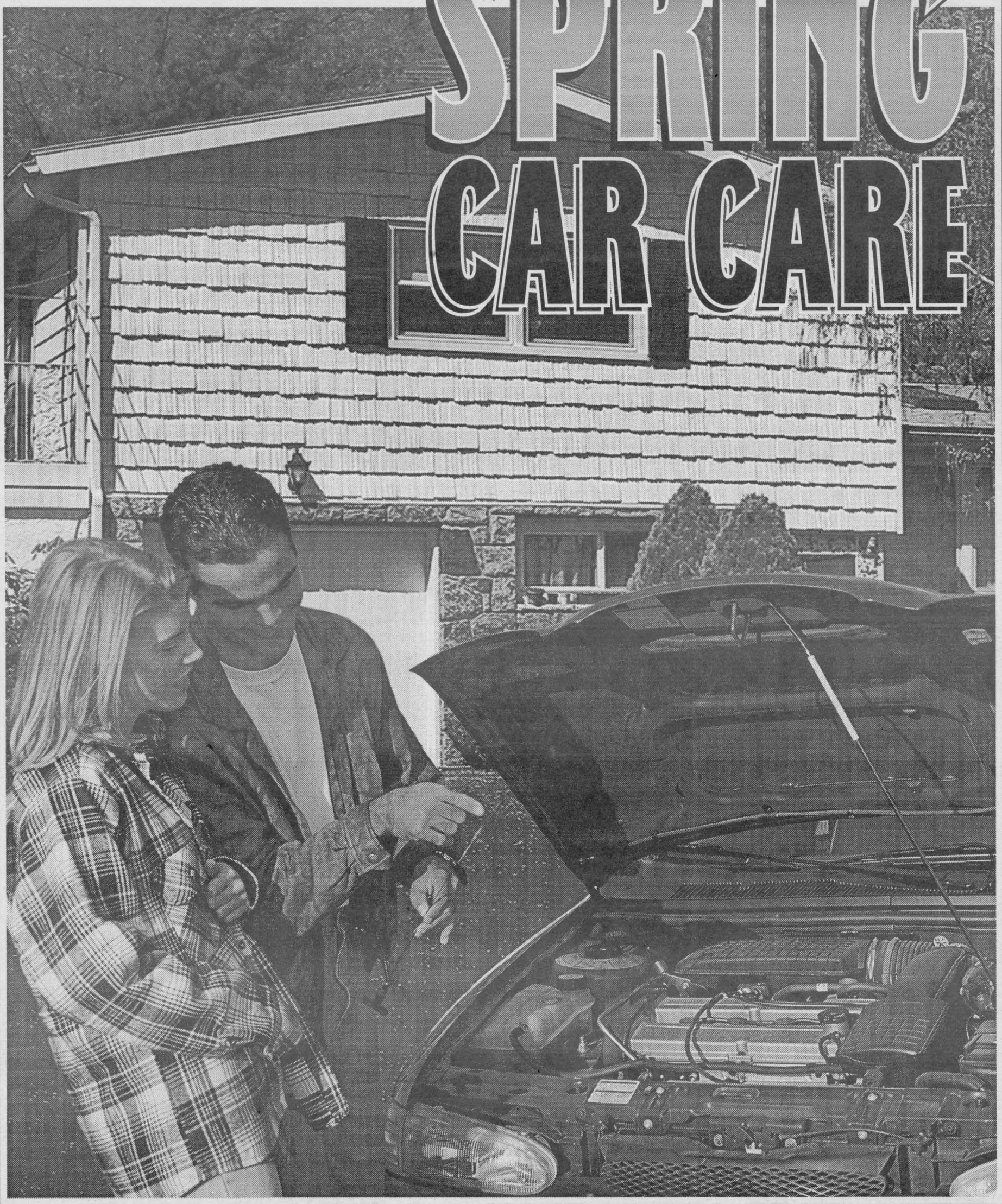
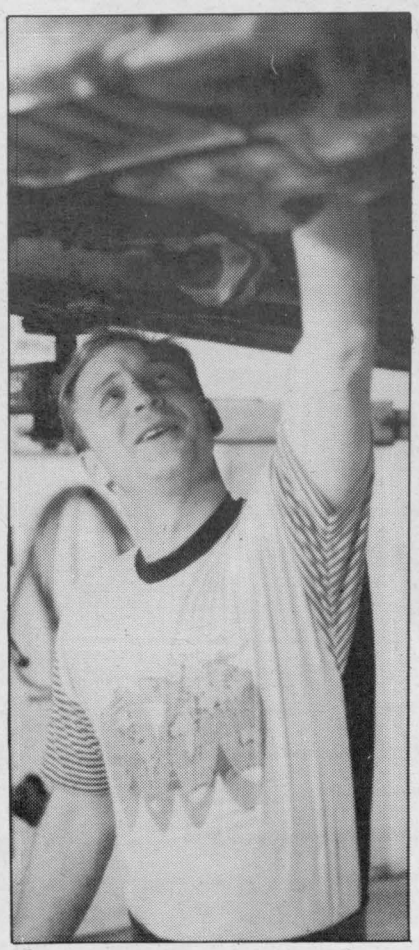
SPRING CAR CARE



Special supplement to the Winchester Press, Wednesday, April 16, 1997

Preventive maintenance saves money



Super Dave's

Dave Spicer, proprietor of Super Dave's Automotive in Metcalfe completes an oil change on a customers car.
Press Photo — Erwin

Canadians are taking better care of themselves by eating better, exercising and altering their lifestyles to live longer. But how many motorists apply this same way of thinking to the care of their vehicles? According to a recent study, five per cent of all motor-vehicle accidents are caused by automobile neglect.

Inexpensive preventive maintenance on vehicles results in a longer vehicle life and saves money on major repairs down the road. Regardless of the age of the vehicle, the following preventive maintenance and safety steps can preserve the condition and performance of the vehicle. These steps are not only economical for you, the consumer, they also benefit the environment.

Here are a few tips you can follow:

• Always consult your owner's manual, but a good rule of thumb is to have the oil and filter changed regularly, every 4,800 to 6,400 kilometres.

• Have all fluids checked, including brake, power steering, transmission/ transaxle, windshield washer solvent and antifreeze. These fluids play a large part in the safety performance of the vehicle.

• Check tire inflation. Underinflated tires can result in a loss of fuel efficiency. This is the least expensive form of preventive and safety maintenance. Tires should be checked once a month.

• Keep your engine tuned up. A fouled spark plug or plugged/restricted fuel injector can reduce fuel efficiency by as much as 30 percent.

• Have your vehicle's chassis lubricated frequently. This step extends the life of the moving components of the vehicle's suspension system.

• Check battery cables and posts for corrosion, and clean them if needed. The battery fluid also should be checked and filled if it is low (except in the case of maintenance-free batteries).

• Have the lighting system checked frequently, including headlights, turn signals, brake lights and taillights.

• Check windshield wiper blades for cracking, tears and windshield contact. Replace them approximately once a year or sooner if streaking begins.

• Inspect engine belts regularly. Worn belts will affect the engine performance. Look for cracks or missing sections or segments.

• Have the air filtration system checked frequently. The air filter should be checked approximately every other oil change for clogging or damage. This system ensures that the vehicle is performing at its peak condition.

Motorists should consult the vehicle owner's manual for individual service schedules. Vehicle manufacturers' service schedules may vary.

Be sure to select a qualified automotive service facility.

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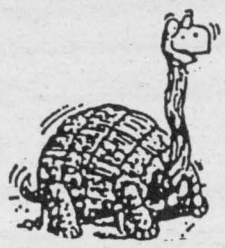

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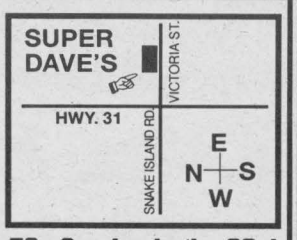

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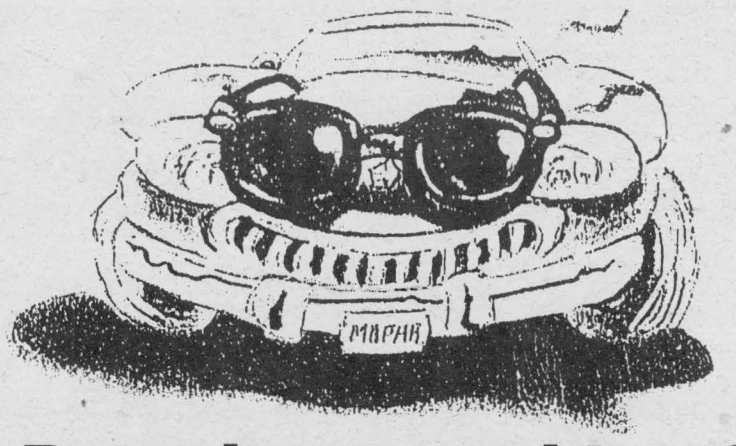

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Ending brake squeal

Making brakes "squealless" is a seemingly impossible task. After all, brake squeal is the sound created by friction, namely that of your car's brake pad against the brake rotor. And, if noise is produced when you rub your hands together, imagine how hard it is to keep metallic and semi-metallic parts quiet when they rub together.

However, there are methods and materials that do succeed in keeping the noise down, if not eliminating it altogether, Noise is by far the most common brake complaint heard by the service technician,but it also has the greatest possible solutions.

Among the causes and solutions are:

• Outboard pads loose in caliper. Bend the pad ears to tighten.

• Pad-wear indicators contacting rotor. Install new pads in axle sets only.

• Glazed pads. Resurface or replace pads in axle sets only.

Ask your service technician to install friction material that has gone through the post-curing process to minimize the potential for glaze. Post-curing strengthens the friction material and increases its performance in high-heat, high-stress applications. This is particularly important during the initial break-in period.

• Improper rotor finish. Your service technician will make sure the installed rotor has a smooth, flat, non-directional finish to help keep vibrations (noise) down to a minimum. A proper rotor finish also allows better braking effectiveness.

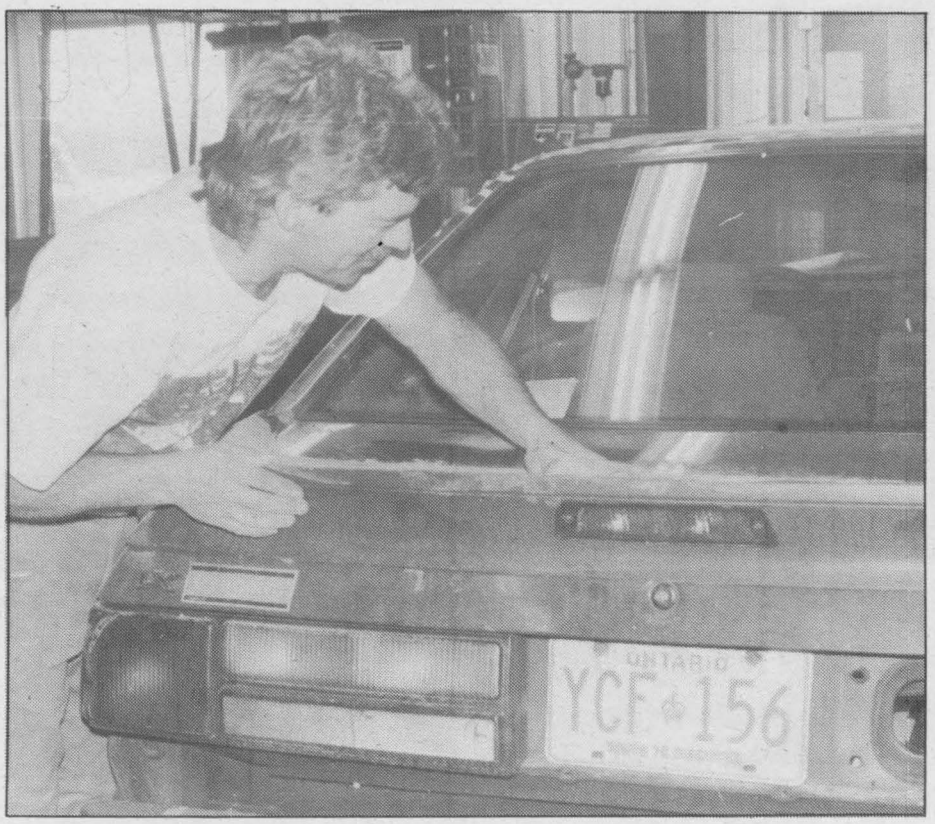
• Insulator shim not in place between piston and pad plate. Disc-brake shims are very effective in dampening pad vibrations; constrained layer shims are even more effective than non-constrained, as they absorb vibrations that cause noise, rather than just dampen vibrations. Owners of light trucks, minivans and sport utility vehicles might consider installing a new line of disc pads specifically designed to eliminate noise without the addition of shims.

• Worn or weak anti-rattle springs. Install new anti-rattle parts.

• Replace brake hardware. No matter how small or indiscrete that rubber bushing or metal clip is, it is designed to absorb energy and prevent vibration. Absorbing energy or movement in the caliper helps alleviate many noise problems, so replacing brake hardware during service is an excellent way to help prevent noise.

• Use EMP to absorb vibration. Your service technician may add an elasto multipolymer compound that helps to absorb noise-causing vibrations between the surface of the disc-pad plate and the caliper.

• Use silicone lubricant. This grease helps to stop brake noise by lubricating components and preventing corrosion, according to Smith, keeping the components moving freely.



Prepping car

Faron Fawcett is shown prepping a car for a paint job at D's Collision Centre in Winchester.

Press Photo — Holmes

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Proper charge

Peter VanVeen of Laughlin Motors in Hallville carries out a battery inspection. Regular maintenance of your car's battery is essential for proper starts.
Press Photo — Erwin

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Take the heat out of summer travel

Spring — it means the beginning of warm weather, sunny days and the countdown to summer vacation! However, before you start planning your road trip, it's a good idea to have your car checked to ensure it's in proper working order. The last thing you want on your vacation is to have a breakdown.

Here is a checklist to follow before taking to the road:

• Make sure your car has "ride control," the ability to hold the road when manoeuvring in traffic at high speeds. This means that you should have tight steering and suspension, strong shock absorbers and struts, and good tires. Have your shocks and struts inspected to make sure they are properly aligned and in good condition. Check tire pressure to make sure each tire is at the recommended level. Not only will underinflated tires reduce ride performance and handling, but they also will decrease your vehicle's fuel efficiency.

• Have the braking system carefully inspected. Check pads and shoes for lining wear; all wheel cylinders; calipers, drums and rotors; all hardware; brake lines and hoses for leaks, kinks or blockages; and the brake-fluid level. If you need to repair your brakes, insist on quality parts from reputable sources. Remember, your family's safety is on the line.

• Inspect your vehicle's cooling system, especially the thermostat, hoses and radiator pressure cap. If you don't, your car may overheat, and this can cause serious damage to cylinder heads.

• Look at the hoses and belts to make sure there are no signs of wear. If a hose or belt fails, it radically can affect a vital part of the motor.

• See that your car has enough oil. Besides being a lubricant, it is also an engine coolant.

• Check the windshield wipers. If they aren't clearing the window properly, replace them before leaving for vacation. Make sure you buy the right type and size, and know how to install them. Read the instructions on the package before leaving the store, and if you don't understand, ask a salesperson questions.

After making sure your car is in good condition, you can get on the road with confidence. It should be easier to enjoy the trip now that you have one less thing to worry about.

Seven things to do after an accident

There were several million police-reported accidents in Canada last year, and you can bet that, in almost every one, the people involved felt anxious, angry and disoriented. These understandable emotions often lead to costly mistakes when handling insurance claims.

Here are seven commonsense steps you should take after having an accident. Post them on the inside of your sun visor or glove box.

AFTER AN ACCIDENT

1. Move your vehicle to a safe place, then stop and identify yourself to the other driver. If it can't be moved, turn on the hazard lights. Seek medical help if you need it, and notify police. Tell them who you are, where you are, and about any obvious or claimed injuries.

2. Exchange information with the other driver, including driver's licence number, vehicle registration number, make, model and licence plate number. Be sure to get the other driver's name, address, telephone number, and name of his or her insurance company. Also, list any passengers and witnesses.

3. Get the names of any police officers who arrive at the scene. If there are injuries or extensive damage, the police will file a report. Ask how to get a copy.

4. Avoid any extensive discussions at the scene about who is responsible for the damage. If the other person admits responsibility, offers a money settlement and you accept, any future claim against that driver may be compromised. Never agree just to forget the accident. You or the others later may find damage and bodily injury not apparent at first.

5. Write a complete description of the accident as soon as possible afterward. Include weather conditions, estimated speeds and as much precise information as you can observe. Take pictures if you have a camera.

6. Have the vehicle towed or driven to a collision repair facility of your choice.

7. Notify your insurance company of the accident as soon as possible.

Documenting this pertinent information will help avoid complications and discrepancies about details of the accident.

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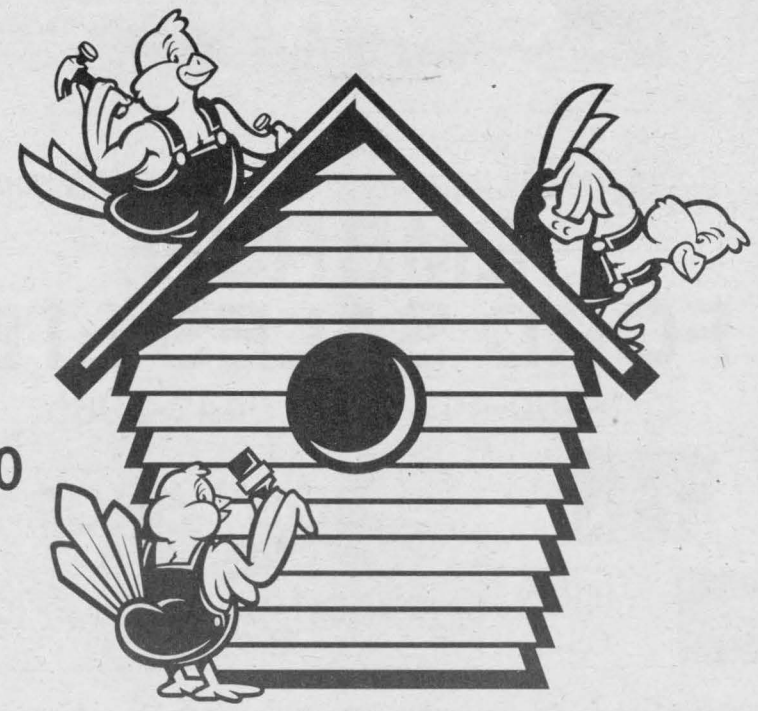

Illuminating facts

Have you ever discovered a burned-out headlight in your car and then wondered just how long you've been driving around that way? Days? Weeks? To avoid the embarrassment — and potential hazard — of auto-lamp failure, the automotive experts offer the following guidelines for proper headlight performance:

Single driver? — Turn your lights on, and get out of the car to inspect your headlights and other car lights. Today's headlights can be so bright that you might not even notice if only one is working. It's easy to drive with only one headlight or taillight for weeks if you don't have a passenger or someone at home to alert you. Have a friend help test your turn signals and brake lights, or pay attention to the patterns your lights make against a building or a wall to check that they are working properly.

Fog — Use low beams on foggy roads; their lower aim can get beneath fog to better illuminate the road surface.

Check the alignment — Have headlights realigned at least once a year to prevent possible safety hazards. Improperly aligned headlights (they gradually can go out of alignment due to road vibration or bumps) can shine in the eyes of oncoming drivers and temporarily blind them. Also, you won't be illuminating as much road surface as you need to be.

The power of halogens — Halogen lamps offer whiter, brighter headlight power and fit all types of headlight systems. High output halogen headlights offer up to 80 per cent more light than conventional lamps. Increased wattage (from 35 watts to 55 watts) and an all-new lens design to better direct the light help add to the performance.

Keep it clean! — Even the most high-tech headlights can't do their job if you're looking through a dirty windshield. Improve your night visibility by keeping your windshield clean and smudge-free. That road grime on your window also will scatter ordinary headlight glare to a blinding point.

All the light matters — Headlights aren't the only critical lights in your car — smaller bulbs, like trunk, dashboard and brake lights, are critical. If you experience a flat tire at night, you'll want your safety flashers to work, as well as your trunk light operating so you can find your spare tire and tools. Check all the bulbs in your car.



Car care

Stephanie St. Pierre performs car cleaning and detailling at Winchester Automotive Services in Winchester. *Press Photo — Holmes*

Encourage good driving habits for your teenage driver

- Set a good driving example (no use of alcohol or other drugs, no speeding, always wear your safety belt, and require that safety belts be worn by all passengers).
- Require that your teen maintain good grades in school before he or she can drive. Check with your auto insurance company to see if any "good student" discounts are available.

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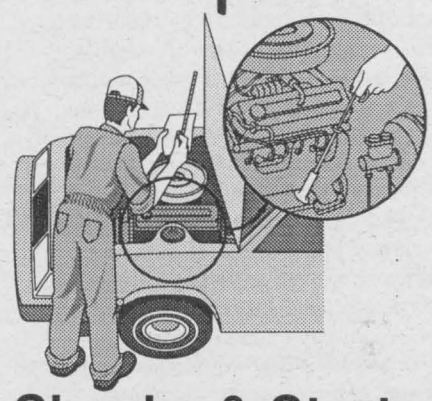

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Extend your car's life with a makeover

Is your old car squeezing you for everything you're worth? Are you fighting the urge, with every last ounce of determination, to head for the dealer's showroom or used-car lot? Well, whether it's the once-trusty family sedan, the once-shiny sports car or the pickup that was once the envy of truckers everywhere, your once-prized vehicle probably represents a sizable investment.

Thinking about investing perhaps no more than the amount of a down payment to fix it up just may make the soundest financial sense. A little money can go a long way toward upgrading a car.

Here's how to consider this option objectively:

1. Visit a mechanic, and let him inspect your car. After compiling a list of mechanical needs, he can approximate the cost to put it back in good shape. If the car is paid for, you'll probably save money by giving it a new lease on life. Further, by having it repaired, you can make your car serviceable for another two to three years while saving toward its replacement. After all, you'll probably have more value to bargain with when you're ready to trade.

2. Diagnosing mechanical problems is one consideration, but how about a manicure? Car owners should look to buffing out the paint job, fixing dented fenders or replacing missing trim. Some touch-up work or perhaps a new paint job may be needed. How about pinstripes or adding rims to dress up the tires a bit?



Good timing

Jeff Hamiaux of Upper Canada Motors in Morrisburg adjusts the timing on a vehicle at the dealership during its annual spring tune-up.

Press Photo — Erwin

3. Next, look at the interior. Does the fabric need to be cleaned and/or repaired? Would a sunroof make "Old Faithful" snazzier?

To estimate the costs of a cosmetic upgrade, you'll need the help of a body and paint shop, as well as an upholstery and trim professional.

If you decide to revamp the car you already own, depending upon the extent of the project, you may need a little help from your bank. Most banks will be eager to finance a loan for repairs on an older car — the sum will be less than a loan for a new car and, therefore, there's a reduced risk. Your payments will be smaller and on a shorter term also.

So, the options beckon:

- a new car that may strain the budget and depreciate once you drive off the lot,
- a used car that's an unknown, and
- the once-beloved car you already own.

Remember, regardless of the work your car requires, it may not be as costly as the first two options. Put the pencil to it, and arrive at a conclusive figure. Treat your car to a make-over or an upgrade and, in return, it will give you extended years of driving enjoyment.

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Spring tune-up

Upper Canada Motors (Morrisburg) technician Steve Kerkhof completes a service inspection of a customer's General Motors vehicle.

Press Photo — Erwin

Know how it all works

Taking an active part in the maintenance, safety and smooth running of your vehicle doesn't have to be a major undertaking, even though there are many important devices that need to be checked regularly, filled and cleaned.

Many car owners have never even looked under their own automobile's hood — it intimidates them. However, knowing how it all works is not necessary. Simply have someone who knows about cars show you where some key components are located. Learn how to check the oil, for example, fill the windshield-fluid reservoir or check the brake-fluid level. It may be rewarding to find out how to jump-start your car in an emergency or help someone else do it. A little knowledge can go a long way.

Advice from the pros

Experts agree, a little planning, attention to detail, and good, two-way communication between customer and the repair facility are fundamental to getting satisfactory automotive repair and service.

Unless you're a bona fide car enthusiast with plenty of tools and lots of patience, you'll probably depend upon a professional to maintain your car, light truck or van.

We offer the following advice to consumers as they purchase automotive repair and service.

Read the owner's manual to become familiar with your vehicle, and follow the manufacturer's suggested service schedule.

Start shopping for a repair facility before you need one; you can make better decisions when you are not rushed or in a panic.

Ask friends and associates for their recommendations. Even in this high-tech era, old-fashioned word-of-mouth reputation works well.

Check with your local consumer organization about the reputation of the shop.

If possible, arrange for transportation, so you won't select a shop based solely on location.

Look for a neat, clean, well-organized facility with vehicles in the parking lot equal in value to your own and modern equipment in the service bays.

Professionally run establishments have a courteous, helpful staff. The service writer should be willing to listen to you and to answer your questions.

Policies (labor rates, fees for diagnostic services, guarantees, methods of payment, etc.) should be posted or explained to your satisfaction.

Ask if the shop customarily handles your vehicle make and model. Some facilities specialize. If your vehicle needs major work, ask if the shop usually handles that type of repair.

Feel free to ask for the names of a few customers as references. Call them.

Look for signs of professionalism in the customer-service area: civic and community-service awards, membership in the Better Business Bureau, and customer-service awards.

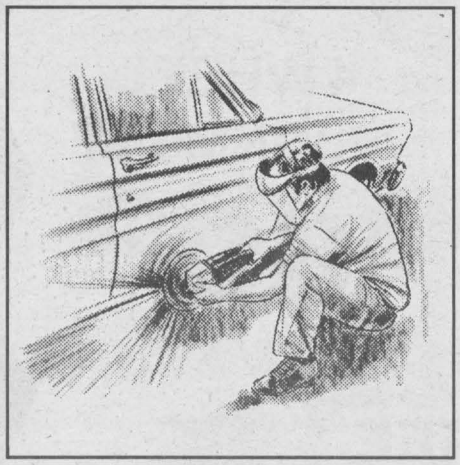
Look for qualified technicians. Trade-school diplomas, certificates of advanced course work and factory certification of competence.

Reward good service with repeat business and customer loyalty. It is mutually beneficial to you and the shop owner to establish a relationship.

If the service was not all you expected, don't rush to another shop. Discuss the problem with the service manager or owner. Give the business a chance to resolve the problem. Reputable shops value customer feedback and will make a sincere effort to keep your business.

Keep good records; keep all paperwork. You may be glad you did.

Spring rust got you down?



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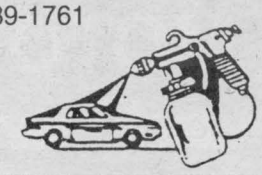

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