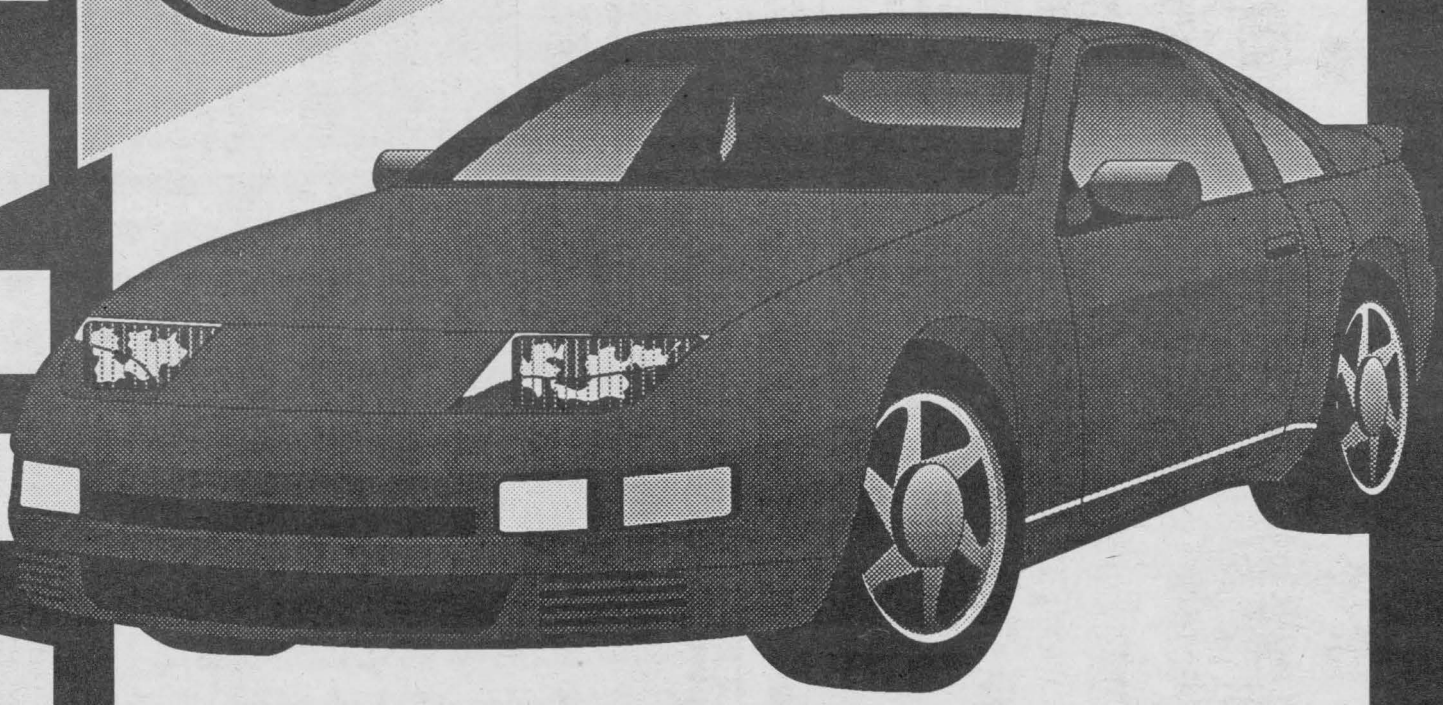
WINTER

CAR CARE & BUYER'S GUIDE



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Tips to prepare your vehicle for the winter

It's a well-known fact that every year a large majority of the more than 15.5 million vehicles on the road are caught unprepared for the first blast of really cold weather. Don't be caught unprepared. Spending a little bit of time and effort now, can save you time, effort, frustration, and even money later on.

Here is a quick list of things to check before that first nasty blast of winter:

Cooling system: If it hasn't been done in a while, flush out your cooling system with a good chemical cleaner and put in fresh anti-freeze. Remember to use the anti-freeze in its proper proportions. Pure anti-freeze (most often made of ethylene glycol) does not cool or protect as well as the proper mixture of water and anti-freeze which is described on the anti-freeze container. And don't forget to check containers, belts, hoses, the pressure caps and thermostat.

Battery and electrical system: If your battery is more than a few years old, have it checked. Cold weather is hard on batteries. Be sure connections are clean and tight. Corroded or loose connections can give the symptoms of a weak or dead battery.

Engine: Is it time for a tune-up? Faulty wiring, worn spark plugs, a sticking choke or emission control devices that need attention, can all lead to hard starting. A diagnostic check-up of the engine can be a good winter pre-investment.

Oil and filter: Dirty oil can give you trouble in the winter. Now's the time to change it. Change the oil filter too! And don't forget to check the other filters on you car, including the fuel, air and transmission filters. (The transmission filter should be changed with the transmission fuel when it is changed during regular preventative maintenance.)

Tires: For every 5 Celsius of temperature drop, your tire pressure decreases by one pound. Tires which are under-inflated by only eight pounds can reduce gas mileage by five percent and cut tire life by 25 percent or more. Check your tire pressure regularly.

Emergency kit: And don't forget to carry an emergency kit in your vehicle during the winter months, it could save your life.

Following these simple tips will help you to survive another Canadian winter.

Proper Tire care and wheel alignment will save money

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

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

More fuel is consumed as a result of incorrect alignment, which can result in at least a two per cent tankful energy loss as well as reducing tire life. Of course, incorrect alignment accelerates tire wear to an even greater degree.

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

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

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

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

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

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The easy fix for your tired exhaust system

You hit a bump on the road and your muffler starts dragging on the road, sparks flying everywhere. Then, the muffler goes flying off, right into the left headlight and bumper of the car behind you. As you roar down the highway, hoping you don't encounter any police cars, you can t believe that you didn't act sooner. what could have cost you only a few dollars to have a new bracket installed, is now going to cost you a lot more.

Annoying, embarrassing and expensive, this kind of scenario can be avoided with a few easy and inexpensive preventative measures. The loss of a muffler, and/or the pipes that go with it, is usually due to a broken support bracket or hanger that secures the exhaust system to the frame of your car. These flexible brackets are vulnerable to damage caused by the elements (weather), flying stones or other road debris, and engine vibrations.

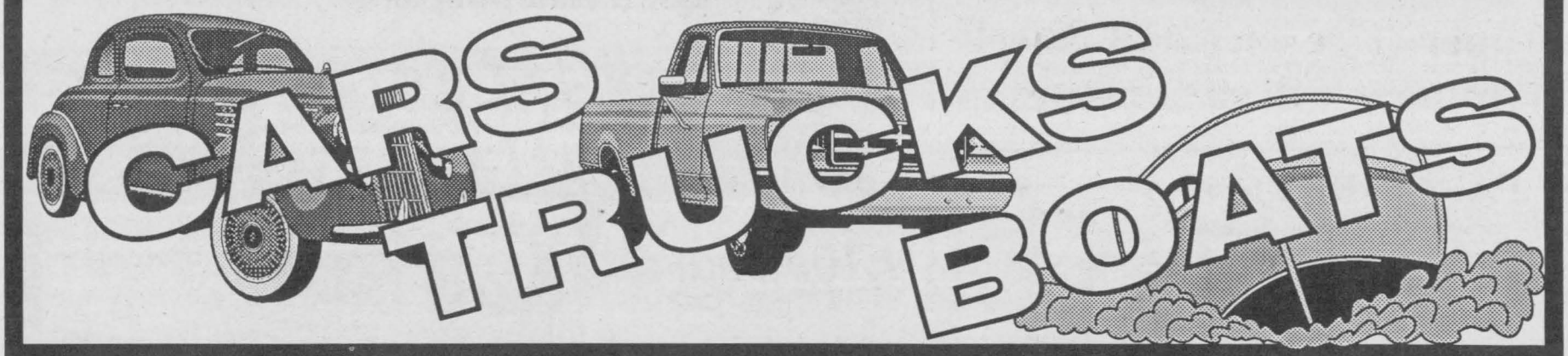
The rattling and banging of an exhaust pipe against the underneath of your car or the road is the first sign that a bracket has broken. That is a clear warning that you need to act quickly and replace the necessary part.

Your muffler may still be perfectly good. It is most likely the bracket, which costs only a few dollars, which needs replacing. Many mufflers that have fallen from their owner's vehicle and what you see on the side of the road are perfectly good, but they fell off because a bracket or two needed replacing.

The exhaust system should be inspected whenever the car is on a hoist for regular preventative maintenance. In between time, you can check it yourself by reaching down and shaking the tile pipe (when it is cool). If it is loose or hits the car's undercarriage or body, then you know you might have a problem. when in doubt have your mechanic/automotive service technician check it for you.

And be careful. Another warning noise, the familiar rubble or roar of a blown muffler, or in its early stages a faint "pfft...pfft...-pfft", can be deadly if not tended to immediately. These sounds may be caused by a small hole in the exhaust system. Colourless and odourless exhaust fumes, composed of carbon monoxide gases, can seep into your car and they can be lethal. The sooner you replace the defective exhaust parts, the better and healthier you'll be.

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Help in finding the right mechanic for the job

If you want your vehicle to remain in excellent, dependable working order, you know that you have to give it some tender loving care in the form of regular and preventative maintenance. Don't wait until it breaks until you fix it - that could cost you a great deal of money. The average Canadian consumer spends more than $700 per year on maintenance. By practising regular maintenance you can reduce that amount and prolong the life of your vehicle.

But how do you find a mechanic/automotive service technician, you can trust? Rule number one for finding a good mechanic/technician: don't wait until you're desperate for help. Finding an automotive service technician you trust, is like finding a doctor or a minister - you need to build a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. These things don't happen overnight.

Most of the business for a repair garage is from referrals. The only way to get referral business is from satisfied customers. So, if you are looking for a new automotive service technician, ask around. Ask your friends, relatives, business associates, church members - anyone you can think of. You'll probably get a more reliable feel for who is good and who is not by getting several opinions instead of just one.

If you get a chance, drop in and meet the technicians who will he working on your car. Is the shop tidy and well organized? Do they have the latest computer equipment? Is there evidence that the mechanics in the shop take regular training courses on the latest automotive and diagnostic technology?

The days of the mechanic under the hood with a screwdriver, tuning things until they sing just right, are a distant memory. Now, they have to be computer literate technicians, interpreting the communications between the on-board computer system and the diagnostic computers in the shop.

Whether you go to an independent garage, a department store, or a franchised repair centre doesn't matter all that much. In the end, it all comes down to trust. You're looking for somebody who is willing to tell you which repairs should be made immediately, which can be delayed without affecting safety, and which are completely optional for performance upgrades.

Look for an ASE certified automotive technician or a PRO technician. ASE's mission is to improve the quality of automotive service and repair through the voluntary testing and certification of automotive technicians. ASE was founded in the United States in 1972, but it has only recently begun testing in Canada.

ASE automotive service technicians have the credentials to prove their competence in a variety of automotive sectors and specialties. If your automotive technician has an ASE patch on their uniform, it means they passed a tough automotive test designed to evaluate whether or not the technician's skills are up-to-date with the latest automotive repair techniques. It provides you with a valuable yard stick by which to measure the knowledge and skills of your technicians.

A PRO automotive service technician subscribes to a strict code of ethics. The PRO Program emphasizes three key points: Professionalism, Responsibility to the industry; and Obligation to the public.

Car Care Canada notes that you can help your automotive service technician to help you, too. when you take your car in with a problem, tell the technician what the symptoms are (not what you think the problem is). Describe whether it happens when the car is warm or cold, at highway speeds or in the city, stopping or accelerating, etc.

Get to know your car, too. Read through the owner's manual so you know what to expect. Turn off your stereo once in a while and listen to the sound of your car when it's healthy, so you're better able to notice when it needs help.

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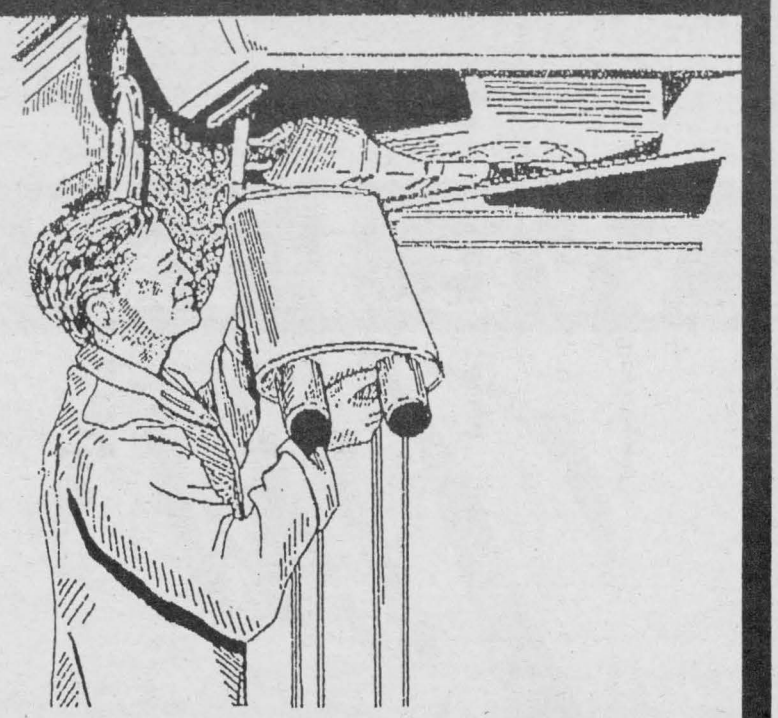
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Is your battery tough enough?

No matter where you live, Canada is a cold country in winter. When the first severe cold wave arrives you may discover that your faithful old battery no longer has the power to get your car started. A battery's output decreases as temperature drops, so a battery that was doing its job during the warm summer months, may only have half of its output when the thermometer dips below freezing. Meanwhile, your cold engine may need twice the starting power.

If you car is hard to start because of a weak battery, you should consider replacing it before it lets you down. when buying a battery you'll be selecting from among several within the size range that fits your car. In addition to the price, there are factors which you should consider when buying your battery: cold cranking amps (explained below), reserve capacity, and length and type of warranty.

Cold cranking amps refers to the engine starting (cranking) output at -17 Celsius for 30 seconds. A starter may draw 400 amps, so at -17 Celsius it would not take long on a cold Canadian winter morning to drain a battery rated at 300 cold cranking amps.

Reserve capacity refers to the length of time the battery will hold up without recharging. This usually is expressed in amperes of output per so many minutes. When comparing battery specifications, you should compare output and reserve on the. same amperage per time basis. Typically, the reserve capacity rating will refer to the amount of time a battery can produce 26 amps at 27 Celsius. (Headlights may draw about 15 amps versus a tail light's 1.5 amps.)

When idling along in stop-and--go traffic, with the heater, defroster, tape deck, and lights turned on, the electrical system is carrying a heavy load. It's comforting to know there is a strong battery under the hood. That security is well worth the effort of evaluating the best battery for your particular car.

Where can you get an automotive battery? In addition to retail outlets and department starts, you may also want to go to your local automotive parts wholesaler. Many of them will also accept your old battery and dispose of it properly.

And remember, replacing the battery is no substitute for regularly maintaining your vehicle. If an engine is in borderline condition, needs a valve job or tune-up, even a strong battery may not get the car started.

Previously owned vehicles

The average transaction price of a new passenger car today is more than $21,000, and the average for a truck is more than $31,000. To make purchasing a vehicle more affordable you may be considering buying a previously owned, or second hand, vehicle. It's a smart choice that many Canadians are making. Total used vehicle sales increased from 2.3 million units in 1990 to 2.9 million units in 1996.

If you are considering buying a used car, even a fairly new one, be sure to factor in a reserve repair fund into your total budget. When buying a used car, the first money you spend should be on the services of a trained automotive technician to look over your perspective purchase. Your trusted automotive service technician can help you spot discrepancies that the untrained eye might never catch.

This ounce of prevention will not only help you to avoid making a bad purchase, it will also help you to determine what, if anything, you can expect to spend on repairs soon after you become the new owner. A drive belt, radiator hose, battery, brakes, or a couple of tires are all typical items which might soon need repair. Armed with the knowledge of these impending repairs, you may be able to have some extra bargaining power with the vehicle's current owner.

And be wary of the vehicle seller, either a private owner or part of a dealership, who resists a professional inspection. It may mean they have something to hide.

A professional opinion can be valuable in estimating interior repairs, too. A car with worn or damaged fabric that is still in good operating condition may still be a good investment. Upholstery burns and tears can usually be repaired by an upholstery shop at a reasonable price. Don't forget to have your technician take a good look at the vehicle's outer body as well.

Once you have made your decision and purchased a previously owned vehicle, remember to do some basic preventative maintenance at regular intervals. Clean oil, a fresh oil filter, and a properly tuned engine cost very little, but add thousands of kilometres to the life of your vehicle.

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Checking your "Brake Knowledge"

Brakes are the most critical safety item on a vehicle. After tires, they are the leading vehicle defect reported at highway accidents, according to some North American studies. But how much do you know about your brakes? Find out by taking this simple brake quiz. It could save your life.

1. If your car pulls to the left when brakes are applied:

a) your left front tire may be under-inflated
b) your right front brake is not working properly
c) your left front wheel bearing may be failing
d) all of the above

The correct answer is "d".

2. When brakes squeal you should

a) replace all pads and linings
b) have the rotors resurfaced
c) ignore the noise, it's normal, and turn up your radio
d) have a mechanic/automotive service technician check it out
e) all of the above

The correct answer is "d". A brake inspection may disclose that one of the other answers also applies. Brake squeal is a common problem, indicating a need for corrective measures. Only a thorough brake inspection can reveal the true cause of the problem.

3. Brake fluid is the master cylinder reservoir should be checked and replenished as needed. When doing so, you should use:

a) whatever good brake fluid you may have in your garage
b) a good quality brake fluid meeting the specifications recommended in your owner's manual
c) a quality grade 20 weight motor oil
d) all of the above

The correct answer is "b". Always use brake fluid from a freshly opened container. Use only the specific grade of oil recommended in your owners manual.

4. Most brake lining pads are now made of:

a) steel wool-like strands in a heat resistant resin binder
b) high friction, heat resistant asbestos fibre
c) ceramic based friction material
d) any or all of the above

The correct answer is "a". Asbestos, now considered a hazardous waste, has not been used in brake linings for a long time.

5. Do you understand your ABS brakes, answer true or false:

(Score half a point for each of the following)

a) Even with ABS, on a slippery road I should pump the brakes for maximum stopping power.

The correct answer is "false". The ABS system will pump only the brake or brakes on wheels that are slipping. The other brakes remain fully applied, so you'll stop faster. The ABS system can pump the brakes that need to be pumped many times a second.

b) When I press down on the pedal on a slippery day, I feel the pedal press back against my foot and I hear a humming noise. This means the brakes are failing.

The correct answer is "false". This is normal, and tells you that the ABS system is working. Use a firm steady pressure on the brake pedal.

What's your score?

•If you have five correct answers you have an excellent knowledge of brakes. Congratulations!

•If you scored four correct answers you have a very good understanding of brakes. You should be proud of your knowledge.

•If you have three correct answers you have a passing knowledge. Be careful, or seek professional guidance.

•If you scored less than three correct answers, brush up on your car care tips, or be sure to have your vehicle properly and regularly maintained by a trained automotive service technician.



Cars on display

Everyone is proud of their vehicle, but when hours of TLC go into the installation of an antique car it becomes a treasure. When winterizing your vehicle-- just think this beauty will be inside, warm, dry and salt free. Come spring's warm sunshine, this chopped and channelled Ford will once more grace our highways and byways. *Chieftain photo by S.L. Johnston.*

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EFI. TBI. MPI. It all sounds so impressive, but all it means is how you go about squirting gasoline into your engine so you can go for a drive. Almost all engines are fuel injected now (EFI - electronic fuel injection). Some are injected at a single point in the intake manifold (TBI - throttle body injection), while some have more injectors to get the fuel distribution among the cylinders as even as possible (MPI - multi-point inspection).

Each fuel injector opens and closes to squirt fuel into the engine thousands of times per second. It's all controlled by the engine's computer, which is why the engine management system is so important to how well your car runs. Today's computers are so smart that they can monitor the ignition timing, exhaust temperature and oxygen content, and engine load, and make adjustments as needed to keep the car running at its most fuel efficient. High fuel efficiency also translates into low exhaust emissions.

Typically, fuel injectors for a multi-point system are located along a rail to position them for optimum fuel distribution. Because there are several, each one only injects a little fuel - so the outlet hole is tiny. This hole can get clogged, causing rough idle and inefficient driving. Usually, this happens if you make a lot of short trips or leave your car idling. Sometimes, you can clean the injectors out by taking the car out on the highway and driving at highway speeds for 30 km or so.

All the major gasoline marketers sell gasoline that has detergents and injector cleaners added to keep fuel injected cars operating cleanly and efficiently. However, if you take a lot of short trips, it's a good idea to help these cleaners along by adding some fuel system cleaners, available at all automobile stores. These products will keep the injectors and valves clean, eliminating stalling and hesitation, rough idling and engine rock.

Natural Gas "a viable alternative fuel for today's vehicles"

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

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

Safer than gasoline?

Natural gas has several safety advantages over gasoline:

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

A good investment

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



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1997 Cavalier 2-door Coupe Sport, purple, auto cassette, 15" wheels, 17,000 km - **Sale priced $14,200 or lease @ $237.48/month***

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1997 Ford Escort Wagon, 30,000 km, grey, auto., cassette, air, keyless entry - **Sale priced $14,100 or lease @ $230.66/month***

1996 Lumina 4-door Sedan, 35,000 km, maroon, fully equipped - **Sale priced $16,300 or lease @ $270.36/month***

1996 Olds Cutlass Supreme 4-door Sedan, 49,000 km, blue, fully equipped, Ext. GMPP warranty up to 100,000 km - **Sale priced $16,200 or lease @ $242.76/month***

1996 Olds Ciera 4-door Sedan, 30,000 km, maroon, V6, power windows, locks, air, tilt, cruise - **Sale priced $16,200 or lease @ $238.58/month***

1996 Pontiac Sunfire 2-door Coupe, 30,000 km, white, auto., air, cassette, spoiler, tilt & cruise - **Sale priced $13,800 or lease @ $228.91/month***

1996 Metro 4-door Sedan, green, auto., 25,000 km - **Sale priced $10,000 or lease @ $164.62/month***

1995 Corsica 4-door Sedan, low km, light maroon, air, auto., V6 - **Sale priced $10,500**

1995 Grand Am 4-door Sedan, only 32,000 km, blue, V6, auto., air - **Sale priced $13,600**

1994 Achieva 4-door Sedan, 64,000 km, dark green, V6, auto., air, tilt & cruise, power windows & locks, power seat, alum. wheels - **Sale priced $11,700**

1996 Lumina APV, fully equipped, power seat, 44,000 km, maroon - **Sale priced $19,000 or lease @ $273.22/month***

1995 Lumina APV, 7-passenger, auto., 69,000 km - **Sale priced $12,300 or lease @ $128.35/month***

1997 Blazer 4-door 4x4, 3 to choose from - **Starting at $357.00/month, $2,500 down + taxes**

1997 Tahoe Sport 4x4 2-door, brown, fully equipped, power seat, 9,000 km - **$35,900**

1993 Astro CL EXT, (2 to choose from), 7 & 8 passengers, fully equipped, 98,000 and 123,000 km - **$12,495**

1993 Lumina APV, white, V6, auto, air - **$10,800**

1992 Astro CL EXT, white, all-wheel drive, fully equipped, 122,000 km - **$10,995**

**$1,500 down payment or trade-in (OAC) plus taxes. 36 month lease*

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