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Taking Care of Your Car! Let's Do It Today!

By Wade Daniels

Let's face it. Most of us are semi-impoverished students who drive old heaps Uncle Chester pawned off on us for beer money when we turned 17. We also live amid the salty mist of the Pacific. We're prime candidates for body rot.

It usually takes about five or six years for corrosion to set in, according to Dave Boytis of McLean's Auto Body and Paint in Goleta. One of the most common factors that contributes to body rot is design flaws which allow water to accumulate and eat at the paint and then the metal.

Windshield moldings and fenders are the easiest targets for this. Water often accumulates in the bottom of car doors, which become clogged.

Although some body shops boast that they guarantee their work, repairs done on these areas cannot truthfully be guaranteed, since the problem is design-oriented, Boytis explained.

These sorts of problems have, for the most part, been eliminated in newer-model cars.

Salt in the Isla Vista air is a more indirect culprit. It attacks the paint, thus making the body itself more vulnerable to the elements. For this reason, it has been widely recommended that one should avoid buying automobiles from areas where salt is poured on roads for traction in icy conditions.

Perhaps the best advice for keeping your paint intact is to keep it washed and waxed. This may seem a little farfetched, but, he said, it's only advice.

Beer cans, careless drunks, meteorites—all are common problems in I.V., and all scratch and dent our fair autos, laying naked their flesh of ore to the monsters of the sky. But we ourselves can at least slow down the progress of decay until we graduate and can either trash the hunk or get it fixed by someone who knows what he or she is doing.

For scratches and nicks, you can buy some very fine-grained sandpaper and painstakingly remove all the rust. You'll probably take out some of the surrounding paint, but that's all right.

Then, take a spray can of silicon coating or paint primer (both available for a few bucks at car-part stores) and layer on a couple of coats. You can also purchase aluminum tape, which helps, but tends to fall off and looks really tacky.

Both of these methods leave your car in less-than-showroom condition, but slowing down the decaying may save you a good deal of cabbage in the long run.

When body rot is initiated internally, the exterior will have a sort of bubbled appearance. The paint won't seem affected much at first, but you can bet there's water in there working away. If you can, feel the other side and see how far it has progressed. If not, start sanding. If the metal is "bubbly," you may end up making a hole all the way through.

There is a good demonstration of do-it-yourself hole-filling in the May 1984 issue of *Popular Mechanics*. For starters, you have to tear or snip off every bit of rust or it will start spreading again immediately. It's kind of like operating on a cancer patient.

Now comes the infamous Bondo. It either takes a lot of luck or an artistic hand to make this look good. You have to get it in there, smooth it out as best you can and wait for it to dry. Then start sanding and do your best to make it match the rest of the car. This is where luck or skill comes in handy.

Some people do body work with a blow torch and a sheet of fiberglass, but this doesn't work especially well on metal cars.

If your car decay is at a very advanced stage, you will either have to spend a lot of money to get it fixed or just live with it (maybe put some flowers in there).

Hints For Buying Used Car!

By Glenda Adney

At this time of the year, most students are either preparing themselves for graduation, vacation or summer employment. However, at the same time, these students are most likely realizing that they probably can't fulfill all their summer goals on their skateboards or bikes because the rest of the world simply isn't as centralized as Isla Vista. In order to get anywhere in this world, or if you want to take your date somewhere other than Tacos Acapulco, you need wheels.

Sure, you could take the bus, if you don't mind standing for long periods of time on street corners waiting to be a victim of a drive-by shooting. And even though taxi cabs oftentimes have vomit and sperm stuck to the seats, they can still be kind of cool because you sort of feel important being driven around by a sort of

chauffeur. Problem is, riding a cab is actually more expensive than riding a limousine, really. For example, it'll run you damn near \$20 to get from downtown Santa Barbara to Isla Vista. Forget it!

Unless you enjoy the aforementioned humiliating modes of transport, you need to break the bank and buy a used car (unless you can weasel some serious cabbage out of your parents for a new one). But, before you do, in order to ensure that you receive the most for your money, here is a list of helpful hints to assist in your search for the perfect set of wheels.

Check the Oil

When you locate a car that appeals to your aesthetic tastes, be it a Nova or a Porsche, be sure to open the hood and check the oil. If the juice is black, you're okay. But, if it's cream-colored, shut the hood and leave because the strange coloration signifies there is water in the oil, probably signifying either a cracked head or a bad head-gasket, which could be quite expensive to repair.

Check the Body

Stand in front of your po-

tential automobile and look carefully down the side of it. If the side of the car looks straight, fine, but if it appears to be somewhat wavy, be wary—most likely, the car has undergone body work due to some kind of accident. Question the seller about any previous damage to the car. I mean, wouldn't you like to be the first one to wreck your car?

Check the Paint

Besides looking at the overall paint job on the car, take a look at the rubber moldings surrounding the windows and doors. If there is any paint on them, chances are the car has been repainted, because in a car factory, the moldings are placed on the car after the body has been painted. While a new paint job may not mean that the car has been damaged, question the seller just to be sure.

Listen to the Engine

If you can't take a mechanic with you when you go used-car shopping, or you don't know diddly-squat about cars, there is a way to check the engine, or parts of it, without getting your hands all greasy. Start the engine and listen. If you hear a tapping noise, known

as "lifters" or "tappets," it could mean a problem with the top end of the engine, or a valve problem. If you don't hear anything, put the car in drive, push the brake pedal real hard and pull on the emergency brake. Then push down on the accelerator slowly, all the while keeping the car stationary with the brakes. If you hear a knocking sound, known as "knockers," it could mean a serious problem with the bottom end of the engine, such as problems with the camshaft or the bearings, a bad cylinder or a bad rod—in short, bad news.

Other things to do include checking any receipts left in the glove compartment for past repairs or checkups and checking the pedals and interior for excessive wear and tear. Kick the tires and slam all the doors because if the car can withstand that, it surely can come away unscathed after a confrontation with a tree or another car.

Of course, the best advice is not to buy a used car at all. Save your dough, sell your body, steal from your grandparents and buy yourself a new car.

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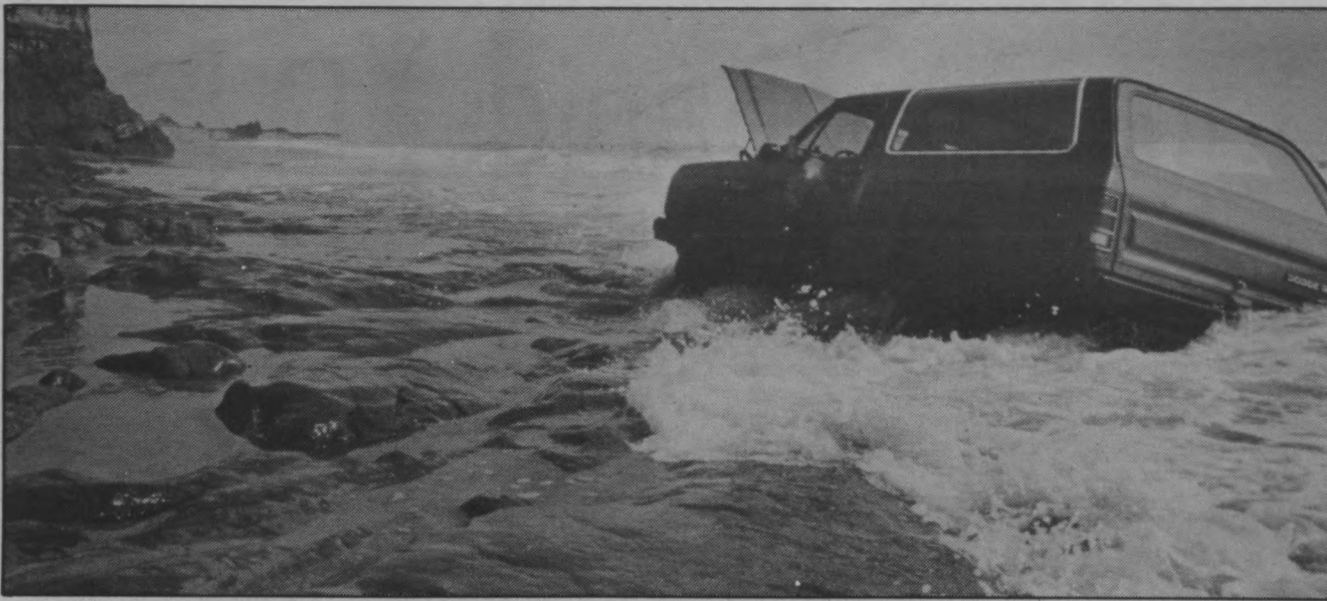
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If you are not careful ... LOOK WHAT CAN HAPPEN!

Driving & Drinking... Coffee!

By Matt Curplew

It's morning. You've just hopped out of bed, flipped on the coffee maker and thrown your gear in the bag. The fog in your brain hasn't quite lifted and you have many miles yet to travel. You throw on a pair of nifty white jeans, fill your well-stained mug and hop in the car. A job interview in distant San Francisco awaits, and you've got to be sharp.

With brimming cup in hand, you sidle into the car, gingerly place the brimming mug of coffee in the crux between your legs, and turn the ignition. The cup feels secure. The air is brisk. The journey has, it seems, just begun.

With a sigh of satisfaction, you lift the fresh brew to your lips. In the same motion, you attempt to steer with your right forearm (the one holding the coffee), adjust the left side mirror with your left arm and merge into some bustling traffic. It is a delicate skill you have honed to perfection, but suddenly — Oof! A rather

large truck comes barreling into view in the overhead mirror and Eek! a car comes to an unexpected stop immediately in front of you and Whammo!

Once again you've got a lap full of coffee. A new pair of brown and white tie-dyed pants to your collection. But the sheepish embarrassment with which you explain the new fashion to your would-be employer is but a mask. Secretly, you feel a giddy, guilty pride that you have braved, though scathed, the shark-infested waters of drinking and driving.

It is hard to explain this feckless obsession of yours; that illogical urge to carry an unfettered, sloshing basin of gurgling waters into such a precarious environment as a moving car. But it is more than that. Mobile coffee drinking, as any veteran can tell you, is as much an art as a necessity.

Some farsighted people have cars equipped with holders designed expressly for a coffee mug. Others buy coffee cups with snug little lids that in most cases keep

spillage to a minimum. They are cheeky little gadgets, affronts to the sport you cherish so dearly.

The purist blanches at the thought of them.

There is a certain sense of danger — an adrenalin-laced rush — that is felt only while driving with an open-rimmed cup of coffee, with the liquid caffeine vicariously coursing to and fro to the rhythm of a humming engine. The feeling as the wind whooshes through your hair, the road roars beneath your feet and the percolated nectar sloshes through your veins, and perhaps your lap.

It is not a sport for the luxury car driver, to be sure. It is best undertaken in a family-type car with many years under its belts and with seats faded to a gray-blue shade that can withstand or absorb the worst stain. And often has. A blue-collar car, if you will.

Any old cup will do, but styrofoam (the ozone be damned!) is best. Unlike ceramic mugs, foam cups offer the added thrill of a possible puncture or rupture of

some kind.

And don't be embarrassed to employ a plastic lid on your styrofoam cup, as these are usually ill-fitting and easily displaced.

Cappuccino is a no-no, as it usually is buffered by a layer of foam. The best mobile coffee is a strong, murky, bracing brew that at any other time would make you scrunch up your face in displeasure. An oily film should float on top. Cream and sugar are strongly discouraged.

Sure, it might spill at any moment. It is usually on the verge of doing so, and most often does — a little. But as Nabokov's Humbert Humbert would tell you, a fetish unquenched is a life un-lived. Besides, what's a little coffee stain gonna hurt, anyhow? Whoa!



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Cars, Mechanics, Death

By Leo Werner

As Elmo lay dying, his life's blood flowing down across the radiator, fan and belts, mixing with the eternal oil on the floor, an era came to end. Or, more accurately, an era long-dead finally gave up the illusion of life.

And in my family, Elmo's death also meant a new period of striving, looking for a new meaning, a new truth ... a new mechanic.

There just aren't any mechanics like Elmo anymore; the modern mechanic wears a spotless white smock, with pens and a calculator in his pocket. He opens the hood, dons surgical gloves and hooks up wires and things from his "Analyzer" into your engine compartment.

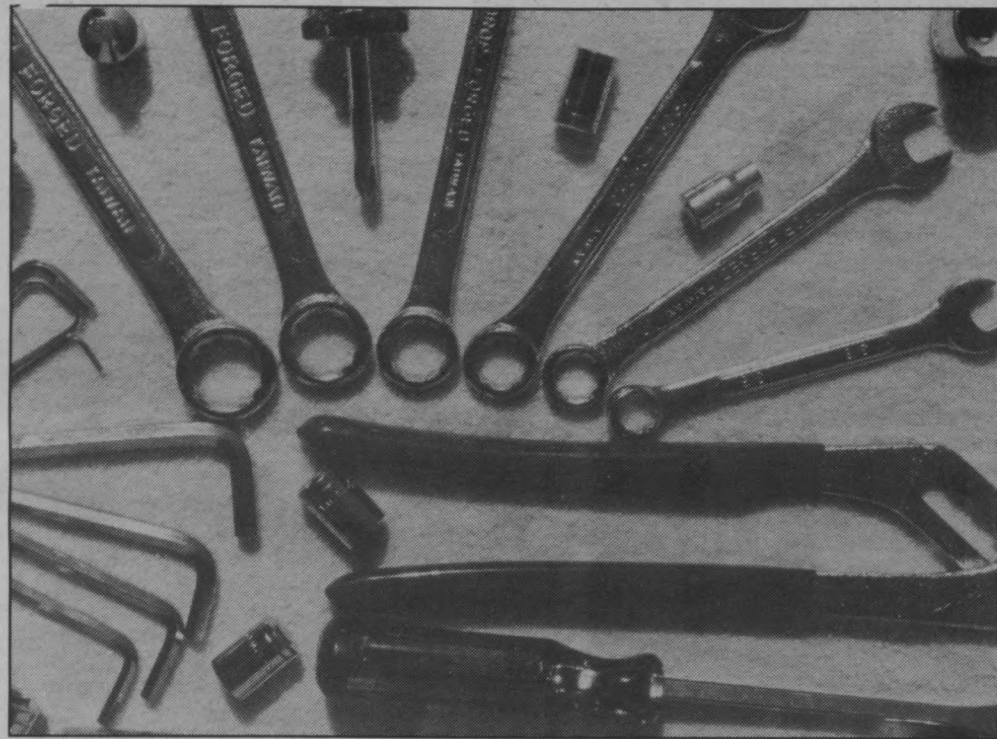
Soon, after a brief flashing of lights and whirring of unidentifiable little motors, a printout emerges. The printout has an indecipherable list of "components" and a number which is the sum of your checking balance and your various credit limits. This is called the "Estimate."

Elmo wasn't like that, not even with customers who weren't relatives — though most of us were. Elmo had a big, corrugated aluminum barn; you had to weave through a couple alleys and a bumpy dirt road to get there to find Elmo weaving through the garage cluttered by his lift, air compressor and all kinds of tools laying everywhere.

Inside, every surface seemed to be coated with a layer of oil. I never understood how it got there, I never saw Elmo spraying the walls with oil or anything, but it was there nonetheless.

The thing was, when a car drove into that shed, or even into the dirt lot where people stored cars waiting for Elmo's attention, it breathed easier. You could see it or feel it or something. The car actually settled in, rode a little lighter on its suspension.

Elmo understood cars, he could listen to one, stroke it a little and understand what hurt. Which might lead you to think that, like all of the male icons of the period, Elmo was kind of stupid. Nothing could be further



It is often the case that tools, or "mechanic's helpers," come in useful in auto repair.

from the truth — Elmo was not only an intellectual, he had, in his own small way, reauchembeaued with the gods.

Once, he explained to me the origins of internal combustion.

"Poor-Am-Eats-Us was this god who thought man should have the secret of internal fire. The other gods, committed as they were to the world order, warned that if everyone had a car, they would all get up and move to California, thus disrupting the hierarchy of misery. A few also mentioned that some 100,000 people a year would die on the highways, that pollution would choke the skies and that parking would be impossible.

But Poor-Am-Eats-Us ignored the advice of his fellow gods and brought mankind the means to make everyone mobile. He also displaced the prior icons of manhood with the new, greasier version.

In punishment, the gods turned Poor-Am-Eat-Us into a 1972 Plymouth sedan and gave him one of those "noises" — a "ping," to be exact. Every night, a squad of mechanics ripped out his innards, trying to find the source, and every morning the gods put him back together, complete with that ping."

You might think Elmo was just telling his little

brother a story, but he actually worked on that car once. And, knowing that he was ripping the liver from the very god who started it all, Elmo worked all night, all the next day and into the weekend and the Labor Day holiday, trying to make the noise go away. He stripped that thing down to its molecular substrates and concluded that the noise was not natural.

So, knowing that the comfort of the god of internal combustion was at stake, Elmo did what the best mechanics do, he told the woman who brought the car in that the ping was normal. It was just the "rudenator" changing modes, nothing to worry about.

The woman went away happy, and from that day hence, no one rips the innards out anymore.

But times change, the wheel turns, and the gods don't like to have their punishments thwarted. And so, cars began to transform into something else, something evil, unrecognizable.

Where once under the hood you had your basic engine, carb, distributor and such, now you got all manner of weird stuff, none of which makes the car go. Elmo held off for years.

Knowing that the gods who had changed the nature of cars would just love to get hold of him, Elmo never worked on any car

newer than 1972. But, you know, it was family thing. Along came the eighties with the smaller, fuel-efficient, stylish little neo-cars, and Mom, Dad and Uncle Pete all wanted to move up. Too much money just can't abide old cars, even well-maintained ones. The pressure was too much.

One day, I just had a feeling. I'd heard Uncle Pete had a new Fiero, but I was sure he'd have the dealer service it. But, I knew, as I walked home, that something was really wrong. Maybe it was that gleeful way the weather gods seemed to be making car parts out of the clouds, but I could tell that the universe had shifted. I ran home.

As Elmo lay there, body draped over the engine, hand trapped in some kind of device that didn't look like it belonged in any car, I understood that he'd died years ago. Sensitive men driving BMW's and eating all-fruit jam on croissants had run over his soul; mechanics who get certificates for this and that system without ever learning why cars go had ripped apart his spirit. And finally, his body had fallen. By the way, Elmo was named after a car, but no one could remember what car, or how the name Elmo was related to it.

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