The Glengarry News

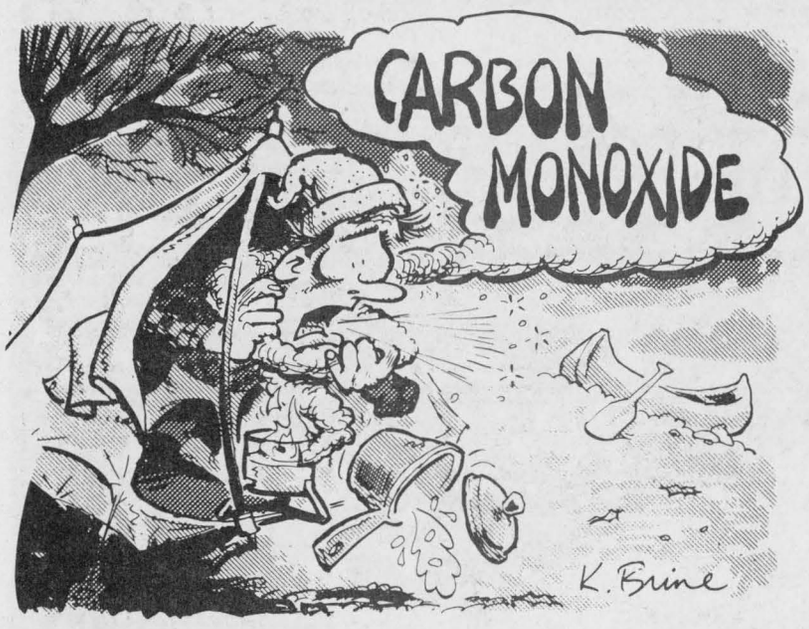
SNUGGLE UP! WINTER'S ON THE WAY

FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT

WITH CARE

Supplement to The Glengarry News

Home Improvement



Don't let outdoor fun be ruined by indoor heaters

Throughout the winter, sports enthusiasts and others enjoy the wonder of Ontario's northland.

If you're planning to stay in a cabin, trailer or motorhome sometime soon, advice from fuel safety experts at Ontario's consumer ministry can help keep you safe and warm.

"Portable gas-fueled appliances, such as camping stoves, heaters and lanterns can make life in a cabin a lot more comfortable than it would be otherwise," says Ken Taylor, Chief Engineer at the ministry's Fuels Safety Branch.

"But they should be used with care because the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning exists with this equipment."

A small amount of carbon monoxide -- a gas you never know is there because it is odorless and colorless -- is produced whenever any fuel is burned.

So long as the heating system is running cleanly and the gas has an adequate escape route, it poses no threat to safety. But if the carbon monoxide can't escape, enough of it can gather to kill overnight.

Dangerous amounts of carbon monoxide can also be produced if a natural gas or propane appliance isn't in good working order or is not supplied with enough fresh air.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include fatigue, nausea, headaches and dizziness. The results can be brain damage, physical disability or death.

"Although we've told the public about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning for years, we're repeating the warning as a precaution, because the number of victims has increased in some other jurisdictions," says Taylor.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reports a total of 43 known victims, resulting in death for 39, over the past four years.

Taylor says following a few simple rules will help keep people safe.

Make sure the product fits the need. As well as being uneconomical, it's downright dangerous to use an appliance for a purpose not intended by the manufacturer.

Also, make sure the size and power of the unit are appropriate for the amount of circulating air.

As a rule of thumb, a square inch opening is needed for every thousand BTU's (British Thermal Units) of output. For example, if you're using a 12,000 BTU camping heater, at least one 3"x4" window should be open.

In the confined area of a trailer or recreational vehicle, exposure to carbon monoxide can quickly result in disaster.

Modern winter-use tents present special problems because the fabrics seal so well that in a storm, insufficient air might get through the flap screening. Tent heaters should only be used when fresh air is circulating and should never be left running when campers are asleep.

Read the manufacturers' labels, service instructions and operating directions carefully. Even if you've used the camp stove 50 times, make sure you know exactly what it is intended to do and how to operate it properly.

Inspect your used camping stove or heater and clean it carefully to make sure dust and tiny bits of debris aren't blocking burner parts.

Following manufacturers' service instructions to the letter may include replacement of a few small parts, but spending a little money now can prevent aggravation and danger.

When buying new equipment always look for the Canadian Gas Association (CGA), Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (ULC) symbol to ensure the product has been tested and complies with Canadian standards.

For a free copy of the brochure *Living safely with propane appliances* write or call the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, Communications Branch, 555 Yonge St., Toronto, ON M7A 2H6, enquiry line telephone (416) 326-8555 or at toll free 1-800-268-1142.

Special electronic equipment for the deaf, hard of hearing and people with speech difficulties is available at (416) 326-8566.

Venting advice has child breathing easier

More than five years ago, David Walker's 16-year-old daughter, Stacey, began breathing easier thanks to some of the best home building advice he's ever received. During the construction of his new home in Kincardine, Ontario, someone told him to add a heat recovery ventilation (HRV) system.

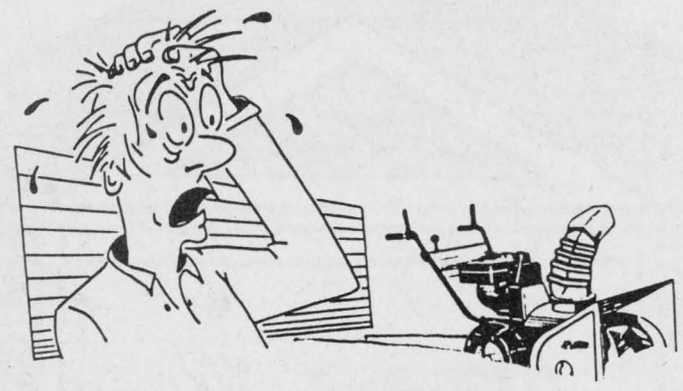
To begin with, Walker was simply interested in achieving proper air circulation in his new airtight home, but he soon realized that the constant exchange of fresh air was making a difference to Stacey's allergies. He noticed that whenever she entered the house, she experienced fewer allergic symptoms. Not only was the HRV ensuring fresh, filtered air, it was also eliminating indoor pollutants caused by building products, furniture, carpets and animals. The HRV was giving the family the ability to control their in-door air quality.

Walker has just put his house on the market and is thinking of buying an older home. "The first renovation I'm going to do is upgrade the ventilation system to an HRV," he says.

Heat recovery systems exhaust stale inside air while bringing in equal amounts of fresh outside air at the same time, with one complete exchange occurring every three hours. However, unlike ordinary ventilation systems, HRVs allow for the exchange of heat energy between the ingoing and outgoing air streams. In this way, the warm air that is exhausted from the home in the winter, heats the cold air coming in. This process is reversed in warmer weather.

While much attention has been given to outdoor air pollution in recent years, far less has been paid to indoor air quality. Jean Poisson, Product Manager at Venmar Ventilation, manufacturers of the HRV that the Walker family installed,

(Continued on page 3)



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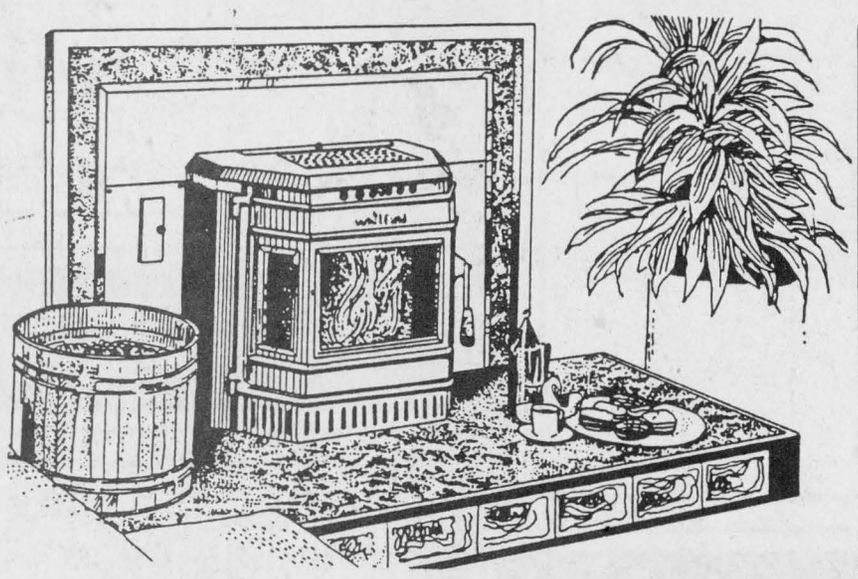

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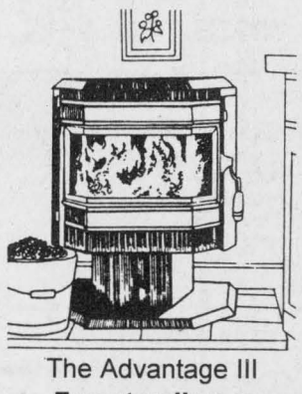

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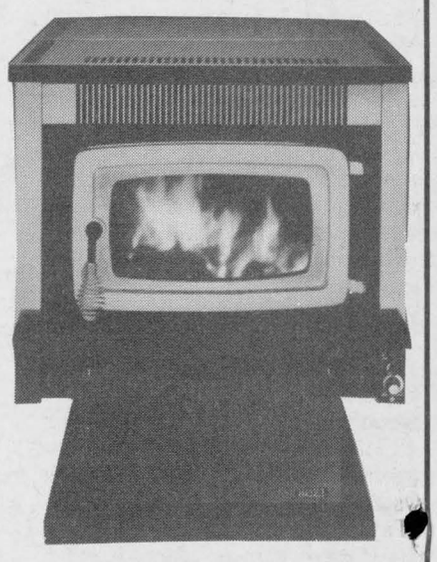

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Home Improvement

Beware of door-to-door consumer "deals"

Many salespeople who promote items door-to-door offer good quality merchandise at fair prices. Unfortunately, some do not. Ontario's consumer ministry frequently reminds consumers that once the salesperson has left their homes, companies need not accept returns if items are paid for in full and delivered at once.

Some people, especially those we call vulnerable consumers, who don't have much opportunity to compare prices or the quality of goods, have been taken advantage of by dishonest sellers. Sometimes the items are overpriced or aren't the quality the consumer was told to expect. Sometimes promised work is done poorly, or not at all, once the consumer has paid.

Often, vulnerable consumers are people on fixed or very limited incomes, so even a small loss may cause financial hardship. As concerned as they are with all these cases, experts at Ontario's Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations say they worry about one type of dishonest promotion above the others, because it involves personal safety as well as financial loss.

"Unqualified heating contractors, who may offer 'special' prices to inspect and repair home-heating systems not only cheat consumers but may also endanger their safety," says Ken Taylor, Acting Director of the Engineering and Standards Branch of the ministry's Technical Standards Division.

"Most licensed contractors are quite busy in the fall," he says. "Although some qualified heating professionals do solicit work, if someone calls and says your furnace is due for inspection, or knocks at your door and asks if you want work done while they 'happen to be in the area,' be cautious."

Taylor says a good start when looking for a qualified heating contractor is to ask friends or fuel suppliers to recommend an expert. If in doubt, consumers should call our branch at (416) 234-6030 to find out if the contractor is registered under the Energy Act.

Proper inspection of home-heating systems is so important because a defective or out-of-adjustment heating system can cause death by carbon-monoxide poisoning or fire. Because of the dangers, consumers are advised to have their furnaces checked and cleaned every year by a heating contractor registered with the branch.

Registered contractors will inspect the entire heating system and tell the householder about any problems. But letting someone who isn't qualified do the work only gives consumers a false sense of security.

Consumers should also find out if the costs of repairs that may be needed are covered by a service plan or warranty. If not, they should ask for written estimates from three companies before they sign a contract. The estimate should outline the work needed, whether any portion of it will be subcontracted and to whom and start-up and completion dates.

Telling the contractor about any warning signs from the last heating season will help make his or her job easier.

These may include:

•an unusual noise from the furnace;

•water stains around the furnace or chimney;

•strange odors from the furnace or through forced-air vents anywhere in the house;

•a pilot light that goes out repeatedly, or a furnace that can't be restarted following the manufacturer's instructions.

Backdrafts, soot or dampness at the base of the chimney are frequently signs the chimney is partly blocked by crumbling brick and loose mortar. This dangerous condition sometimes occurs after heating systems have been converted from oil to natural gas. Chimney repairs or a metal liner will eliminate this potentially dangerous hazard.

Deadly doses of carbon monoxide, a colorless and odorless gas, can be produced in any fuel-burning system that's starved for air.

Taylor says, "Unqualifed people should never tamper with a heating system, but householders can help make sure their system's running safely throughout the year by following some simple steps."

•Change furnace filters at least twice a heating season on forced-air systems.

•Don't block warm-air outlets and cold-air returns with furniture or cover them with carpets.

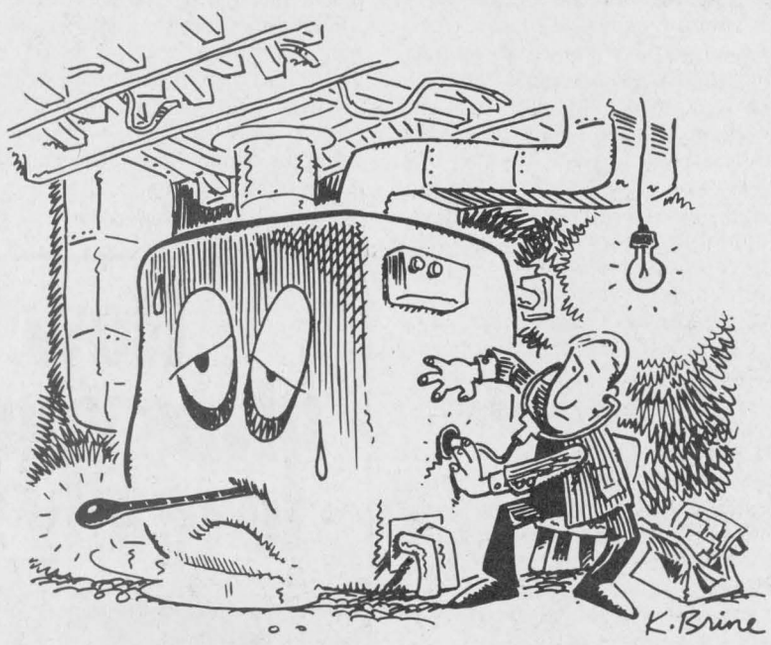
•Examine the furnace and chimney from time to time for signs of corrosion, leakage or water stains.

•Keep bleaches, water softeners and other corrosive materials away from the furnace and out of the furnace room.

•Make sure the heating system's air supply isn't cut off by walls or other obstructions when renovation work is being done.

•Keep the area around the furnace free from dust, lint, rags, paint and other chemicals or combustible materials that could catch fire or explode if they became too hot.

To receive a copy of the ministry's brochure *Home Heating Safety*, contact the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, Communications Branch, 250 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2N5.



Consumers are advised to have their furnaces checked and cleaned every year by a legitimate heating contractor registered with the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Failing to do so can result in a risky situation.

Add an HRV

(Continued from page 2)

says indoor air quality can actually be much worse than outdoor air quality.

More information on indoor air quality and the HRV solution can be obtained by calling Venmar at 1-800-567-3855.



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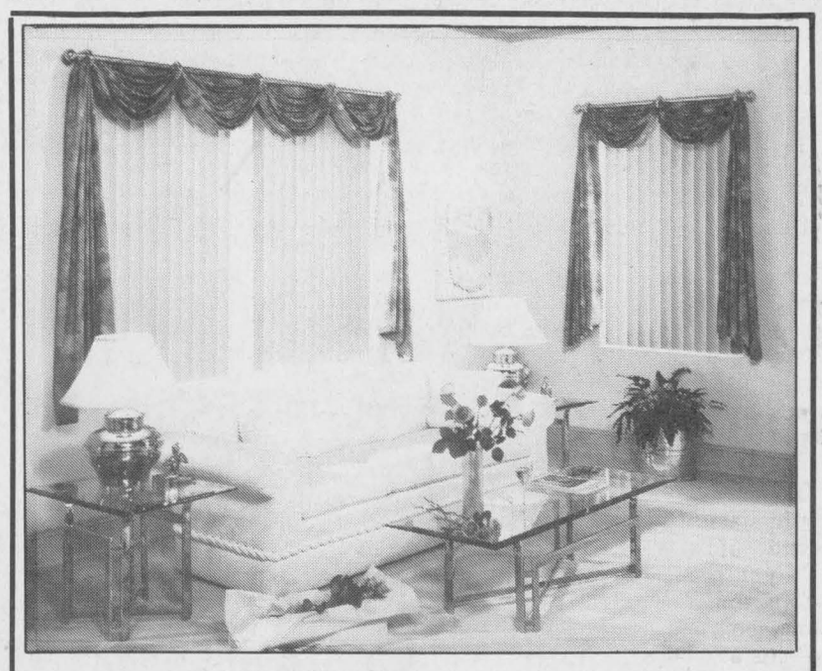

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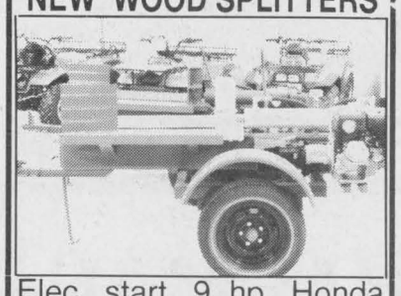

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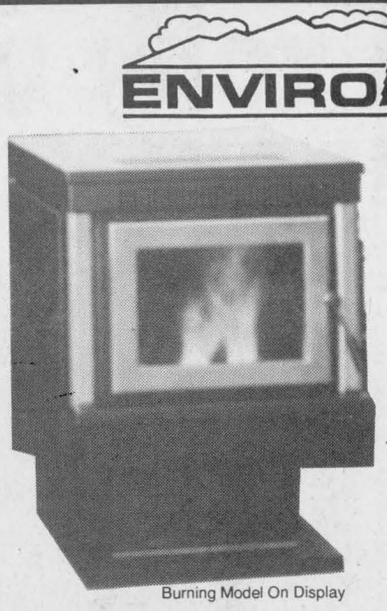

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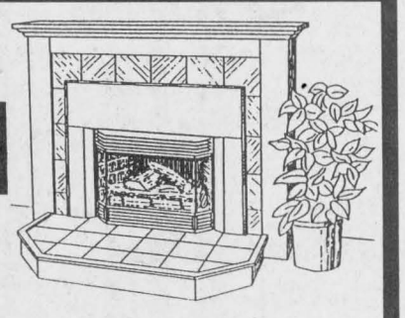

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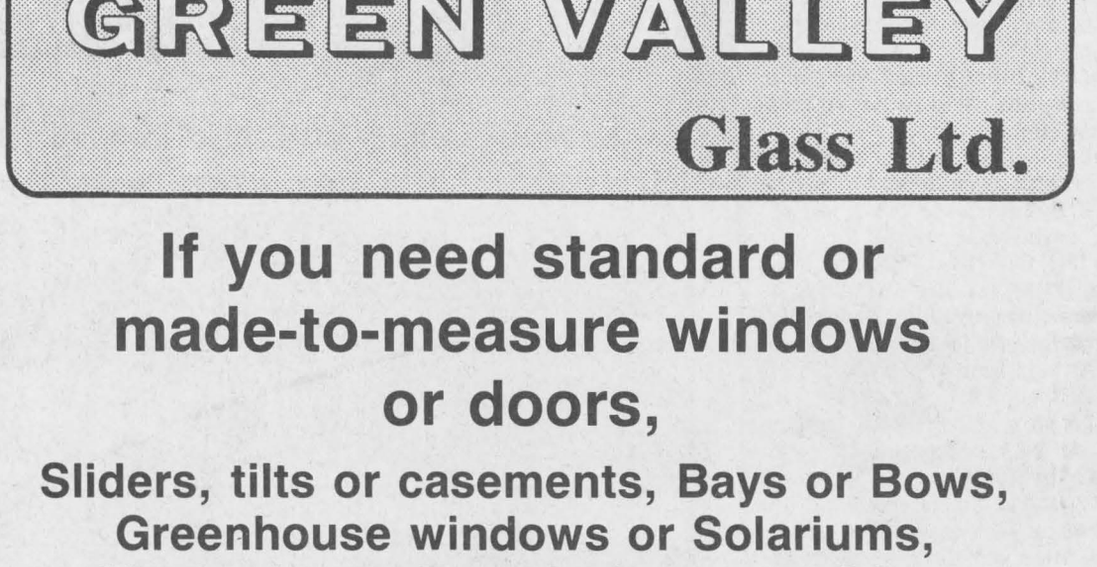

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Home Improvement

Gardeners, now is the time to prepare for next year

Consumers who are preparing their gardens for the coming cold weather should take a tip from smart-shopping experts at Ontario's consumer ministry now, to help cut costs next spring.

This is the perfect time to take advantage of season-end sales on equipment, to decide on the locations and variety of plants you'll want in the garden next year, and to do some late planting as well as the usual fall clean-up.

"One way to cut long-term gardening costs is by using energy-efficient equipment that can literally help your garden now," says Marilyn Gurevsky, a manager with the ministry's Consumer Affairs Branch. "For example, a mulching lawnmower, that returns clippings to the soil, can save a lot of money in fertilizer costs and dispose of grass cuttings every time it's used."

Also, those who don't compost, or have a composting site nearby can use clippings from a regular mower to help protect flower beds over the winter.

She says that people who aren't inclined to spend a lot of money on gardening equipment in autumn can save a few dollars on the spades, spreaders and sprinklers shopkeepers want to get off the shelves before snowblower season starts.

It's also a good time to look for many varieties of evergreens that may now be on sale and can be planted in the fall, as well as the usual spring-flower bulbs. Evergreens can be strategically planted to help cut household energy costs in winter. Consult a professional for advice on landscaping for energy conservation.

Gurevsky reminds home gardeners that whether evergreens are newly planted or years old, they should be well watered at the roots before the ground freezes. "Fertilizer is a no-no after early autumn, but encouraging lots of water to be absorbed by evergreens up until the frost will help keep them healthier -- they may avoid having brown, unhealthy looking plants in the spring."

As well as buying plants and equipment, fall is a good time to plan next year's garden -- you may not be able to remember what you liked about that special flower bed after it's covered in three feet of snow. Take into account the nature of your soil. Many experts suggest soil condition can be improved by running the lawnmower over your leaves instead of raking them. Let some remain on the grass over the winter and using the remainder around the flower beds.

Also, give some thought to long-term cost savings in the garden. Landscaping with trees, bushes and perennials costs more to start with, but can save a lot of money in annual plants over a period of years.

One of the biggest trends in horticulture is zero-scraping. This involves planting gardens that both boost environmental protection and help people who have limited time to spend caring for plants. Zero-scaped gardens require no pruning, watering or other special care once they are in place. Most of these projects are accomplished by trained professionals.

For advice on do-it-yourself projects most people learn to trust a reputable nursery. But Gurevsky suggests anyone who is seeking a good nursery should contact Landscape Ontario, a horticultural organization with members including garden centres, landscape contractors, growers, planners and spray companies.

Landscape Ontario, which works with government on such issues as pesticide controls and plant importation, offers advice to consumers through a series of brochures available at most major garden centres.

This association also offers to help consumers resolve disputes with members. The office may be reached by calling 905-875-1805.

For sophisticated projects, landscape architects may be called in. These professionals are generally involved with complicated projects, such as parks and zoos, but some enjoy residential work. The Ontario Association of Landscape Architects will provide a directory of member firms, free of charge, by calling 416-443-1785.

To receive a free brochure listing information available on a variety of consumer issues write to the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, Communications Branch, 250 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2N5.

Gas environmentally superior to oil, American protection agency claims

Natural gas furnaces are environmentally preferable to oil furnaces, according to a recent study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

It concluded that, among the various types of oil and natural gas furnaces available to consumers, a high efficiency natural gas unit produces the least pollution.

The EPA study analyzed the complete fuel cycle for both natural gas and oil-fired furnaces. Fuel cycle analysis accounts for the air and water pollution and solid waste produced from the point an energy source is extracted from the ground, through processing and transportation, to its final use in the home.

The study is based on a typical single-family house in the upper New York City metropolitan area, although the relative environmental impacts can be expected to remain consistent across many locations, according to EPA.

The adjacent chart summarizes the emissions comparisons in the study. It compares both standard and high-efficiency oil and natural gas furnaces.

According to the study, standard efficiency oil and natural gas furnaces operate at 80 percent efficiency. High efficiency natural gas furnaces operate at 96 percent efficiency, while high-efficiency oil furnaces operate at only 85 percent efficiency.

Consumers should be sure to check the energy rating label on each furnace for the efficiency information for any unit they are considering purchasing.

The study, "An Environmental Comparison of Oil and Gas Heat," was published by EPA's Global Change Division.

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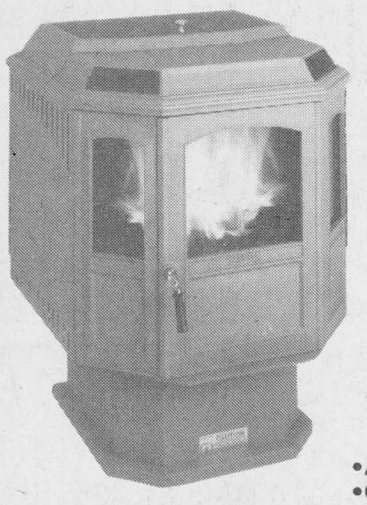

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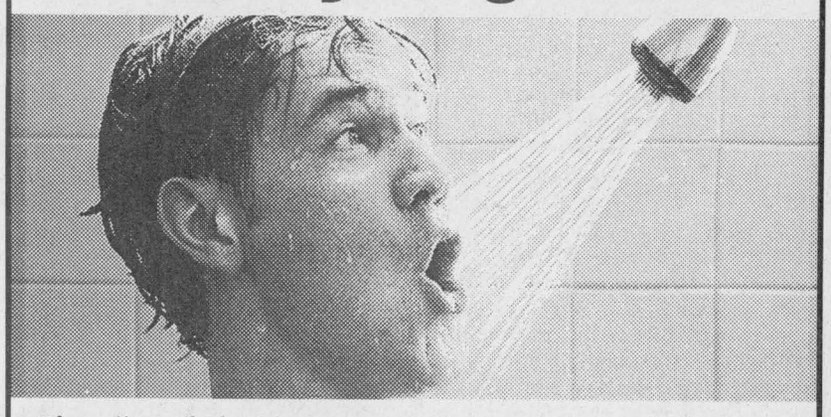

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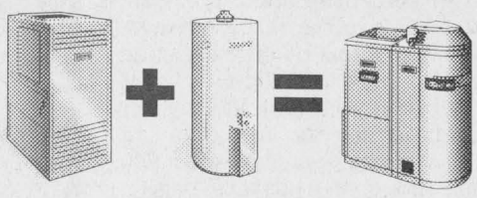

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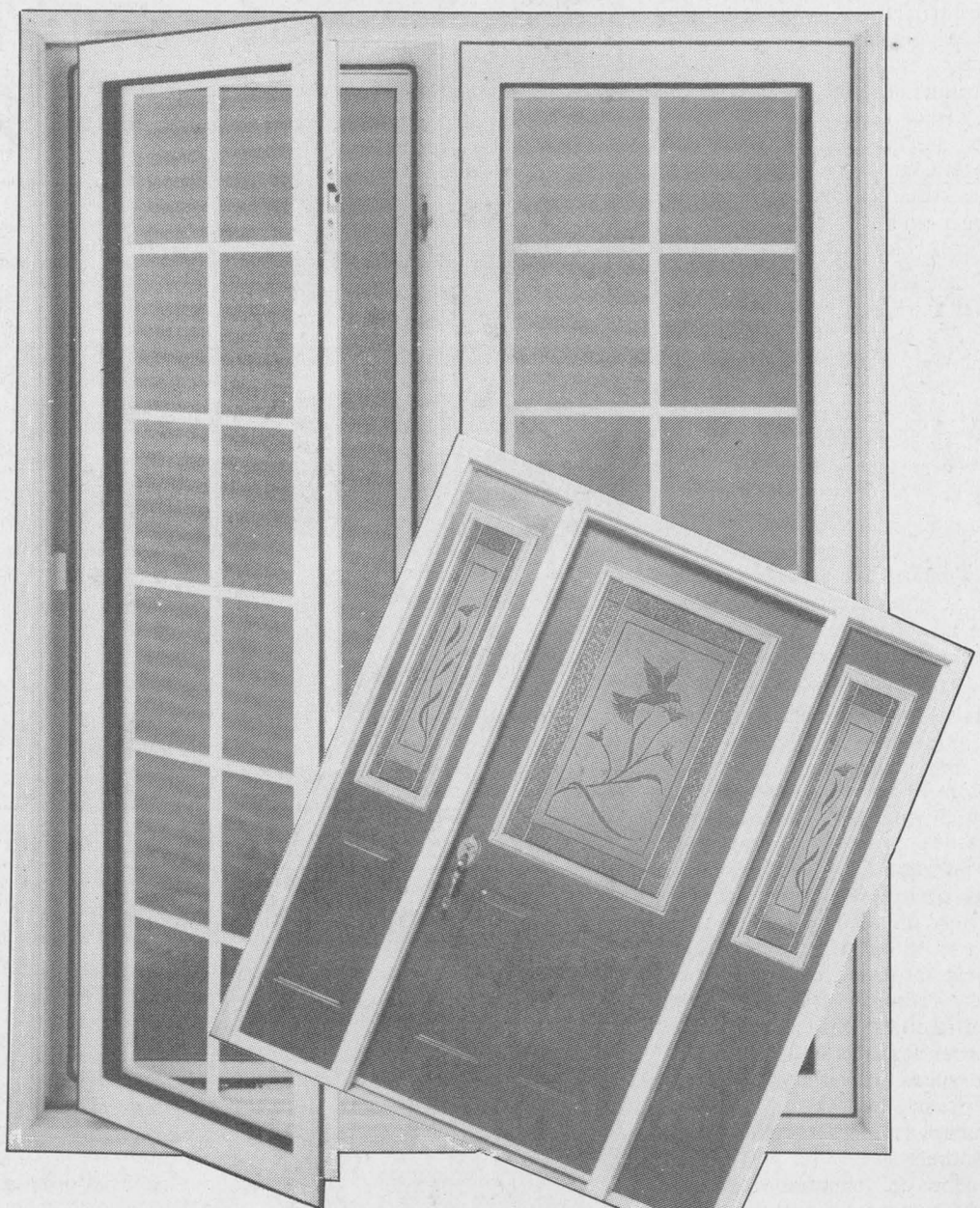

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Home Improvement/Car Care

Kitchen renovations provide the highest return

By Brenda-Jane Kerr
***News* reporter**



Kitchen renovations are a must in houses more than 20 years old, say real estate appraisers with the Appraisal Institute of Canada.

The appraisers ranked kitchen renovations at the top of the list of ten renovation projects with potential for payback when selling a home.

According to the results of the 1994 Renovations and Home Value survey of real estate appraisers, the payback can range from 25 to 200 per cent.

"The kitchen is usually the most important room of the house," said Richard Vaillancourt, a real estate appraiser in Alexandria.

"In a farming community it's usually the focal point of the house."

The kitchen should be functional, bright and spacious with plenty of storage and counter space, said Vaillancourt.

"Modern kitchens are definitely a big plus," said Robert Poirer, a Green Valley real estate appraiser.

Poirer said the current trend is towards built-in appliances and the use of newer materials such as melamine mixed with solid wood including oak.

Newer products also include solid-wood cabinets with PVC doors, said Jean-Yves Couture of Glengarry Kitchen Cabinets.

The doors are made from pressed wood with a veneer-like surface offering a choice of up to 20 different colors and modern designs.

With PVC doors, the homeowner can customize the look of the kitchen by selecting doors of bleached maple, grey melamine or crystal ash, to name a few.

But Couture recommends the lasting style of solid wood.

"Everything else just passes," said Couture. "Wood always comes back."

Prefabricated cabinets can be ordered or custom-made cabinets can be build for the homeower at virtually the same price, depending on the design, said Couture.

He said most kitchen cabinet sets cost between $3,000 and $5,000 and the cabinets take between one and three weeks to order or build.

Poirer added, the homeowner should calculate spending between $150 to $200 per linear foot to renovate, with approximately a 50 per cent return on the investment when selling the house.

Vaillancourt said homeowners should consider renovating if it hasn't been done for 15 years and "a good renovation will last 20 years."

Next to kitchens, residential appraisal specialists put bathroom renovations in second place, with a payback ranging from 25 to 130 per cent.

And bathroom trends are towards the one-piece bathtub and surround, said Poirer.

"They are roomier than they used to be."

Other projects with potential for high re-sell return are interior painting and decor, main-floor family room additions and finished basements.

Ten Tips For The Tire Buyer

Since automobile tire buying is not a daily occurrence in our lives, walking into a tire store can be somewhat unsettling. It's even worse when an attendant offers help and we don't have a clue where to start. If you ask youself these questions before you go to the store to buy tires, you'll be well-prepared for that helpful salesperson.

1. What is the make, model, and year of your car? This information gives the dealer an idea of what type of tire will perform the best and look the best on your car.

2. What is the brand name, model, size and type of your current tires? Just look at the side of your tires. If your current tires did not come with the car when it was new, be sure to check all four tires and make sure they are the same. The previous owner may have been less knowledgeable about tires than you.

3. Do you like your current tires? Do you like the way your tires make your car feel and sound? Or how they make your car look? What would you like to change? Make a list of the things you like and dislike about your current tires. This will help guide your dealer to the tire that best meets your needs.

4. What do you want from your tires when you are driving? Do you want a soft, comfortable ride or do you want a tire that has been built to harness your sports car's capabilities? You may want both, but this is difficult to achieve. A tire that is designed for ride and comfort will not handle as crisply as a performance tire, and a performance tire will not ride as comfortably as a tire designed for comfort.

5. What weather conditions do you normally drive in year around? Are the roads mostly dry (summer tires), or are they usually wet (all-season tires)? Do you ever drive in snow? If so, is it deep (snow tires) or just light snow (all-season tires)?

6. Where do you do your driving? Do you drive mostly around town? Then you probably don't need to spend extra money for a speed-related tire (unless your car came fitted with them). Do you drive frequently on gravel? Then there are certain tread designs you should avoid. The answer to this question can point your tire dealer to the most appropriate and cost-effective tire for your needs.

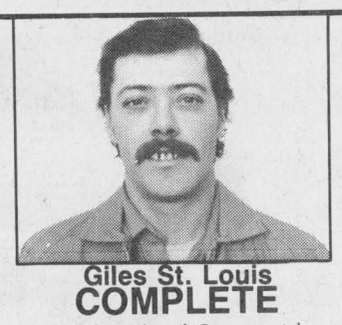
7. At what speeds do you normally travel? If you travel at higher speeds, or own a sports car, you may need a speed-related tire. However, if you always drive at moderate speeds, you probably do not need to go to the expense of buying a speed-related tire. On the other hand, if your car came form the factory with speed-rated tires, it may be in your best interest to replace them with the same speed rating. This will give your car the same handling characteristics to which you're accustomed.

8. How do you want your car to look? There are several "cosmetic" options for tires: Blackwall tires look good on modern and more performance-oriented cars. Whitewalls look good on many cars. Raised white letters and outline white letters are two more options.The profile of a tire is also a cosmetic consideration.

9. What kind of warranties do you want, or are available? Many manufacturers offer limited warranties which cover you for faulty workmanship and product defects. Many tire dealers also offer "road hazard warranties" for a small additional cost. This warranty covers your tire if a foreign object cuts or punctures it.

10. How much do you want to spend? Once you know the answers to the first nine questions, you're ready to consider price. Your dealer will be able to show you various price options for tires that meet your driving needs. You should also shop around. Prices on the same tire can vary from store to store.

Check out the classifieds in The Glengarry News for deals on new and used cars!



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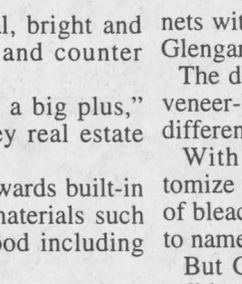

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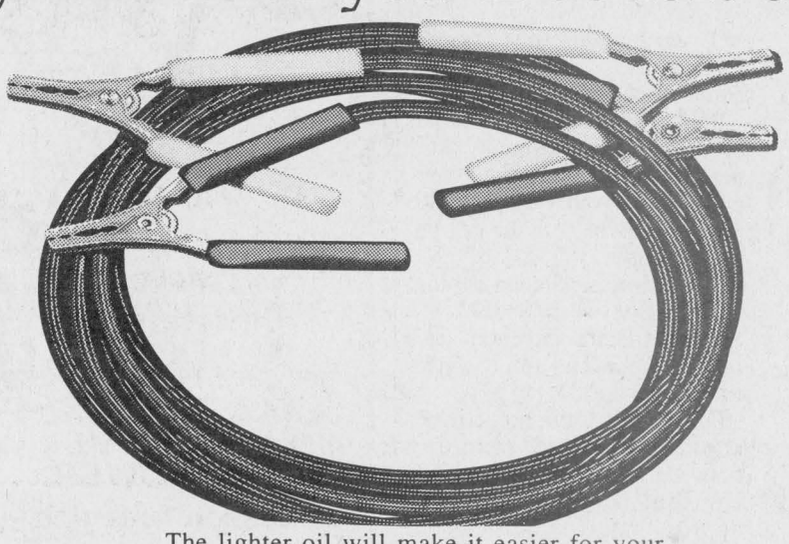
Car Care Tips

Take care of your car or you'll be left out in the cold

By Greg Kielec
News staff



Winter could be closer than you think, and if you are not prepared, you could be caught flat (not to mention cold) footed.

Whether it is making sure your car won't conk the first sign of cold weather, or ensuring your snowblower gives up the ghost the first time you need it, preparation could be your savior this winter.

If you want your car to start religiously on cue this winter, despite how low the mercury drops, a winter tune up is a must, according to Gilles Gareau, owner of Gilles Auto Service in Green Valley.

"It all boils down to the basics," Gareau says. "It's all little stuff, general stuff."

Changing the oil to a lighter viscosity and changing the anti-freeze is a definite must.

The lighter oil will make it easier for your engine to turn over, saving battery power. The new anti-freeze will ensure your motor doesn't freeze up, cracking the engine block.

Since during the cold your car battery is operating at less than half its capacity, a tune-up is also in order to ensure your already cold-drained battery is not taxed even more.

A tune up involves checking and replacing the spark plugs and any other items — your battery and charging system is another key item — that may be in need of replacement to ensure easy starting of your car in the cold months.

Most people know about these tips, but there are still some that challenge the odds and end up calling Gareau at 7:30 a.m. pleading for him to help them when they need to be at work at 8 a.m.

It is better to get the job done in October, before the cold weather sets in, Gareau recommends. It may save you from making that panicked call one cold winter morning.

Frigid weather can devastate a battery

Cold weather delivers a wicked one-two punch to your battery. Freezing temperatures reduce a battery's engine-cranking power. And cold weather thickens oil, which makes the engine even harder to start. In fact, it takes five times more battery power to start an engine at minus 10 degrees Fahrenheit than it does at plus 70.

Battery replacement may be necessary for many motorists this year. So before Old Man Winter leaves you stranded, check your vehicle battery.

Some of the danger signs of battery failure include headlights dimming when accessories are in use and more difficult crank starts on cold days.

Also, even if your battery tests out well, you should consider replacing it if it is near the end of its warranty period. The average original equipment battery is guaranteed for three years, and that's usually how long it lasts.

A thorough battery check should include an examination of its cable connections to make certain they are clean and tight. Loose or corroded connections can diminish the battery's starting power markedly.

If your connections are sound, wipe them and the terminals with a mixture of baking soda and water, which cleans and neutralizes the acidic corrosion. If they are unsound, replace the battery cable. Once re-installed, dab the connectors with a protective coating of grease to further prevent corrosion.

When battery replacement is necessary, the best solution is a new maintenance-free battery. High technology batteries are powerful enough for quick starts even in extremely cold weather. This type of battery is available at major retailers nationwide.

No matter what kind of vehicle you drive, make sure you can depend on your battery when the temperature drops.

Don't be left out in the cold.

Don't regret waiting until your car won't start! Service your vehicle this week!

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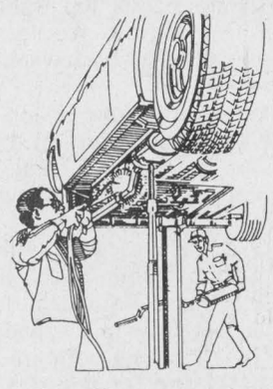

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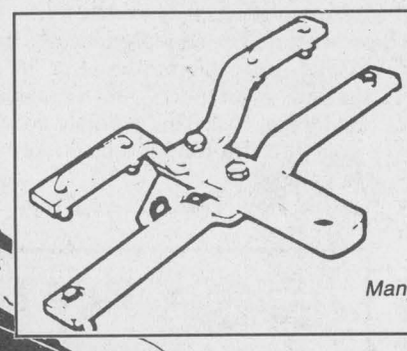

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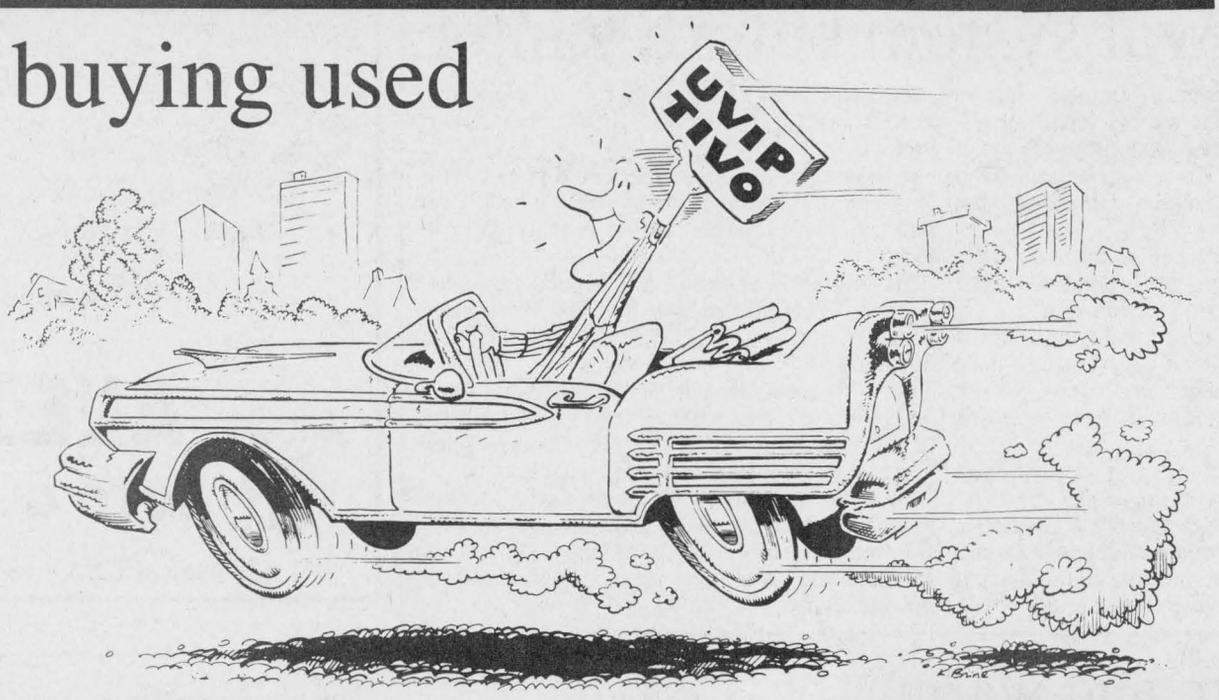
Winter Car Care Tips

Being safe buying used



Used vehicle info. package reduces car-buying risk

For some people, fall means putting away the prized sports car and finding an old "clunker" to get through the winter. That purchase should be less of a risk this year.

Buying a used car from a private owner is now safer, say smart-shopping experts at Ontario's consumer ministry.

It's been made mandatory for anyone wishing to sell a motor vehicle privately to purchase a Used Vehicle Information Package (UVIP) and show it to potential buyers.

"For years the ministry has rated buying a used car from a private owner as one of the highest risk purchases you could make," says Bob Pierce, registrar of the Motor Vehicle Dealers Act.

"But the UVIP takes a lot of the guesswork out of the deal, protecting consumers against sellers who may be curbsiders or who may have liens outstanding on their vehicles."

Curbsiders, people who make a living from selling cars illegally, have long been a problem in the province.

Many consumers prefer to buy from private individuals because they think meeting the owner will help them judge how well the car has been maintained, or because they expect a lower price.

But curbsiders -- so named because the vehicles typically sit by the curb near the vendors' homes -- buy and resell autos as quickly as possible, giving consumers no way of knowing the truth about the vehicle history.

"The ministry has put a lot of effort into pursuing curbsiders, and in fact 51 people were convicted and fined a total of more than $100,000 for operating without licences, in a month.

"But curbsiders change locations and jump in and out of business so quickly it's difficult to track them all," says Pierce.

The UVIP, at a cost of $20, provides a complete list of current and previous registered owners in Ontario. If the vehicle has been traded very recently, the consumer may be dealing with a curbsider.

The buyer should also check to make sure the vehicle is actually registered in the name of the person selling it.

The information sheet in the package provides a description of the vehicle, listing any liens that may be registered against it in Ontario and the names of the people holding them.

If there is a lien against a car, there may be money owing on it. It could have been used as collateral for a loan, or an unpaid bill for repair or storage might be outstanding on it.

In these cases, the buyers of a personal car, truck, motorhome, van or motorcycle might wake up one morning to find a tow truck taking away their recently-purchased used vehicle.

Once the conditions of a lien have been met -- the loan's been paid off, for example -- the holder of the lien is obliged to discharge it within 30 days. However, that sometimes doesn't happen.

If a lien is listed in the UVIP, the potential buyer should call the lien holder to make sure the debt has been paid and require that the lien be discharged before purchasing the vehicle.

The UVIP also gives the average wholesale and retail values of the vehicle. This helps the buyer determine the amount of retail sales tax that will be payable when the registration is transferred.

The used car buyer has six days from the date of purchase to register as the new owner. At the licensing office this information will be needed:

•Used Vehicle Information Package,

•Application for transfer (vehicle portion of permit),

•Safety standards certificate (if you wish to drive the vehicle at once),

•Insurance information,

•Ontario driver's licence or other identification,

•Plate portion of permit (if using existing licence plates) and

•Payment for retail sales tax, vehicle registration fees and new licence plates, as required.

To purchase Used Vehicle Information Packages by telephone 24 hours a day,by using a credit card or to order the free brochure Buying and Selling a Used Vehicle in Ontario call 325-UVIP in the Toronto area or 1-800-267-UVIP from other parts of the province.

Telecommunications Device for Deaf lines are available at 326-8866 in Toronto or 1-800-461-8866 outside Toronto. UVIP packages can be bought from any Driver and Vehicle Licence Issuing Office.

Mileage tips

Regardless of the fuel you use, driving a car will have an impact on the environment. Here's how to minimize that impact, and save money:

Keep to the speed limit. Today, leave a little earlier than usual; then sit back, relax, ease up on the gas pedal. . .and enjoy.

To help you accelerate slowly, imagine placing a raw egg between your foot and the gas pedal.

Avoid idling. If you will be stopped for more than a minute, turn the engine off.

Combine errands so that you can do several in the same trip.



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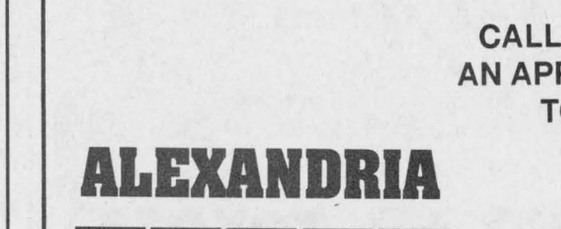

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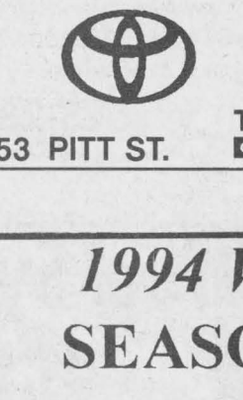

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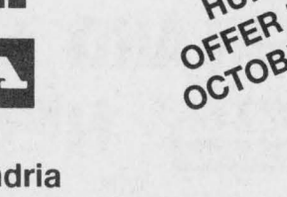

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Winter Car Care Tips

Kickstart your snow-removal system before winter

By Greg Kielec
***News* staff**

You're sitting in your nice, cosy warm home, comfortable in the fact that your trusty snowblower is just a hop-skip and jump away, ready to tackle the fiercest of blustery winter offerings.

But if you haven't brought your machine in for its annual fall tune-up, you may be experiencing a false sense of security.

There is one important thing you should check before this winter, if you don't want to be stuck using the old manual snow thrower instead of your trusty mechanical steed.

"Make sure your snowblower starts for the winter," says Robert Bedard of Roberts Rental on Highway 43 west of Alexandria.

This is the time that many people bring their machines in for his small engine tune-up to avoid getting caught in the winter rush.

Bedard can repair any model. But if repairs are needed, they are best done in October, just in case parts for the machine are not readily available and need to be ordered, Bedard says.

The same applies for do-it-your-selfers, who may want to fix their machine themselves, but need to get the parts first.

It's best to get that all out of the way now, because once the snow hits the ground, it will be every man, woman and child for himself.

You'll be fighting for repair time against all the others who haven't had their tune-ups and have suddenly found the machines won't start, as well as those unfortunate enough to have machine break-down.

"You would be in trouble," says Bedard, "and we would be backed up over the head."

A regular tune-up costs $29.99 at Robert's Rental. For that price, Bedard changes the spark plug and gas and checks the oil, changing it if necessary.

He also checks chains and gears to ensure they are in satisfactory condition and properly greased.

If something is noticed that could pose a problem later in the winter, the owner will be advised and can get it repaired before it causes a problem.

Once the snow is on the ground, Bedard is often busy repairing broken snowblowers. With proper usage of the snowblower, there should be no breakdowns.

But if the machine gobbles up any type of hard object in the snow, whether it be a stick of wood or a dog bone, drive parts can be broken, sending you to the repair shop.

To avoid machine breakdowns, Bedard recommends machine operators keep the area clean of solid objects before the snow hits the ground, or to check the area being cleaned before starting the machine.

Cold proof your car to stay safe and warm

Check your lubrication, cooling system and battery

As the snow begins to fall, smart drivers are protecting themselves from Canadian winters by preparing their vehicles for colder temperatures. Cold-proofing a vehicle is easy and will keep you safe and warm.

"We have developed an easy three-point system to provide maximum protection for your vehicle," says Norm Hudecki, director of technical services for Valvoline, Inc. These include checking the following:

- the lubrication system;
- the cooling system;
- and the battery.

The Lubrication System

"Selecting the right motor oil for your engine can reduce friction and keep your engine running clean during the winter," says Hudecki. "In colder temperatures, motor oil requires more time to lubricate the engine. We recommend selecting a thinner multigrade oil, like 5W30 or 10W30 that will reach those critical engine parts faster."

When selecting a motor oil for winter driving, look at the number in front of the "W" of a multigrade oil. The lower the number is, the better the motor oil will flow in cold weather. Multigrade oils, like Valvoline's 5W30 and 10W30, have additives that improve motor oil flow in colder temperatures.

In severe winter conditions, a synthetic motor oil is recommended to help with cold engine starting. According to laboratory tests, synthetic motor oils flow to vital engine parts 57 per cent faster when compared to similar mineral-based oils. Choosing a synthetic motor oil will reduce engine wear, improve horsepower and fuel economy.

Check the motor oil level regularly, and change the oil and oil filter every three months or 5,000 kilometres. Read the specifications in your owner's manual to select the correct grade of motor oil recommended by the manufacturer.

The Cooling System

Coolant is the mixture of water and anti-freeze, usually at about a 50:50 ratio, that helps cool the engine during operation and prevents freezing of water in the radiator when the engine is idle.

The coolant system lubricates the engine block, radiator and bearings in the water pump, but can lose its effectiveness after 24 months. A radiator flush and refill is necessary once every two years, or as directed by the owner's manual. The procedure removes scale deposits,rust and dirty coolant from the system.

Also, don't forget to inspect the hoses and clamps around your radiator and replace any that are cracked. Once a year have a professional inspect your radiator, water pump, fan, thermostat, radiator cap and coolant.

The Battery

The battery provides your vehicle with the power it needs to drive through snowy and icy conditions. When the temperatures drop below freezing the battery runs at 40 per cent efficiency. Have a professional check the battery to make sure it is operating properly before winter driving.

A set of booster cables will provide the power you need if your vehicle fails to start in colder weather.

Used motor oil, coolant and batteries can be harmful to the environment, so all should be deposited at local recycling facilities.

Other Winter Car Care Tips...

- Visually check your belts and hoses for cracks, brittle or missing pieces;
- Check your tires to ensure you have adequate tread and inflation for good traction;
- In severe winter conditions, windshield wipers can become brittle and worn. A worn wiper blade can create an irregular wiping pattern and reduce visibility;
- You should change your spark plugs regularly, as recommended by your owner's manual;
- A dirty air filter can limit your vehicle's performance. Change your air filter regularly as recommended in your owner's manual;
- Repair any headlights, brake lights and turn signals that are not working properly;
- Check your brakes, brakelines and fluid before snow and ice cover the roads;
- Enroll in a defensive driving or skid control course to prepare for slippery winter conditions;
- During the winter months, you should store a hat, gloves, boots, blankets, flares, a shovel, a bag of sand, a candle and matches, booster cables, a flashlight and a piece of chocolate for energy in your trunk.

Winterizing your vehicle can make winter driving safe.

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