safety," Kirkwood said. "It's amazing, the number of people who drive with tires that really aren't meant for winter driving."

Other winter "musts" include access to good, warm footwear in case of a breakdown, and tools to clean snow and ice off one's vehicle.

Do your homework

Despite the many pros and cons, commuting can be cheaper in the long run.

With smart and thorough budgeting, you can decide if driving to school is right for you.

Other factors, like environmental impact, the hassle of the commute, and taking advantage of the "residence experience" may weigh in on your decision. The trick is to start planning now – not the summer before you start university or college.

Check out the *Winchester Press'* tip list for more information, and see what upper-year North Dundas District High School students are saying in the "Word on the Street" feature on the opposite page.



Taylor Lytle is pictured here with his 1999 Mercury Sable who is fondly nicknamed "Layla."

Tips for student commuters

Think that driving to college or university will save you money? Think again. Living at home with Mom and Dad can reduce expenses, but only if you plan ahead, budget, and consider some crucial factors. These tips will help you out:

1. A good car

Get a good, fuel-efficient car that should last the duration of your education, whether it's two years, four years, or more. This suggestion is number one because it really is the most important factor. Students might work a part-time job in high school and diligently save up $3,000 – or maybe even earn an academic scholarship worth that amount. But the savings will disappear quickly if a "deal" of a vehicle unexpectedly needs new brakes, a rack and pinion, and wheel bearings by November. Don't buy a money pit!

2. Regular maintenance

Take care of your car and anticipate regular maintenance. Cars do age and need regular tune-ups. Check out your vehicle's maintenance schedule so you can work these expected costs into your budget and avoid breakdowns.

3. Share rides

Split rides or take a transit bus. This is obviously dependent on a student's schedule. If the purchase of a car can be avoided altogether, that's great. Some lucky students can hitch a ride into Ottawa with Mom or Dad on the way to the office. Also, local companies like Wubs Transit and South Mountain Stagecoach/ Transit offer shuttle buses into Ottawa for commuters. However, the prevalence of night courses these days might necessitate the purchase of a car.

4. Schedule wisely

Cram your courses into several days. Some students have more flexibility than others when it comes to choosing classes. But if you can, it's a good idea to concentrate your classes into three or four days, rather than the traditional five. Two fewer trips into Ottawa or Cornwall per week will result in significant savings over the years – and less wear and tear on your vehicle.

5. Brown bag it

Bring along your lunch and coffee. Universities and colleges aren't just institutions of higher learning. They're corporations, and have anticipated that students will be too rushed, busy, or disorganized to bring homemade lunch and coffee. Many an OSAP loan has been squandered on overpriced beverages and food on retail. It might seem tough, but pack your lunch as often as possible. It'll make a difference in the long run.

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Save money at the pumps by using a block heater in colder weather

Did you know that using a block heater to warm up your vehicle could save you fuel?

According to research by Environment Canada, on a -25 C day, using a block heater can reduce your fuel consumption by as much as 25 per cent for a single short trip.



Science has long known that during colder months, vehicle engines and their emission control systems take longer to warm up to their optimum operating temperature. That optimum temperature is critical for keeping engine efficiency at its peak and harmful emissions at a minimum. But until a vehicle warms up, its engine burns significantly more fuel and spews out additional pollutants. As well, when an engine starts up in frigid (aka Canadian) weather, the oil that lubricates its parts is thick and slow, making the engine work harder to get going, thereby using more fuel and increasing harmful emissions.

Give your vehicle a head start by using a block heater. This will warm the coolant in your engine and allow it to start warm and rise to its optimal operating temperature faster. And that means warm air will flow to the inside of the vehicle through the ventilation system faster as well. To limit the amount of electricity used to operate your block heater, put it on a timer so that it runs for two hours before you have to leave.

Some Canadians waste as much as four per cent of their annual fuel consumption idling their vehicles between six and eight minutes a day. Contrary to popular belief, excessive idling is not the best way to warm up your vehicle – driving it is. So get yourself a block heater and use it to warm up your vehicle ahead of time. You'll be saving time, money and the environment.

www.newscanada.com

Best way to warm up your vehicle

Many Canadians have come to believe that the best way to warm up a cold vehicle is to let it run. After all, it seems logical to us northern brave hearts that if everything outside the vehicle is frozen solid, everything inside the car will be petrified as well. The longer we let the car run, the faster it will warm up, right? Not so.

Contrary to popular belief, excessive idling is not the best way to warm up your vehicle in cold weather; driving it is.

Consider these facts recently presented by Natural Resources Canada in its new publication, *Lean and Clean: Best Practices for Fuel-Efficient Driving:*

• Some drivers let their vehicle run for six to eight minutes or more to warm up the inside of the vehicle. Letting a vehicle warm up for that long only warms the engine. It does nothing for the wheel bearings, steering, suspension, transmission and tires. These parts can only be warmed up by driving the vehicle, which in turn, allows the ventilation system to heat the inside of the vehicle;

• By using a block heater for just a couple of hours on a timer, your vehicle will reach its optimal operating temperature faster;

• The faster your vehicle reaches that temperature, the more efficiently it will run;

• The average vehicle with a three-litre engine wastes 300 millilitres – more than one cup – of fuel for every 10 minutes of idling;

Find more tips for fuel-efficient driving on the NRCan website at www.vehicles.nrcan.gc.ca.

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Are you a speed demon?

How many of us have ripped through a red light, soared past the slow poke in front of us or hummed along the highway not really concentrating on the conditions around us? All of us have driven this way at one time or another. These three driving styles – known as aggressive, rushed or average – can be dangerous, expensive and harmful to the environment.

Did you know, though, that there are driving behaviours that could keep you safe, save you money and help the environment?

Natural Resources Canada defines this type of driver as one who is focused on fuel efficiency at all times. Thinking about road safety and saving fuel and money, fuel-efficient drivers are known to accelerate gently, maintain a steady speed, anticipate upcoming traffic, coast to a stop with their foot off the gas (like driving for free) and avoid high speeds.

A study in Europe revealed that calm drivers use significantly less fuel than aggressive drivers who, the study found, consume 39 per cent more fuel in city traffic than calm drivers and only achieve a four per cent savings in time. Also, students who took fuel-efficient driving lessons were shown to save about 25 per cent in fuel.

You could save up to $500 a year in fuel and cut your harmful greenhouse gas emissions by over 1,000 kilograms a year just by changing your driving behaviour. Not convinced? Check out the NRCan website for more information at www.vehicles.nrcan.gc.ca.

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Mo' power

North Dundas District High School students enrolled in Andrew Whitton's transportation technology class have the opportunity to work on their own vehicles. Jeremy Ruyf (middle) owns this 1972 Dodge Charger, and with the help of friends Ryan Romans (left) and Jordan Sharkey, is currently upgrading the 318 c.i. V8 engine. The classic Mopar has the original 2 bbl. carburetor and points ignition system. Recently, the engine developed a valve train noise, so it was decided to replace the factory camshaft with a high-performance model and upgrade the intake manifold. Ruyf and his classmates carried out preliminary tests (compression, oil pressure and cylinder leak-down) to ensure the engine could handle the improvements. Press Photo – Van Bridger

Inflate your tires properly this winter to stay safe and save money

Make sure your tires are properly inflated before the snow flies or you could find yourself needing a tow truck, or worse, an ambulance.

Since the air pressure in tires supports the weight of your car, it is absolutely vital that you inflate your tires to just the right degree. This is especially important in winter when tires lose their pressure faster because of the colder weather. Underinflating or overinflating your tires increases your fuel consumption and expenditures, pumps out unnecessary harmful emissions and increases the risk of damage and injury to you, your passengers and your vehicle.

Here are a few tips from Transport Canada to maintain proper winter tire inflation:

• Measure your tire inflation at least once a month.

• Measure the pressure when the tires are cold (after two hours of non-use or less than two kilometres of driving). Tires lose pressure when the air temperature gets colder.

• Inflate your tires to the recommended pressures printed on the label inside your car or in your owner's manual.

• Use a high-quality gauge such as those sold at automotive supply stores.

• Underinflation increases rolling resistance, which reduces tread life and increases fuel consumption. It can also lead to sudden tire failure. Without enough air, the sides of a tire bend and flex too much. This builds up heat, which can cause serious damage. Operating a vehicle with just one tire underinflated by 56 kPa (8 psi) can reduce the life of the tire by 15,000 km and can increase the vehicle's fuel consumption by four per cent.

• Overinflation can be a problem, too. An overinflated tire rides on just the centre portion of the tread. The smaller contact area means reduced grip on the road. This can lead to a harsh ride, handling issues (such as steering and stopping problems) and increased wear on tires and suspension components.

Transport Canada has posted these and other tire maintenance tips on its website: http://www.tc.gc.ca/roadsafety/tp/tp2823/inflating.htm.

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Car care tips for women facing winter



Confessions of a Country Convert

by Adele Eyman

City women don't think about winter driving the same way that country women do. That's because they don't have to. City women can get their morning chores done and leave for work without making a snow survival plan. They know that their worst winter nightmare has the bus not showing up, forcing them to take refuge at a nearby Starbucks until rescued.

Not so for country women facing winter. Most country women drive in the winter. They have no choice; they *need* to drive to get to work, pick up the kids, and grab a few groceries on the way home. Winter weather is no match for a country woman, on the road with a shovel, bag of kitty litter, candle, box of matches, sleeping bag, extra socks, lip gloss, and a big bag of Mars bars from Halloween stashed under her seat. Country women will clean off the car and plow through a fresh snowfall for a bag of milk and a box of Pop-Tarts because the kids need breakfast. Country women will steer the van into a blizzard because their seven-year-old just threw up at school. Country women will start the truck at 3 am in flannel pyjamas and high-heeled boots for a trip to the ER in freezing rain when their toddler puts a marble up her nose.

Unlike her city cousin, a country woman needs a vehicle that will start and go when she has to, especially in the winter. Here are a few things that you can do (or, better yet, teach her how to do herself) to make sure your country woman facing winter gets what she needs.

Tires

Check the tires regularly. Tires are where "the rubber meets the road" and you should check each tire's pressure and tread at least once a month. Check tire pressure when the tires are cold, i.e., when the car has been sitting for a while. Use a tire gauge to take a reading, and compare it with the recommended level of tire pressure found in the vehicle owner's manual or on the door sticker. Remember: Every time the outdoor temperature falls 2 degrees Celsius, the air pressure in your tires drops 1-2 psi (pounds per square inch).

Fluids

Check the engine fluids regularly, especially the engine oil. Do this before starting the engine. First, unlatch and open up the hood. With a rag in one hand, pull out the oil dipstick. Use the rag to wipe the dipstick clean; then re-insert and remove the dipstick again. This time, see where the oil level falls on the dipstick; it should fall within the acceptable range marked. Re-insert the dipstick. If the engine needs oil, look in the owner's manual to see what weight of oil to add and how to add it.

Check the other fluids levels. That includes: coolant, and the transmission, power steering, and brake fluids. Follow the owner's manual for this.

Finally, top up the windshield washer fluid reservoir. On messy days, you can go through two or more litres of windshield washer fluid, keeping the windshield clean.

Under the hood

While you're under the hood, check the battery cables, clamps, and terminals for signs of corrosion. Check the engine belts and hoses for signs of wear, too. But even a good look at these may not show a problem area developing; so, follow your vehicle's service schedule or maintenance plan. Your mechanic can tell you what servicing is generally needed for your odometer reading – how many kilometres your car has travelled – in addition to regular oil and filter changes. Ignore your mechanic's advice and risk ending up like I did: Stranded on a county road one Boxing Day, with a carload of gifts, a broken timing chain, and no garage within 100 miles.

Change the air filter when it gets dirty. A dirty air filter restricts the air flow to the engine, which could mean reduced engine power when you need it the most. An air filter which no longer works can cause corrosion and unnecessary engine wear, meaning expensive repairs down the road.

Idling

Finally, let a cold engine (one that has sat five or more hours) idle for at least 30 seconds before upping the RPMs. This gives the oil a chance to move up from the oil pan and back into the engine again. If you put the car into gear and drive, or worse, stomp on the accelerator right after ignition, then you are forcing your engine to work hard without adequate oil to lubricate its moving parts. So go easy when starting the vehicle; at this point, even if it's cold outside, flooring it won't help "warm it up." Help "blow it up" is more likely, which is not what you want to do when you are a country woman facing winter. Unless, of course, you can spot a bus stop, an approaching bus or a Starbucks nearby.

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How to drive in dangerous conditions

Weather-related accidents are some of the most prevalent but can be largely prevented if the proper driving techniques are followed.

Some of the more dangerous driving conditions include heavy rain that causes hydroplaning, driving on ice and driving in heavy snow.

Hydroplaning

Hydroplaning occurs when water on the roadway accumulates in front of a vehicle's tires faster than the weight of the vehicle can push it out of the way. The water pressure can push the vehicle up on a thin layer of water, essentially breaking the tires' contact with the road. In a matter of seconds, a driver can lose control and end up swerving out of his or her lane.

It is important to follow a few guidelines to prevent hydroplaning. First, keep tires well maintained. Worn-out tread can contribute to hydroplaning, as can inadequately inflated tires. Certain tread patterns are more capable of diverting water away from the tires. Ask a professional about which tire tread to choose.

Next, realize that the higher the speed, the higher the propensity to hydroplane. At lower speeds, it is generally rare to hydroplane, unless the water puddles driven through are exceptionally deep. Reduce speeds when it is raining.

Also, lighter vehicles are more prone to hydroplaning. Again, if driving a compact or lightweight vehicle, slow down when water is on the road.

Should hydroplaning occur, let off the gas and do not apply the brake or turn the wheels. Once the car slows down and retains traction once more, steer and brake accordingly.

Ice

Ice is a problem that plagues drivers when the temperature drops. While some ice can be detected on the roadway, thin sheets of ice blend in with the asphalt and are known as "black ice." Black ice can be undetectable until a car begins to skid.

It is important to make some modifications to a vehicle if driving on ice will be commonplace this season. At the least, proper tire inflation is important to maintain traction. Tires should also be checked for tread, as bald tires will do little to grip the road.

Individuals who want even more protection should consider switching to snow tires for the winter. These tires are made from a softer rubber so they can better grip the road. They may also feature a different tire tread for even more traction. Snow chains can be used to offer greater grip. However, speeds will have to be greatly reduced when chains are in place.

Reducing speed is helpful when driving in an inclement condition, including on ice. It helps a driver to better correct a situation and react. If skidding is experienced, gently steer in the direction of the skid without applying the brakes. When traction is resumed, slow down and correct the car.

Heavy snow

Driving in snow is different from driving on ice, but they share some similarities. Snow can be melting and freezing on roads simultaneously, depending on whether salt and sand have been applied by road service personnel. Therefore skidding from hydroplaning and ice may occur.

Another hazard from snow is reduced visibility. Driving under blizzard conditions is very dangerous. Wind and snow can cause white-out situations, essentially wiping out any visibility. In these instances, a driver should pull over to a safe area and wait out the storm.

Some people experience trouble with snow accumulation on roads that have not been plowed. A lower-profile car with smaller tires may not be able to navigate through snow drifts and end up getting stuck. This can prove dangerous if the car stalls in the middle of a road where visibility is poor.

The best advice for driving in snow is to assess the situation. If it is falling heavily, it can be safer to stay home. If a person must drive, reduce speed and leave a very large buffer zone between the vehicles to allow for emergency stopping. When approaching intersections or stop signs, begin braking early to prevent skidding through. Also, be extremely cautious of other vehicles, as they may be experiencing trouble stopping as well.



Ready for winter

Bruce Angus of D & J Motors is pictured here putting on a winter tire. Good winter tires are a key component of safe winter driving. *Press Photo – Smith-Millar*

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Dealership looks to the future

by Matthew Uhrig, Press staff

What would you do if everything you've ever known was threatened to be taken away in just the blink of an eye?

That thought became reality in May 2009 for staff at Upper Canada Motor Sales in Morrisburg.

It was the height of the worldwide economic meltdown, and General Motors (GM), both the flagship in the United States and its Canadian affiliate, were feeling the pinch. Following the near-collapse of the continent's auto industry, and as a cost-saving measure, GM selected certain dealerships across North America for closure, just as they were slated to receive hefty government bailouts.

All of this certainly came as a surprise to Paul and Marc Goupil, the father-and-son management team at the dealership. Paul is principal owner, while Marc is the service manager.

"I was just about speechless when we got the word," said Marc. "It's hard to describe really [how I felt]. We have this beautiful building, and just put in $1 million to upgrade to GM's image standards."

Marc continued, saying that the compensation package for those slated to close was explained to all GM dealerships across the continent, and those selected would receive an email during the morning.

"It got to 1 pm that day, and we thought we were in the clear," he said. "But, at 3:30 pm, we got a phone call, because there was a problem with the email system. We were told we were too small of a market."

In GM's opinion, residents in Dundas County looking to buy a GM vehicle could drive to Ottawa or Cornwall to find what they are looking for, said Marc.

"They made my market small," he said. "In my mind, by closing us, they'd be hurting other dealers."

Marc explained that with Upper Canada being in Morrisburg, residents are liable to stay with GM, but if they are forced to shop elsewhere, there's a wide variety of dealerships available in a bigger centre.

"People shouldn't have to travel the long distances, and they should try and support local business," he said. "Plus, not too many farmers like driving into the city."

From the time of the announcement on, Marc and Upper Canada's staff set themselves up for a dogfight they had every intention of winning.

When being told they would close, what GM deemed a fair financial compensation was offered to the dealership, but Marc remained adamant that the dollar amount was lacklustre.

"For that price, we might as well have closed the doors," he said. "Their decision was very knee-jerk."

With just five days to accept the terms of the closure agreement, Marc and the staff wanted nothing to do with it, but, said Marc, about 80 per cent of the Canadian dealerships selected did take what they were offered.

"We looked thoroughly at the compensation, and it just didn't make sense for us to take it," he said. "We chose not to accept, and moved on with another process."

By not accepting the terms, Marc, along with his father, were beckoned to GM Canada's corporate headquarters in Oshawa for a management review meeting, but they had already made up their minds. They would work, at all costs, to stay open.

"We were told that we'd have to go through arbitration on our own or join with other dealers in the same boat," said Marc. "But the problem was, they would not say who took the package and who didn't."

Marc said it was hard to find other dealers in the beginning, but they eventually hooked up with a small group of franchises in Toronto.

"We got informed about a potential lawsuit against GM, by them," he said. "Up until then, life was [at] a standstill."

The local automotive sales centre and repair shop joined forces with 18 other dealerships across the province – plus one in Prince Edward Island – in an attempt to sue the Canadian subsidiary and keep their doors open.

"Court's a lot of paperwork, but our lawyer was excellent. Extremely well organized," said Marc. "But, for 15 months, life stood still."

The 15 months was the time it took to reach an agreement with GM. First, GM argued that each dealership should fight in court on their own, and not as a collective, but that was thrown out by a judge, said Marc.

"This is a huge win for us and the group of 19 dealers that didn't accept GM's proposal," Paul said at the time. "This will allow us the opportunity to see, in open court, the criteria that GM used to make their decisions."

Next came the courtroom battles.

"But it all was more than just a court case," said Marc. "These were a group of good dealers, and everybody was in the same boat."

As the months wore on, so did the lawsuit, but all that ended in August. At that time, GM Canada reached an out-of-court settlement with the group of non-retained dealerships, leaving 13 of them to remain open under a new five-year contract, while the other stores received additional compensation for closing last month.



Owner Paul Goupil (left) and his son, Marc, service manager at Upper Canada Motor Sales. *Press Photos – Uhrig*

"The morale around here is so much better now," said Marc. "A lot of things were on hold [during the court battle], but now we're really looking at things, like improving our sales."

For the foreseeable future, said Marc, the dealership will continue on its path in Morrisburg, while one day in the near future, the transition of ownership will go from father to son. (Marc also hopes his children will one day take over.)

"We're here for a long time to come," said Paul.



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