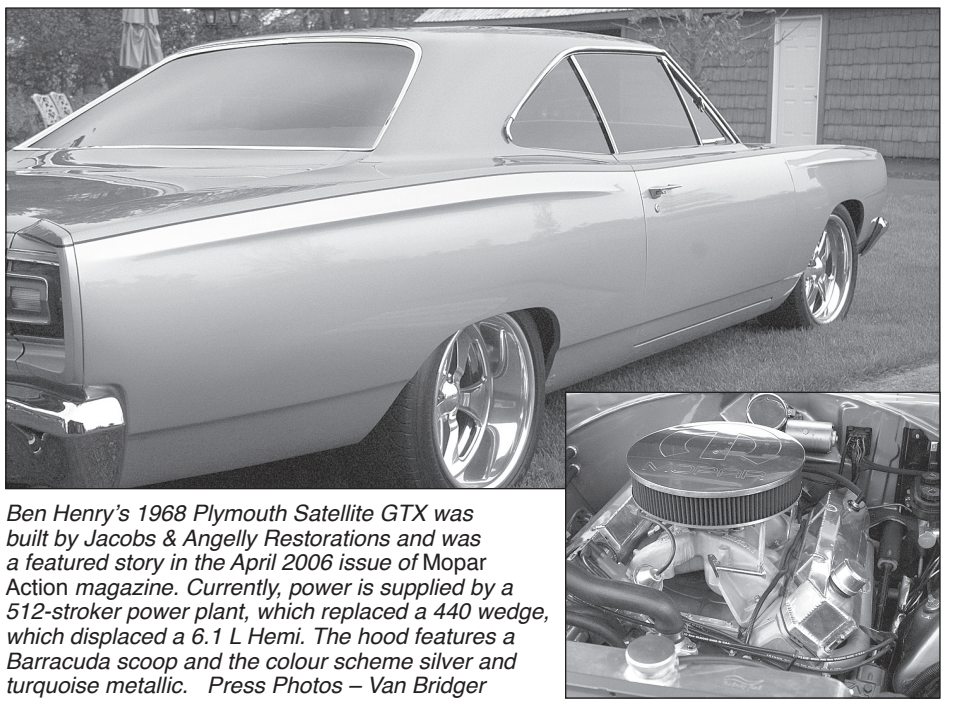
October 30, 2013



Fall CAR CARE

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO THE WINCHESTER PRESS



Ben Henry's 1968 Plymouth Satellite GTX was built by Jacobs & Angelly Restorations and was a featured story in the April 2006 issue of Mopar Action *magazine. Currently, power is supplied by a 512-stroker power plant, which replaced a 440 wedge, which displaced a 6.1 L Hemi. The hood features a Barracuda scoop and the colour scheme silver and turquoise metallic. Press Photos – Van Bridger*



Classic Chryslers find home in Dundela

DUNDELA

Classic car shows are growing in popularity and the restoration of yesterday's muscle cars is an industry unto its self.

When the sun shines, it is not uncommon to see restored antique automobiles, hot rods, and refurbished pickup trucks cruising local highways.



Featured on our cover

Winchester businessman Ben Henry (Ben's Pioneer) is one of a growing number of collectors who doesn't mind putting his rolling stock on the road.

Henry is the proud owner of a pair of unique Mopars – a 1964 Plymouth Barracuda and a 1968 Plymouth Satellite displaying GTX badges. These classic Chryslers, in part, standout because of their eye-catching paint schemes.

The Barracuda is brilliant fire engine red adorned with pink ghost flames and pin stripping (by a custom car artist who is known as Yosemite Sam). The road hugging GTX is two-tone silver and turquoise metallic.

"I try and drive them at least once a week, if the weather is nice. Actually, I've put 10,000 miles on the GTX since I got it in '06," the Mopar fanatic, who sports a Mopar "M" tattoo, told the *Winchester Press*.

In fact, since he acquired the GTX six years ago, Henry's wife Tanya has taken to the hobby to the extent she encouraged her husband to purchase the Barracuda, which he says is now her car.

"Even the kids like touring around and going to car shows," he said. "It is something the whole family can do."

Henry has the perfect location to play with and baby his Mopars. He and his family reside on a farm property, complete with a red barn, just north of Dundela. There are outbuildings and garages for storage and maintenance, and most importantly no close neighbours to complain when the GTX is fired up.

Cover car

Henry's '68 GTX is unique because it was custom built in Eldorado, Ill. by Jacob & Angelo Restorations (J&AR) and was featured on the cover of the April 2006 edition of *Mopar Action* magazine.

Henry tracked down the GTX at a show in Carlyle, Pa., made the purchase and imported it to Canada.

Some time after he had the GTX on the road he was asked if he knew his new ride was a feature story in an American hot rod magazine.

"I didn't have any idea. The owner didn't mention it. But that makes it even more special," he said.

The GTX came rust free from California and was customized by J&AR with the intent of being shown and sold at the SEMA show in Las Vegas. A monstrous 6.1L Hemi engine replaced the original 318 cu inch engine. The interior was completely redone and the rear frame narrowed two inches to fit the 18x10" Budnick tires.

A 440 wedge, which was under the hood when Henry took possession, eventually replaced the 6.1 L Hemi. After dropping a piston, Henry had Bobby Skuce of Hainsville rebuild the power plant into a 512 stroker, topped with an Edelbrock intake and a 4 BBL Holley carburetor.

Henry said that having a friend as a mechanic, in this case Todd Kirkwood (R/T Auto Center Inc.), is a must when owning collector cars, which in itself is a very good investment.

Because the GTX has been appraised at over $70,000 and the stock '64 Cuda at $22,000 Henry smiled and said, "These are two cars I won't lose money on."



64 Cuda

Henry's '64 Plymouth Barracuda is unique because it was manufactured in 1964, the year the fastback was introduced by Chrysler. Press Photo – Van Bridger

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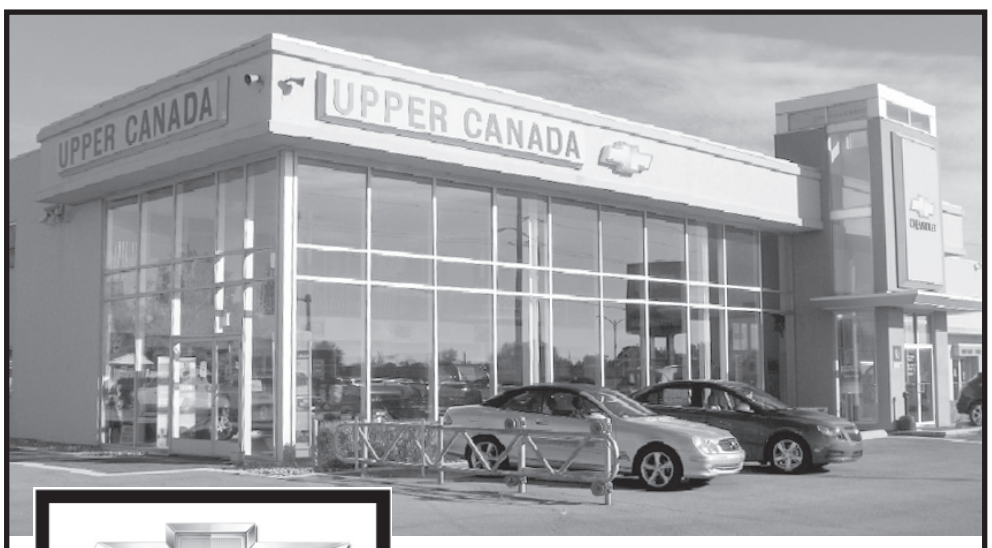

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Simple ways to extend the life of your vehicle

According to data from TrueCar.com, in 2012 the average new car cost $30,500. That's a considerable expense, especially at a time when fuel costs remain high and cost of living continues to rise.

Because new cars have become so expensive, more and more vehicle owners are looking for ways to extend the life of their vehicles. The longer a car can stay on the road, the better an investment that vehicle becomes. Fortunately, there are several steps vehicle owners can take that should ensure their vehicles stay on the road for years to come.

Scale back on short trips

The toll cold starts take on a vehicle can add up over time. When a car is started, condensation builds up in the vehicle's exhaust system. On longer trips, that condensation will gradually evaporate. However, on short trips, that condensation often does not have enough time to evaporate, and over time too many short trips will lead to an accumulation of water in the muffler that can lead to rust and rust holes on the muffler. Short trips also can negatively affect gas mileage. When possible, leave your car at home on trips into town when you can just as easily walk or ride a bicycle. Over time, reducing the amount of short trips you take in your car will greatly reduce wear and tear on your vehicle and improve your fuel efficiency as well.



Keeping a vehicle's interior clean can make it more enjoyable to drive while encouraging owners to keep their cars for longer periods of time.

Stick to manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule

Adhering to your vehicle's maintenance schedule serves many purposes, including improving its durability and protecting various components, including its cooling system and drivetrain. While many manufacturers used to recommend changing a vehicle's oil every 5,000 kilometres, many of today's newer automobiles need their oil changed less frequently. Check your owner's manual for manufacturer recommendations regarding oil changes, and don't forget to replace the oil filter when changing your vehicle's oil.

Pay attention to brake pads

Brake pads that are allowed to wear down can cause damage to the brake rotors and calipers. That damage can prove costly and make things harder on your vehicle. Keep an eye on your vehicle's brake pads, which are far less expensive to replace than rotors and calipers, and do not allow them to wear down to metal.

Keep your tires properly inflated

Tires that are under-inflated will negatively impact your vehicle's fuel efficiency. In addition, the tires' life expectancy is reduced considerably when tires are not properly inflated. Routinely check your tire pressure, especially if you drive a lot, and keep tires inflated at the pressure recommended in your vehicle's owner's manual.

Be mindful when filling up your tank

Many people do not pay much attention to their surroundings when pulling into the filling station. But when you fill up can impact your car's life expectancy. Perhaps the worst time to fill your tank is when the fuel tanker is in the gas station refilling the underground tanks. That's because the process of filling the underground tanks can stir up sediment that had settled at the bottom of those tanks. If that sediment finds its way into your vehicle's gas tank, it can clog filters and fuel injectors and negatively affect the vehicle's performance. So unless your car is running on empty, avoid refilling its gas tank when the tanker is still in the station.



Pressure check

John Montgomery, a mechanic at W.J.L. Boyd & Sons OK Tire in Winchester, is pictured checking the air pressure in this car's tires. *Press Photo – Casselman*

Take care of the interior

Caring for a car is not just about being good to what's under the hood. Caring for the car's interior will not necessarily impact its performance, but a well-kept interior will improve how you look at your vehicle and how much you enjoy driving it. The longer you enjoy driving your vehicle, the longer you are likely to keep it. Preserve the vehicle's door and window seals; clean the dashboard, including the gauges, vacuum the floor mats; and wipe down the vehicle's interior, whether it's cloth or leather. Keeping up the appearance of the car's interior will make the vehicle more enjoyable to drive and increase its value at resale.

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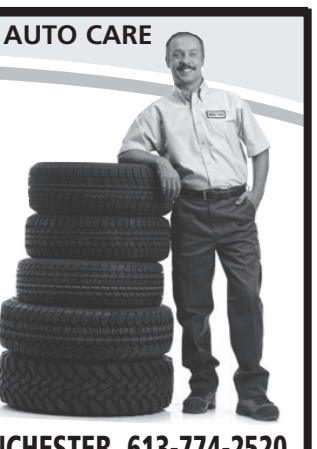

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Drop in or make an appointment

Centre offers free help with car seat installation

WINCHESTER

Installing a car seat looks fairly easy, but sometimes looks can be deceiving.

Local Ontario Early Years Centres in Cornwall and the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry, offer parents, grandparents, and caregivers free assistance in how to correctly install a car seat.

"It's not until they start installing them that they really start to panic," Carrie Van Allen, family resource co-ordinator at the Winchester location, said.

Van Allen explained that while it is preferable that parents make appointments for the car seat clinic, she does have a lot of parents and grandparents who drop into the Fred Street centre when they realize there is more to the task than expected.

Whether parents drop by or make an appointment, Van Allen said it is important that they bring along their car seat manual, as well as their vehicle manual, as installation varies depending on the type of each.

Van Allen, who has been officially trained in the task, will then ensure that the car seat is the right one for the child in question, and that the correct installation technique is being used for that particular model of seat and car. Cars made after 2000, for example, usually come with the universal anchorage system (UAS) where it may not be possible to anchor the car seat in the centre of the backseat.

Is the child the right weight and height for the seat being used? Should the car seat be rear or front facing when installed? What is the difference between tethering and anchoring a car seat? Is it okay to buy a used car seat? Can I use the same seat I used for my first child?

These are all important questions that Van Allen and her team can answer, many of which are not what you might expect. Used car seats, for example, are not a good idea. Seat regulations may have changed since the item was first manufactured, or it may have been in an accident, jeopardizing its effectiveness.

Van Allen and her co-workers, who refresh their training annually, keep informed on current recalls and upcoming changes in installation requirements, and they are ready and willing to share what they know with parents and grandparents.

How many parents know that bulky snowsuits and bunting bags are a bad idea when it comes to fastening their child into the car? Van Allen said it is recommended that there be no layers between the child and the seat, as it could mean the safety chair will not function as expected. Instead, car seat bags and blankets are recommended to keep children warm.



Carrie Van Allen, family resource co-ordinator for the Winchester Ontario Early Years Centre, is pictured installing a car seat. This service is offered free by qualified individuals and is open to parents, grandparents, and caregivers. *Press Photo – Casselman*

The Ontario Early Years Centre, one of the many services offered by the Glengarry Inter-Agency Group (GIAG), a non-profit community-based organization, is ready to help any parent, grandparent, or caregiver, whether they attend the centre or not. Whether the parent needs someone to install the seat, check on the status of one already installed, or give advice, the centre's staff are ready and waiting. (The Winchester location works in partnership with the Eastern Ontario Health Unit, whose staff provides the service on Fridays.)

For more information, visit www.giag.ca.

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Expansion latest phase of D's Collision's evolution

WINCHESTER

As small business owners, Dennis and Phil Carkner were left with a decision to make – expand their existing Dawley Drive location or stand pat.

After much deliberation, the father-son duo took the leap and increased D's Collision Center by a further 4,000 square-feet.

The shop addition comes at a key time in the business' transition from Fix Auto to a more solidified affiliation with Collision Solutions Network (CSN).

"Since making that change, our sales have gone up dramatically," Phil said. "I'm not sure it is all to do with that, but there is probably some correlation."

With an increased workload, a need for more operational space became evident.

"We've basically doubled the workspace," Phil said. "It was all tailored to our need."

Included in the expansion are six new bays for body repair and teardown of vehicles, while three portable hoists have been added, along with a new, heavy-duty vacuum system. The original portion of the shop will become the dedicated paint area.

"The next step is to reorganize, and be sure all our processes are in place," Phil said. "We have to make sure our flow is better."

Room has also been made for a designated parts area, keeping needed items out of the way and no longer stored as closely to the paint area as they had been.

"All of this is a big improvement from what we had previously," Dennis said. "Everything will be okay, and we'll be wrapped up by the end of the year. We'll be rock 'n' rollin' by then, I hope. The whole place will be a lot better when we're done."

Outside of completing various vehicle bodywork, including collision and dent repair, detailing and wheel repair and more, the shop is also a certified Enterprise Rent-A-Car outlet.





The Dawley Drive shop (above) has expanded by 4,000 square-feet, adding six new bays, and upgraded vehicle repair technology.

Dennis (left) and Phil Carkner are pictured near D's Collision's new Enterprise Rent-A-Car designated workspace.

Press Photos – Uhrig

For Dennis, meanwhile, the latest addition is especially heartening, as he is celebrating the 25th anniversary of D's Collision.

Having began in the building currently occupied by Akcent Motor Sales, Dennis moved his shop across Dawley Drive near the end of his first year in business, and has been working to grow its services ever since.

"Sure, there is still room grow, but we're progressing in the right direction," he said. "We've had nothing but 100-per-cent support from the community, and that is why we reinvest in the shop. Our customers like to see that."

A celebration of the shop's expansion is also being planned for July 2014, but complete details have yet to be worked out.



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Rolling along

The Highway 43 Car Club, which began as nothing more than an idea to bring together enthusiasts, now boasts more than 300 active members. Today, the organization remains involved in its role to promote and preserve the automotive hobby, while at the same time raise needed funds for various community groups and charities. The club also benefits from a number of sponsors, including Winchester businesses BMR and D's Collision. Pictured during a stop in the village in late August is Phil (left) and Dennis Carkner at the Dawley Drive located D's Collision, alongside car club executive members Mike Lecuyer and Rod Rafter (right). For more information on the Highway 43 Car Club, visit www.highway43carclub.com.

What's the difference between AWD and 4WD?

Winter weather is just around the corner, leaving some drivers wondering if their two-wheel-drive vehicles can handle roads covered in snow and ice. Now is the time people flock to car and truck dealerships to trade in their cars for something with a little more power and traction and also to take advantage of end-of-season pricing. When faced with an array of vehicles boasting four-wheel-drive (4WD) and all-wheel-drive (AWD), consumers often wonder about the differences between the two options or if there is any difference at all. Though similar, 4WD and AWD are not quite the same.

Both drive systems engage all four wheels at the same time to provide more traction. On AWD systems, the powering of the wheels is automatic and usually handled by the electronic system of the car. Some vehicles drive in two-wheel-drive, but then engage AWD when sensors detect a need for more traction and maneuverability. When operating 4WD vehicles, drivers may have to manually engage the system. True 4WD uses a transfer case mounted by the rear of the transmission. A button or selector lever on older model SUVs would switch the vehicle from 2WD to 4WD. Unlike in AWD systems, the front and rear axles are locked together in 4WD systems.

Four-wheel-drive systems are better for off-roading and driving through mud and water. Individuals who participate in many off-road recreational activities will find that 4WD, especially in vehicles with more gears, is more effective and provides better traction. All-wheel-drive provides stability, largely on roadways, and enables the vehicle to modify the level of power to either the front or rear wheels to improve traction as needed. All-wheel-drive is adequate for many drivers and situations.

It is important to note that, on icy or slippery roads, neither AWD or 4WD systems assist with braking or completely prevent cars from skidding on slick surfaces. Having the ability to engage all four wheels at the same time should not be used as a replacement for cautious driving in inclement weather.

Four-wheel-drive and all-wheel-drive both provide power to all four wheels on the vehicle but have subtle differences that make each better for certain driving conditions.

Did you know?

According to AutoGuide.com, the Toyota Corolla is the number one selling vehicle of all time.

Since production on the Corolla began in 1966, the Japanese automaker's beloved sedan has sold more than 37.5 million units.

While its relatively low price tag and reputation for fuel efficiency likely played a role in propelling the Corolla to its status as the most popular automobile of all time, the vehicle that is second fiddle to the Corolla might come as a surprise.

With roughly 35 million units sold since its introduction in 1948, the Ford F-Series truck line is the second best selling vehicle of all time.

The popularity of the F-Series line of pickup trucks is perhaps a byproduct of its various incarnations, such as the smaller F-150 and the much larger and more powerful F-450.

Rounding out the top five are the Volkswagon Golf, which has sold 27.5 million units since it was first introduced as the Rabbit in 1974; its older sibling, the Volkswagon Beetle, which has sold 23.5 million units since its introduction 80 years ago; and the Ford Escort, which has sold 20 million units despite being discontinued in 2000.

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Left: *Phil (left) and Bob Van Noppen are pictured during the official unveiling of Winchester AutoPro's expansion earlier this month.*

Above: *The new exterior appearance of Winchester AutoPro on County Road 43.*

Press Photos – Uhrig

Winchester Autopro's major expansion completed

WINCHESTER

Nearly five weeks after the official unveiling of Winchester AutoPro's expanded facility, it is business as usual once again at the County Road 43 shop.

Friends, family, and local dignitaries attended the event earlier this month, hosted inside AutoPro's new work area, which was added as an extension to the original building.

"This is another milestone for our shop, and it is amazing to see how blessed we are," Phil Van Noppen, business owner, said during the grand opening celebration. "This is very special for us… It was a smooth transition."

The now completed workspace includes two wash bays and two more service bays, bringing the total to eight. In addition, the main entrance of the business was overhauled, including an updated area for front office staff and an expanded seating area for customers.

Since opening in 1980, Winchester AutoPro's exterior appearance remained largely unchanged, right down to the pumping station terminal, which had not provided gasoline for a number of years.

Byers Carpentry completed the entire overhaul project.

"They did a fantastic job, and did it on time," Van Noppen said.

Van Noppen's father, Bob, who began the business more than three decades ago, also took a turn to address the assembled crowd during the unveiling.

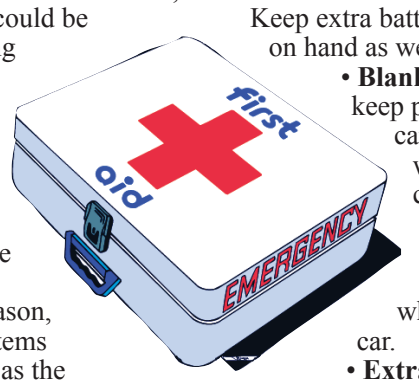
"To see this firsthand after 33 years, it really is a dream come true. We've always been looking forward, and preparing for next steps," he said. "To see this finished now, it is wonderful."

Bob also took time to reflect on the earlier years of the shop.

"I was working in Ottawa, and had a successful career as a service manager, but then ended up without a job," he said. "I then invested in the County Road 43 property…. Got turned down for a bank loan, and struggled with money. But the success you see here now is amazing. Customers have become our friends, and relationship building is so much a part of what we have been able to do in this community."

Must-have items for automotive emergencies

Few drivers want to think about their vehicles breaking down. But cars are not foolproof, and even the most well-maintained vehicle can be sidelined by a flat tire or a dead battery. In certain times of the year, a breakdown may be an inconvenience that takes up a few hours of a person's time. In extreme weather situations, a broken down car could be dangerous. Preparing for emergency situations can help drivers get moving faster.



There are certain items that should be kept in the trunk or cargo area regardless of the season, and some of these items should be modified as the seasons change.

• **First aid kit:** If someone is hurt in an accident, medical supplies in the trunk allow drivers and/or passengers to treat injured persons until paramedics can arrive. Go over what is in the kit and learn how to use each item correctly.

• **Flares:** If your car breaks down at night or in situations where visibility is poor, flares can keep other drivers away from your vehicle when it is parked on the side of the road. Flares also will illuminate the area so that you can work on fixing a problem or alert emergency personnel as to where you are located.

• **Jumper cables:** Jumper cables enable you to recharge a dead battery, a common problem in cold weather. Automotive retailers also sell portable car battery chargers that can provide the boost needed to the battery in the event you cannot find another car around to offer assistance.

• **Spare tire and tools:** Tire blowouts or holes in tires are unpredictable. Having the necessary items at the ready can get you back on the road faster. Learn how to change a tire. In a pinch, tire sealant can be used to get you to the next service station and away from the side of the road.

• **Flashlight and batteries:** A flashlight makes it possible for drivers to see under their vehicles and under the hood more effectively. It also can be used to grab the attention of fellow motorists who might be able to help. Keep extra batteries for the flashlight on hand as well.

• **Blankets:** A blanket can keep passengers warm if a car breaks down in chilly weather. Blankets also can be placed on the ground so that you can lay on the road and be cushioned from debris when looking under the car.

• **Extra clothing:** An extra set of clothing can be handy should your clothing become soggy or soiled.

• **Nonperishable foods:** A few snacks and bottles of water stashed in the car can help quell hunger while waiting for a tow truck.

• **Sand and kitty litter:** Sand can weigh down the back of a rear-wheel drive vehicle to provide better traction on slippery roads. Sand and kitty litter also can be sprinkled underneath tires to help them grip the road better when you are trying to get the car out of an icy or muddy patch.

• **Charged mobile phone:** Keep your cell phone charged so that you can make emergency phone calls or contact a tow company in the event of a breakdown.

• **Shovel:** A shovel makes it easier to dig a vehicle out of mud or snow.

Certain things should not be stored in a vehicle. For example, hot weather can cause lighters and cans to burst inside of a car, so such items should not be kept in your car. In addition, freezing temperatures may reduce the effectiveness of certain products and cause liquids to freeze and burst.

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Things to consider before shopping for a new insurance policy

Many motorists consider auto insurance a necessary evil. While drivers don't want to be out on the road without insurance, many lament paying such a high price for security.

But automotive insurance need not be so expensive. In fact, many drivers on the road today could save a considerable amount of money if they took some time to explore their options. While it might be easier to simply stick with an existing policy, some simple comparison shopping might result in a much more affordable auto insurance bill. But before you begin shopping for a new policy, it may help to consider a few factors that might decipher just how affordable your next policy will be.

Driving record

Drivers who recently received a ticket or another citation likely won't find a more affordable auto insurance policy awaiting them. But if points on your license from a past speeding ticket or citation are about to disappear, then wait until they're officially off your record before shopping for a new policy. The fewer points you have, the less you're likely to pay for auto insurance. So be patient if points are about to vanish or be proactive and find yourself a better deal if points recently came off your record.

Personal finances

Your individual credit score will influence how much you pay to insure your vehicle. If your credit rating is strong, then this should help you find a more affordable policy. But if your credit rating has recently faltered or you currently have a significant amount of debt, then work to improve your credit score and reduce your debt before shopping for a new policy.

Ownership status

Many drivers lease or finance their vehicles. In such situations, the lending institution typically mandates drivers carry full coverage. Drivers who lease have no wiggle room on their policies, but those who are financing and are close to paying their vehicle off can likely lower their coverage considerably once they have paid for their vehicle in full. Once you are no longer making payments on the vehicle, you can, if you so choose, adjust your policy so you aren't paying for full coverage. This should save you a considerable amount of money. But before adjusting the policy, shop around among insurance providers and see who gives you the best deal. You might find the most affordable policy is offered by a different company from the one you are currently using.

Location

Where you live also influences the cost of your auto insurance. If a move is in your not-too-distant future, you might find insurance is more or less affordable at your new location than at your current one. Rural areas and the suburbs tend to have fewer drivers on the road than more densely populated urban locales, so insuring a vehicle in such areas is often more affordable than insuring a vehicle within city limits.

Employment situation

While your employment situation won't have too big an impact on the cost of your insurance, finding a new job that's closer to home, which remains a goal for many professionals, may just lower the cost of your auto insurance. Insurance companies consider a host of factors when determining the cost of each auto insurance policy, and the distance between a driver's home and his or her office is one of those factors. If you're in the midst of a job hunt that you hope will end with a new job and a shorter daily commute, then you might want to wait before signing the dotted line on a new auto insurance policy.

An adequate insurance policy gives motorists peace of mind as they traverse the nation's roadways. Finding a more affordable policy is a goal for many motorists, who must consider several variables before they begin the search for a new policy.

Keeping cool

Doug Kelly, owner of Raymond Kelly's Garage in Winchester is pictured using a refractometer to check the status of the coolant in this vehicle. Kelly recently acquired a new 21-foot flat bed tow truck for the garage, which is longer and wider than its predecessor.

Press Photos – Casselman





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The proper tires can make a difference

Drivers rarely think of the tires on their vehicles until they have a flat. But the type of tires on your vehicle can impact its performance. When choosing tires for their vehicles, drivers should consider a host of factors, including the terrain and driving conditions vehicles are likely to encounter.

Understanding tires and what makes some a better fit than others for certain vehicles can make for safe driving and improved handling.



All-season tires

The most common type of tire and arguably the best known is the standard all-season tire. Many vehicles come equipped with these tires, which are designed to be versatile enough to grip the road in various conditions. They are commonly made of a harder rubber that will not wear out quickly and will retain their tread. Most day-to-day driving can be done on all-season tires.

High-performance tires

People who live in dry climates or drive sports and racing cars can benefit from high-performance tires. These tires are specifically designed to grip the road better and offer superior handling under higher speeds. Because high-performance tires are made of a softer rubber compared to standard tires, they will not last as long as all-season tires.

Snow tires

People who live in snowy, icy conditions will benefit from the use of snow tires. These tires are designed with special treads to offer more traction in slippery conditions. The rubber used to manufacture the tire can remain flexible even at extremely low temperatures. Winter tires are best reserved for extreme weather and not used all season long because they will wear out more quickly than others. They may not have the same level of traction on clear roads. In some cases, winter tires may have metal studs included to enhance traction in icy situations. People who do not want to switch tires when cold weather arrives sometimes invest in snow chains that improve traction on standard tires.

Mud tires

Muddy areas can be just as slippery as snowy conditions. Mud tires are designed similarly to snow tires but will have extra grooves and a tread pattern that facilitates movement of mud away from the tires and road. Mud tires may be wider than standard tires as well.

Truck tires

Drivers of trucks or sport-utility vehicles often need special truck tires. These tires can better handle the weight and size of a larger vehicle. Many drivers stick with the type of tire that originally came with their truck. Drivers who like to go off-roading may need an all-terrain tire to offer more traction when climbing hills or traversing different conditions.

It can be easy to overlook the importance of tires, but tires help vehicles remain on the road and can affect mileage, manoeuvrability and safety.

Improving focus behind the wheel

Driver distractions have grown over the previous decade. In addition to cell phones, in-vehicle entertainment systems have grown more popular. The threat posed by drivers using their cell phones while behind the wheel has been widely documented, but drivers also can lose focus on the road when music is blaring or passengers are watching DVDs in their vehicles. Lack of focus can even occur when drivers are alone in their vehicles and their minds begin to wander. The following are a handful of ways drivers can maintain their focus on the road and reduce their risk of being in an accident.

• Take different routes. Familiarity with certain roadways, such as the route you might drive to the office, can lead to a lack of focus. While it's good to be familiar with roads to reduce surprises, taking the same route every day can make it easy for your mind to wander. Losing focus or taking your eyes off the road, even if for just a moment, can cause an accident. If possible, spice up your daily driving routine by taking different routes every so often.

• Leave on time. It's easy to lose focus on the road if you're running late and hurrying to get somewhere on time. When you hurry, your focus is largely on getting to your destination on time and not on getting to your destination safely. Giving yourself enough time to arrive at your destination on time can make you a more alert driver. If you are running late, call ahead to your destination before leaving and let them know you will be a few minutes late. Doing so will calm you down and make you a better driver.

• Switch cars. Much like familiarity with a certain route can lull you into a false sense of security, so can a familiarity with your vehicle. Driving the same vehicle every day has its advantages, but it's easy to become distracted in an automobile you spend hours driving each week. Switch cars with your spouse once or twice a week if possible. You might find driving another vehicle every so often is fun, and a new vehicle might break up the monotony of a daily commute while increasing your alertness.

• Ban smartphones in your vehicle. Smartphones are technological marvels that have quickly changed the way we live our lives. But smartphone use behind the wheel is both dangerous and illegal. Even hands-free devices that allow drivers to keep both hands on the wheel can take drivers' attention away from the roads if they're busy having a discussion on the phone. If your goal is to improve your focus on the road, turn your smartphone off when behind the wheel.

• Encourage backseat passengers to wear headphones when using in-vehicle entertainment systems. If passengers want to make use of your in-vehicle entertainment system, such as a DVD player, then make sure they wear headphones while doing so. This allows you to hear the sounds of the road without being distracted by a loud movie entertaining passengers in the backseat. Front-seat passengers should refrain from watching movies or playing games on their tablets, as such devices can draw drivers' attention away from the road.

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The in-dash infotainment system in the Ford Fusion. Photo courtesy of Ford Motor Company.

Vehicle infotainment systems change the world of driving

Long gone are the days when a person hops into the driver's seat and only has AM or FM radio at his or her disposal. Although standard radio is still popular, today's motorists are faced with a bevy of options in an always-evolving "infotainment" industry.

Infotainment, also known as in-car entertainment or ICE, and in-vehicle infotainment, or IVI, is a collection of hardware devices installed into cars and trucks to provide navigation services and audio and even visual entertainment.

Many of today's cars allow drivers to map routes with ease through intricate navigation systems tied to location-narrowing satellites. Children can boot up a favorite DVD and watch it in the backseat to make a trip more agreeable, while passengers can stream satellite radio and have thousands of different musical options at their fingertips. And thanks to Bluetooth or USB connectivity, drivers and passengers alike can verbally message friends and family by linking their phones to car computer systems. While many of these infotainment sources are channeled through a smartphone, even that technology is changing.

General Motors is the first major automaker to announce that most of their 2015 vehicles will offer embedded 4G modems for constant connectivity. This eliminates the need to pair infotainment systems with a phone and wait for a connection. This may put online radio on par with what is available at home or via wireless hot spots.

Apple recently started bringing a special version of its Siri – a speech-recognition assistant that is built into iPhones and other products – into cars. Siri integration will be coming to at least nine automakers in the future, including BMW, General Motors, Mercedes-Benz, Land-Rover, Jaguar, Audi, Toyota, Chrysler, and Honda. Other manufacturers, like Ford, which already has a Microsoft-based Sync, have their own voice-recognition software that ties to a larger information "cloud."

From ordering dinner to cuing up movies, infotainment offers drivers many benefits. But on the opposite end of the spectrum, such systems can pose a potentially dangerous distraction.

An AAA study points out that there really isn't a fully safe infotainment system. Of all the typical in-car activities studied by AAA, speech-to-text systems were found to be the most cognitively distracting. When assigned a specific numeric rating by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, with 1.0 being no distraction at all, listening to the radio earned a 1.21 rating, talking on a phone ranked 2.45, while listening to and responding to email using speech-to-text technology received a rating of 3.06.

AAA's president and CEO, Robert Darbelnet, says that text-to-speech capability in cars and many other infotainment features could present a safety crisis.

"It's time to consider limiting new and potentially dangerous mental distractions built into cars, particularly with the common public misperception that hands-free means risk-free," says Darbelnet.

With the ability to send and receive tweets, update social media sites, get directions, and make restaurant reservations all through a vehicle's infotainment system, drivers have many features at their disposal. It remains to be seen if these features will be a boon to drivers or result in more distracted driving.

Is there a link between car colour and accidents?

The colour drivers choose for their car may say something about driver personalities and preferences. It also may play a role in the propensity to get into an accident.

Various studies have been conducted to determine if a certain car colour puts a driver at a greater risk for a crash. Though it's difficult to pinpoint which colour vehicles are most likely to be in accidents, common sense suggests that certain colours that are more conspicuous on the road are more easily seen, and this may make them less prone to accidents.

Daimler Benz once conducted a study on the conspicuousness of cars. White cars were the most inconspicuous, followed by black, dark red and blue. Dark-coloured vehicles tend to be the most difficult to see on the road and therefore might be most prone to accidents.

Another study from researchers at the University of Auckland in New Zealand in 2003 showed that drivers of brown cars had a higher risk of injuries in car accidents. Black and green cars also were involved in a high number of car accidents resulting in injuries. In addition, findings also indicated that people who drove silver cars had a 50 percent less chance of being involved in accidents resulting in injury.

The reason why certain colour vehicles are involved in more accidents was missing from the studies. Visibility may play a role, which would make lighter colour vehicles less prone to accidents. Another point to consider is that certain colours may be favored by individuals who have specific driving tendencies. For example, silver and gray cars are often seen as conservative and may be driven by an older demographic that is more cautious on the road. Black cars are often viewed as sleek and may be favored by those who like to push the envelope regarding speed.

While vehicle colour may play a role in accidents, other factors also come into play, such as usage of lights and other features. The National Safety Council has stated the safest car colour to be "one that is highly visible in the widest range of lighting, weather, and vision conditions." They also indicated that white is most visible in uniform lighting but can be an unsafe colour in bright sunlight, snow and fog.

Furthermore, safety behind the wheel has a lot do with driver ability. Defensive driving and being observant on the roadways can significantly reduce accident risk. Here are some other ways to reduce accidents.

- Do not tailgate.
- Leave for trips early enough so that you're not rushing and being aggressive on the roadway.
- Drive with weather conditions in mind, slowing down when necessary.
- Avoid distractions in the car.
- Always wear seatbelts.
- Make sure you keep your car well maintained so that breakdowns do not contribute to accidents on busy highways.

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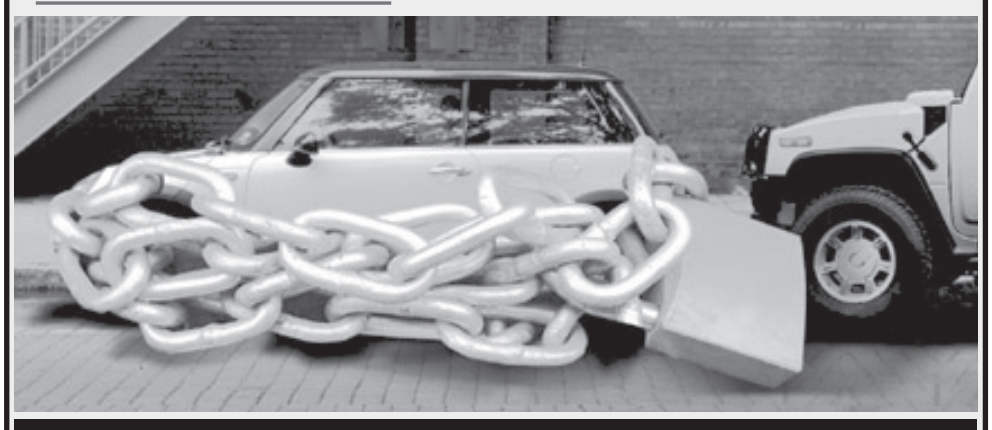

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Tips to help you drive safely around the big rigs

Vehicles have to share roadways equally, but some vehicles tend to take up more space and make motorists more nervous than others. Anyone who has traversed a freeway has ridden alongside trucks. More than 70 per cent of accidents involving trucks are the fault of the other vehicle, according to a study from the U-M Transportation Research Institute that analyzed crash data on fatal two-vehicle accidents involving a heavy truck in the United States. Accidents involving large trucks frequently result in injuries. Ensuring everyone's safety means knowing some of the rules of the road when trucks are present.



Blind spots

Experienced drivers know the advantages of defensive driving techniques, especially when riding alongside tractor-trailers. Despite their larger side view mirrors, large trucks have much larger blind spots than standard cars, and knowing about blind spots is a great way to avoid accidents involving tractor-trailers. Avoid driving on the right side of the truck in the front or rear of the vehicle. The middle-left side of the truck is another spot to avoid, as trucks merging into lanes may not be able to see you when you are on the left flank of the truck.

Merging

As mentioned, the middle of an 18-wheeler is a large blind spot, as is directly behind the truck. When trucks are merging into the roadway, give them plenty of space. You can flash your high beams to alert the truck that you are slowing down and allowing the driver to cross in front of your car. Otherwise, move over into an open lane to give him a wide berth.

Leave plenty of room

Give tractor-trailers plenty of room when sharing the roadways. Tire blowouts on such trucks are quite common, as carrying heavy loads can put a lot of stress on tires. Blowouts send shards of heavy rubber into the air and roadway and can cause the trucker to swerve. The more space you leave between your vehicle and the truck, the less likely you are to be involved in a blowout-related accident.

Another thing to keep in mind is that trucks have a large amount of surface area that can be blown around by the wind. Trucks can be difficult to control in the wind. Therefore, leave extra room on windy days; otherwise, you could find a truck drifting into your lane.

Wide turns

Trucks need to make wide turns to clear curbs and roadside items. Therefore, truck drivers need to swing left before making right turns. Very often the driver will not be able to see cars next to his trailer. The right side of a truck can be extremely dangerous and has far more blind spots than the driver's side of the vehicle.

Don't stop suddenly

A truck traveling behind you cannot stop and manoeuvre as quickly as a passenger vehicle. Try not to hit the brakes to avoid an obstacle in the road, or you may have a semi barreling into the rear of your vehicle. According to information from the site Drive Safely, trucks fully loaded may take as much as the length of three football fields to come to a complete stop when driving at 100 kilometres per hour.

Pass quickly

When passing a large truck, do so only on the left and do it as quickly as possible. This way you move out of the truck's blind spots promptly and avoid getting caught in a situation with a truck coming into your lane because the driver doesn't see you.

Practice self-preservation

Trucks are much larger than cars, and a collision with a truck can result in the car being trampled by the tires or sliding underneath the rig. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports that 70 percent of fatalities in accidents involving a car and a truck were people in cars and not trucks. Do whatever you can to steer clear of trucks and give them plenty of room, even if and when truck drivers are in the wrong. It could mean the difference between a pleasurable road trip and a potentially fatal accident.

Trucks try to maintain speed

When on roadways it can take a while for a truck to reach a cruising speed. Therefore, drivers will usually do what they can to remain at that speed. Otherwise the trickle-down-effect of braking could mean losing precious momentum, causing a backup on the roadway and wasting expensive fuel. Therefore, a trucker will try to avoid hitting the brakes and could swerve quickly into a left lane to avoid a merging car. Truckers usually hold their speed and let the cars around them adjust, which could make for some scary moments.

Trucks also may have speed limiters that cap their speed at a maximum of 104 kilometres per hour. In such instances, they cannot move as fast when passing around other trucks and cars. If a truck seems like it is pacing another truck or car, it could just be because it is at max speed and the terrain doesn't allow the truck to pass effectively. Patience is key in this situation.

Driving with trucks requires drivers sharing the roadways with trucks to be more cautious and courteous. Cars are much more manoeuvrable than trucks, not to mention much more susceptible to damage in an accident.

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