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This fall's featured vehicle is Todd Rehmert's 1972 Plymouth Duster

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## Falling in love with a '72 Duster not once, but twice



**BY ROXIE MURPHY**  
**ADVOCATE STAFF WRITER**  
 rmurphy@wardpub.com

Todd Rehmert has always had a soft spot for the Plymouth Duster.

“Growing up in Gerald, there was a guy named Mark Steineker, and he had bought a 340ci (Plymouth) Duster,” Todd recalls. “It was black with white stripes. I was probably only 10 years old when he was driving that thing around. I said I would like to have it. I thought it was cool.”

When Rehmert first noticed the Chrysler-made machine, they had only been on the market for five years — running primarily between 1969-76 as a two-door coupe version of the compact Plymouth Valiant.

His first run-in with the Plymouth Duster was around 1972 when his father bought a new Charger from a dealership in Sullivan.

“He said, ‘hey, you want to come with me and pick up the new car today? Your mother can’t come.’ We went over to Sullivan to pick up the Charger and in the same lot, this other car had been sold. I said ‘cool car’ and asked my dad what it was. He said

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FEATURE PHOTOS BY DENNIS WARDEN

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## Duster • From page 2B

it was a Duster.”

The A-body style was slick, painted bold red with white stripes. Rehmert’s 10-year-old-self thought it was a race car.

“My dad explained that the 340ci was the size of the engine,” Rehmert said. “That, and then the guy in Gerald — I knew I wanted one when I was old enough.”

Fast forward six years and Rehemert’s father found a 1974 Plymouth Duster with a 225ci slant 6 he purchased for \$600 on a lot in St. James — the same vehicle in which Rehmert would drive his future wife Alicia Landwehr around.

Until one day in 1982, a fancy Mustang, some friendly competition, and gentle ribbing by his lady would lead Rehmert to a lightning-fast decision that would bring great memories for the next 40 years.

“I was picking up my girlfriend/future wife from volleyball practice from the old junior high — the high school is there now, it used to be the old junior high,” he said. “This other girl, Sheri Limberg, was our next- neighbor in Gerald. Her boyfriend come and picked her up and he had this

See **Duster** page 5B



**TODD REHMERT** with his girlfriend/future wife Alicia in 1982 soon after Dean Gabathular painted the Duster black and added a gold-colored stripe down the side. Rehmert added the deep dish slot wheels and white lettered tires, but the car still held the original 318ci engine it came with, gold-colored stripe on it.”

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**REHMERT HAD** the dash and bucket seats, door panels and steering wheel replaced to match what a factory 340ci Duster would have been. The flat black hood sports a 340 wedge decal. The 340 "wedge" decal was introduced in '71. The wedge refers to the wedge cylinder heads which all 340s had.



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## Duster • From page 3B

Mustang Mock 1 he had just fixed up with this 351 cubic engine in it and it was all rumblin'. Then (Alicia) looked at me when I pulled up and said, 'you think you can even spin the wheels?' She was makin' fun of me, and I said, 'I don't know, I'll try.'"

But that day Rehemert realized he wanted to make a change.

"It's like when you go to the barber and say 'give me a haircut that makes girls run towards me, not away from me,'" he laughed.

### Souped Up — from 318 stock to a 340 rumble

He went to Mike Riefer at Owensville Motors located on First Street.

"Back in them days, him and Jim Brandon worked up there and I said, 'I gotta get a 340 for my car.' That was the legendary motor for MOPAR."

The 340ci engines were part of Chrysler's LA Series — one of four of the company's first low-cost V8 engines that would become a pillar in engine production for the car manufacturer. Modern-day Chrysler vehicles continue to sport a variation of the original design, as late as the 2017 Viper-10.

Rehemert told Riefer he needed something more powerful to burn rubber.

"He said 'I don't know where one's at, and that car you've got is a six-cylinder car and we would have to change things around too much. Change the motor mounts, it's got a wimpy transmission, and the rear end's not right.'"

Rehmert agreed the car was "poochy."

Riefer didn't leave him completely without hope though. He had recently purchased Dennis Frahm's 1972 orange Plymouth Duster with a 318-block engine that was sitting in the back of the car lot. The then-school teacher was well-known.

"Dennis Frahm, he was kind of a wild man back in his younger years," Rehmert said. "He ran the piss out of this car, he bent the frame and had to have it straightened, he had the top dented in and the road grader in Owensville was plowing the snow and knocked into the corner panel and busted the weld and had a whole crackdown. It was a real mess."

The '72 Duster had a 318 motor, which would make it easier to convert to a 340ci with less hassle.



**FROM TEENAGER** to mature adult: Rehmert repainted the original Duster black less than 24-hours after he purchased it from Mike Riefer. Other sporty upgrades included the Deep Dish Slot Wheels. As an adult he reverted the car back to it's original color and stock Rally Wheels.

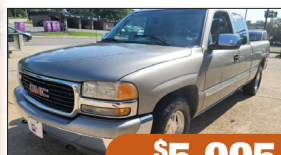
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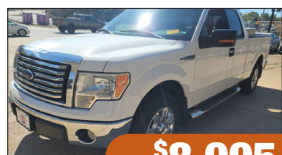
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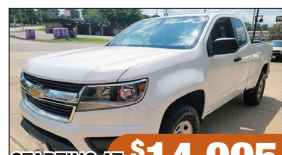
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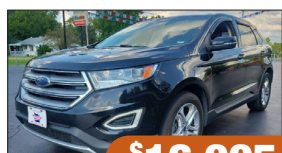
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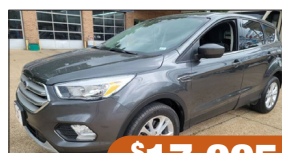
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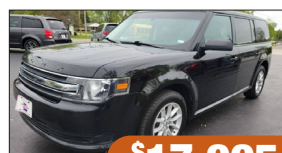
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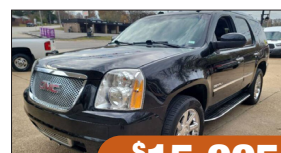
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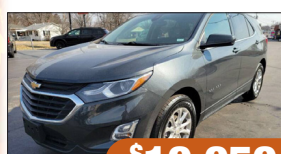
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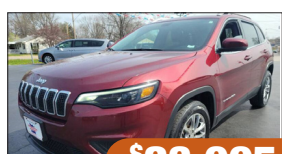
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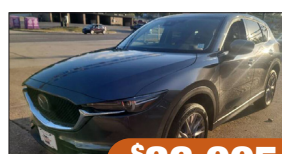
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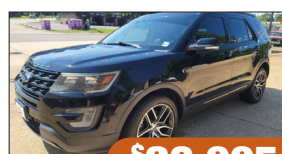
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## Duster • From page 5B

“It had the right rear end, transmission stuff, it would work,” Rehmert said. “And it had the motor mounts to bolt it.”

“Why don’t you just get this car?” Riefer asked.

Riefer wanted \$400 for it.

“I was working there local while I was going to college,” said Rehmert, who was studying to be a teacher himself.

He agreed to the deal and took funds from his summer job.

“As soon as I buy it, I had it one day and took it up to Owensville to Dean Gabathular, he has passed away since, he used to run the Dino Sinclair Station. He painted cars and stuff on the side,” Rehmert said. “Jim Brandon said Dean would paint it on the side. I said ‘paint it black, I don’t want the orange, I want it black’ and we put a gold-colored stripe on it.”

The next stop was finding a 340ci motor for the car, which came in the form of Dave Pfeifer.

“Dave had a 1975 Dodge Demon back in the day, that was basically like Dodge’s version of the Duster,” Rehmert said. “I found out he had a 340 engine for sale after I had asked around at the junkyards and the like. I called him, he had one for \$100 bucks there at his house. I went to pick it up. He didn’t have the heads on it or the engine manifold, so I had to buy those. But then I took it right back up to Owensville Motors and Riefer and Jim Brandon built the engine and we put it in the car. Of course, it was pretty loud and beefy.”

The family drove the car for years, but eventually outgrew the coupe and it sat in the garage to be brought out for joy rides and special occasions.

### A boy’s dream to a man’s reality — return to the original design

In 2004-05 Rehmert began to look hard at the ole’ jalopy and decided it would be a good project.

“I said ‘hey, let’s fix this thing up,’” he said. “It’s not a hard numbers-matching original 340 because it is really a 318ci car.”

Rehmert explained the difference between the 318ci and 340ci is obviously the engine but also the interior, door panels, striping and also the grills are different in the front.

“I said let’s clone it into a 340ci car and I will make it as close to stock original as I can get it,” Rehmert said. “We will take it to car shows and all that.”

In 2005, Rehmert took the car to Jim Oglesbee in Gerald for a paint job — back to the original orange.

“I said ‘I want the paint back to the original color, to the orange that it was before,’” Rehmert said.

Next was the search for all-original parts — original door panels, Rally Wheels, dash, and seats.

“We stripped it all the way down to the skin or basically the frame,” Rehmert said. “I had to replace most of the quarter panels because these cars are famous for being rusted out. One of the front fenders, both inner fenders, the doors are original, the hood, roof, the trunk, all of that, all the floor pans because they rust real bad. All the bumpers have been re-chromed.”

However, the 340 Duster had a different grill than all the others.

“It was called a sharktooth grill — they don’t reproduce them and they are very difficult to find,” Rehmert said. “I looked around for months and months trying to find that grill.”

We finally found a guy in Florida who had one,” Rehmert said.

The second hard-to-find item was a set of specialty taillights.

He bought a pair of taillights from a guy in Gerald who had a junkyard full of MOPAR parts.

He was also able to buy the original Rally Wheels and hubcaps.

“Jim Brandon took the motor again and rebuilt it,” Rehmert said. “He was teaching

auto mechanics at Linn Tech and took it over there and did it all right.”

He told Brandon he wanted to make everything as stock as he could, but the car would have run on leaded gas in 1972 and now everything runs on unleaded gas.

“He said it is so hard to buy lead additive, so what we did was put hardened valve seats and that allows you to run modern, unleaded gasoline in the old leaded engines,” Rehmert explained.

Hardened exhaust seats are resistant to unleaded gas-reduced exhaust valve seat recession as long as the vehicle isn’t running consistently above 3,500 RPMs or is towing a heavy load.

The engine also received an overhaul.

“I think we had to put sleeves in the cylinder walls because they were scarred up,” Rehmert said. “Everything was redone on the whole engine. It’s actually a 343ci now, ‘cause they get thinner when you rework ‘em.”

Rehmert said they painted the motor to the original medium blue color and all the crank batteries, speakers and decals were ordered to make it look exactly like a 1972 Plymouth Duster 340 off the lot.

“It’s very close, down to the plugs and alternator wires,” Rehmert said.

The interior was reupholstered.

“I bought all original upholstery from a

guy in St. Clair,” Rehmert said. “Original ‘72 bucket seats and the back seats. It was all redone and had all the original carpets. I did buy a new dash panel, new headliners, door panels, armrests, and window tops. We put in a Tuff steering wheel like the 340s came out with. We found an original reproduction.”

The center console has wood grain in the middle, on the dash and wood grain on the floor.

The entire rebuild took an estimated six months in 2005. For Nearly six years the Rehmert family took Duster to shows and special events.

### Completion of the ‘72 Plymouth Duster restomod, try — try again

The successful rebuild of the ‘72 Plymouth Duster restomod — a classic car modified with modern running gear — came to a screeching halt in 2012 after a MOPAR Weekend trip.

“We took it to a lot of car shows when we were done,” Rehmert said. “I guess the biggest car show we took it to was the Monster MOPAR Weekend in St. Louis at the

See **Duster** page 7B



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**FROM 1974** to 1975, actress Judy Strangis was a TV pitchwoman for the Plymouth Duster in the role of "Mean Mary Jean," wearing a football jersey and short denim hot-pants.

## Duster • From page 6B

Gateway Racetrack in 2012 and I won first place in Stock/Original at Monster MOPAR Weekend. I went to a lot of car shows and won first or second place a lot because, even though it wasn't a number matching, it was a clone that was so close to the original car. We were so happy."

Then on the way home, things took a turn. "We were bumper-to-bumper crossing the Poplar Street Bridge out by the Arch and someone turned off, we were getting ready to turn off on the I-44 exit when a truck driver from Virginia was looking over at the Arch and ran into the back of the car three cars behind me," Rehmert said. "It was a chain reaction, just bam, bam, and of course one of the guys was from Union riding with us in a muscle car and he was right behind me so he got crushed. His car got shoved into the back of mine. I seen it comin' but there was nowhere you could go because it was all bumper-to-bumper. Couldn't swerve out or nothing. I thought, 'oh, my gosh, I just won first place at MOPAR Nationals and I get rear-ended 30 minutes later on the way back home!'"



**A 340CI** Duster has distinctive taillights. After being rear-ended on the Poplar Street Bridge Rehmert had to search for replacements. He now has two spare sets in his barn just in case they are needed.

Rehmert said he made the decision pretty quickly to build the car back.

"The rest of the car wasn't damaged, but the whole tail panel where the taillights are was crushed, of course, the bumper, a little bit of the trunk pan, and the impact of the quarter panel where it pushed against the doors chipped a little paint between the quarter panel and the doors from the flexing of the metal car bending was really weird," Rehmert said.

He was back to the drawing board to find someone to repaint the Duster.

"I wanted to take it to someone else to repair it," he said. "I took it to Tommy Shoemaker who lives in Rosebud — and realized it was Tommy Shoemaker, Jr., — I

See **Duster** page 8B

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## Duster • From page 7B

went to school with Tommy Shoemaker and this is his son.”

Shoemaker ended up repainting the whole car except the hood and restriping it with 3mm decals so that everything would match still.

“He painted huge stripes down both sides and the tail and he did a phenomenal job painting,” Rehmert said. “It was better than before and insurance covered it all.”

After completing what could technically be considered the Duster’s third remodel, Rehmert said he was gun shy to drive it for fear something would happen. Parts are so rare and hard to find, he made sure when he was looking for parts during the 2012 rebuild that he had backups.

“I still drive it around, but it looks brand new — everything on it,” he said. “I don’t plan on ever getting hit again.”

He regularly goes back and touches up the paint on the exhaust manifolds.

### For the gearheads:

The 1972 Plymouth Duster came out of its restomod with a 340ci engine, an A-727 TorqueFlite transmission — arguably the best muscle car transmission ever built and Chrysler’s go-to build — with a shift kit. The 8 ¾ rear-end differential allowed for an upgraded positraction and 3.55 gears, making the car more fun to drive while reaching easy 75 mph cruise speeds for interstate driving.

### The rest is history

Miraculously, Rehmert says he has never really hot-rodged the car, as tires and fuel are too expensive. However, one memorable time in Gerald when he was backing out of a driveway, the tires squawked a little and former Chief of Police Gary Weirich gave Rehmert a ticket.

“It was the only ticket I ever got in the car,” he said.

A lot has changed since 1982, and not just leaded gasoline.

Rehmert and his wife Alicia had their daughter Fallon and for nearly 20 years she



**ANOTHER DISTINCTIVE** feature on the 72 340 Duster is the sharktooth grill.

stood to be the sole recipient of Duster. Then 18-years-ago the expectation was swayed with the birth of the Rehmert’s twin boys Reese and Rane Rehmert.

Rehmert said he is going to eventually have to have a sit-down conversation with his three children.

“Does anyone really want it or not want it,” he may ask. Or ideally, “I will have to build two more cars and have three, which I would like to do. I don’t know who will get it. Maybe one will want it more than the others.”

The family never named the car, they have always just called it “the Duster.”

“I have had this car for 40-50 years and it is part of our family just like anybody else,” Rehmert said. “It has been such a huge part of our family.”



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## A short history of the Plymouth Duster

The Duster coupe provided the compact-sized Plymouth Valiant with a sporty body style to attract customers. The car was a \$15 million effort to update the Valiant for the 1970 model year. The Valiant badge appeared only on the first model year Dusters, and continued to be used on all the companion 4-door sedan and 2-door Valiant Scamp hardtop models. The Duster was built on the Valiant platform and shared the same front end sheet metal, but featured a different design from the cowl back.

The Duster was also positioned to compete with Ford's slightly smaller semi-fast-back Maverick compact car and the AMC Hornet that were both also introduced in 1970, and the slightly larger semi-fast-back Chevrolet Nova whose design was introduced in 1968. While the Maverick, Hornet, and Nova were offered in a 4-door sedan body style, the Duster nameplate was used only for the 2-door coupe. The Duster

was also marketed as an alternative to the original Volkswagen Beetle, as well as the new class of domestic subcompact cars such as the Chevrolet Vega.

Numerous trim and option package variants of the Duster were offered with names that included Feather Duster, Gold Duster, Silver Duster, Space Duster, Duster Twister, Duster 340, and Duster 360. These marketing variations of the basic Duster design targeted customers seeking economy, cargo capacity, and/or performance.

After failed negotiations with Warner Brothers for use of the Tasmanian Devil cartoon, the Duster's "twister" logo and font logo was created by Chrysler's Thomas Bertsch (1952–1987). Bertsch was the director of the interior styling and design studio for much of his career. Many corresponding graphics were used for different trim packages over the years.

*from Wikipedia*

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## What's behind noises your car might be making

**F**ew things can be as unsettling when behind the wheel as a sudden noise. Noises coming from a car can indicate a host of issues, and that's one reason why such sounds tend to be so different. Quickly identifying what's behind car noises can make for safer driving and potentially save drivers substantial amounts of money.

### Noise: Rattling coins

**Problem:** Loose lug nut in a hub cap

This noise can be loud and unsettling, but the good news is that it's often a simple fix if addressed immediately. The automotive insurance experts at Geico note that a noise that sounds like coins rattling around in a dryer is likely a loose lug nut in a hubcap. The lug nut might have become loose if a wheel was not tightened sufficiently after a recent maintenance appointment or even if drivers changed a tire on their own. The longer drivers wait to address this, the more dangerous and costly it could become, as it could have an effect on the wheel bearings. If addressed promptly, the damage is likely minimal.

### Noise: Squealing on start-up

**Problem:** Issue with the serpentine belt

A squealing noise at start-up is among the more annoying noises a driver can hear. This sound is often indicative of a worn or damaged serpentine belt, which connects the crankshaft to the alternator, power steering and additional components. Thankfully, a worn down serpentine belt is a relatively inexpensive repair, though it's important that it be addressed promptly. Squealing at start-up also could indicate a loose tensioner, which is designed to keep the serpentine belt at a certain tightness and tension, or wear and tear to the belt due to parking outside. These issues can be addressed by readjusting or replacing the tensioner or replacing the serpentine belt, particularly if the part is old.

### Noise: Engine knocking

**Problem:** Various issues

A knocking noise from the engine typically sounds like repeated tapping. The noise will often become louder as the vehicle accelerates. Various issues can be behind the knocking sound, and drivers should avoid self-diagnosing the problem, even if they've experienced it in the past with the same or a different vehicle. Some drivers hear



knocking because they're using 87 octane fuel instead of the high-performance and more expensive fuel the owner's manual recommends (this could be a common problem in recent months given the meteoric rise in fuel prices). Another potential cause of engine knock could be problems with the pistons or crankshaft. Regardless of what's causing engine knocking, drivers are urged to

take their vehicle to a mechanic promptly, as the cost of repairs is likely to rise the longer knocking goes untreated.

No one wants to hear noises coming from their vehicles. However, such noises should be addressed promptly, as the quickness of drivers' responses could make the difference between a simple, less costly fix and a more time-consuming, expensive repair.

## Six reasons for a check engine light

**M**odern vehicles utilize various technologies to ensure drivers remain as safe as possible behind the wheel. Technology also can alert drivers when their cars are in need of examination, and such is the case when the often dreaded "check engine" light comes on.

While a check engine indicator is seldom good news, it may not mean that expensive repairs are right around the corner. The following are six reasons why check engine

lights come on and how to remedy these situations.

1. Faulty/loose gas cap: A faulty gas cap is one of the reasons a check engine light might turn on. A cap that is not tightly closed or one that is poorly sealed enables vapors to escape, which can trigger the light. Opening the gas cap and then resealing it tightly may help; otherwise, a replacement

See **Check engine** page 12B

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## How to find a car that fits your budget

**D**rivers in the market for a new or pre-owned vehicle over the last couple of years likely discovered that the process of buying a car or truck is as difficult as ever. Prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, factory closures, supply chain issues, semiconductor chip shortages, and a bevy of other complications led to fewer vehicles on lots and much higher sticker prices on cars that were on the lot. That has caused people who are on strict budgets to reevaluate priorities and timelines.

According to Ivan Drury, Edmunds' senior manager of insights, consumers can't expect to walk into the dealership thinking they're going to find incentives or bargains right now. Plus, they may not even be able to see or test drive a vehicle they want. That reality makes now a great time for car shoppers to rethink their buying strategies.

### Choose a different vehicle class

Tyson Jominy, Vice President of Data and Analytics at J.D. Power, says vehicle inventory in November

2021 reached record lows. Although there has been some improvement in 2022, consumers may still have to make some concessions if they need a vehicle promptly. SUVs and pick-up trucks have been some of the hardest inventory to find. Considering a sedan or even a compact car may be the only way to get a new car quickly.

### Wait it out

Those with the luxury of time may continue to wait for inventory to increase and prices to decrease. Tech experts, including Intel CEO Pat Gelsinger, expect chip shortages to persist into 2024. If a person's vehicle is in good condition, it may be more economical to hold on to it a little longer and do the maintenance required.

### Seek out no-markup dealerships

It may take some investigation, but there are certain dealerships that are not adding astronomical markups, also called "market adjustments," to the costs of their vehicles. These dealers may advertise online, and car buyers

can always call ahead to ask about markups.

### Take what you can get

Lots filled with a variety of makes, models, colors, and features are no longer the norm. Shoppers will be afforded more flexibility in price if they're willing to take what's available.

### Check with different lenders

The Federal Reserve increased interest rates in the middle of 2022 and it initially planned to increase rates a few more times throughout the year. People, particularly those who do not have the best credit, can do themselves a favor and shop around at different banks for the best loan rates — the loan may be less costly than what's offered through the dealership. Also, certified pre-owned vehicles tend to come with promotional interest rates that are lower than the average APR, which makes them a viable alternative.

Vehicles are still expensive and in short supply, necessitating changes to how people buy their cars or trucks.

## Did you know?

**H**istorically high fuel prices will undoubtedly prove to be one of the defining stories of 2022. As the average price for a gallon of gas reached heights drivers might never have imagined as recently as February 2022, some might have wondered just how much that same gallon might have cost roughly 100 years ago. According to the Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy, the average price for a gallon of gas in 1929 was 21 cents. Inflation calculators indicate that 21 cents in 1929 would have about the same purchasing power as \$3.59 has in 2022, suggesting that drivers had a far less painful trip to the pump in 1929 than they have had for much of 2022.

## Did you know?

**A**lcohol-impaired driving traffic deaths rose dramatically between 2019 and 2020. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 11,654 people died in alcohol-impaired traffic accidents in 2020. That marks a 14 percent increase from the year prior. have had for much of 2022.



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## What to do before trading in your car

**T**rade-ins are a vital component of many automobile transactions. A recent report from the National Automobile Dealers Association revealed that 22 percent of all pre-owned vehicle sales included a trade-in.

Drivers want to get the most value they can for their trade-ins. Though some factors, like the age of the vehicle, are beyond drivers' control, there are many steps drivers can take before trading in a car to maximize its value.

- **Do your homework.** It's never been easier to determine the value of a car prior to trading it in. Resources like NADA, Black Book and Kelley Blue Book can give drivers a good idea of what they will get for a given vehicle when trading it in. According to Kelley Blue Book, roughly 54 percent of trade-in vehicles qualify as "good condition," so drivers should be realistic as they determine the value of their trade-in. A trade-in value that is designated for vehicles that qualify as "excellent" is likely unrealistic, though not impossible.

- **Hone your negotiation skills.** Dealers may initially offer less than drivers expect, as they, too, will try to make the transaction as beneficial as possible to their bottom lines. In such situations, drivers who want to get a better trade-in value should be prepared to negotiate. Some dealerships may not budge on their initial trade-in values, but some might, and drivers prepared to negotiate a better value are in the best position to get a good deal.

- **Shop around for a deal.** Trade-in values may not fluctuate wildly between dealerships, but they likely won't be exactly the

same, either. Patiently shopping around for the best deal for your trade-in can ensure you get the best deal possible. Request all trade-in offers be made in writing, and don't hesitate to take one offer to other dealers to see if they will match or exceed a competitor's offer. Don't discount working with less



traditional sellers, such as online dealerships like CarMax.

- **Give the vehicle a thorough inspection.** No matter what resources like Kelley Blue Book or NADA suggest, no car is going to get top dollar at trade-in if it doesn't look good or run smoothly. Address any dings or dents, clean the interior and exterior of the vehicle and take the car to a mechanic to determine if there are any issues that should be addressed to improve trade-in value. Dealerships may want to examine the car prior to making a trade-in offer, so the car should be tended to prior to visiting a dealership. In addition, drivers who conduct their own inspections are in better position to negotiate should dealerships point to certain issues with the car.

Trade-ins are a big part of buying and selling cars. Drivers can look to various strategies to ensure they get a great deal on their trade-in.

### Check engine • From page 10B

cap may be necessary.

2. **Faulty sensor:** Sometimes there is nothing wrong with the engine or other components, but the light sensor itself. The check engine light might come on because its sensor is corroded or not working properly.

3. **Oxygen sensor failure:** The oxygen sensor sends data to the vehicle's computer, which it uses to create the right mix of air and fuel to enter the engine's cylinders. The check engine light may come on when the sensor fails or registers a problem with the fuel/air mix.

4. **Ignition coils/spark plugs:** A check engine light may come on to warn drivers it is time to replace spark plugs and/or ignition coils. According to DigitalTrends, ignition coils generate the electricity needed for spark plugs to ignite the fuel and air mix in the cylinders. Worn coils or fouled plugs can cause any number of issues, including engine misfire.

5. **Catalytic converter issues:** The catalytic converter heats up hydrocarbons and other emissions so that they turn into carbon dioxide and water vapor to help protect the environment, offers AutoZone. The converter usually does not fail on its own, but a mechanic can help diagnose what might cause the failure.

6. **Electronic powertrain controls:** Vehicles are large computerized devices with an array of sensors and modules that run powertrains. Any issues with these sensors, networks or modules can trigger the check engine light.

Depending on the make and model of a vehicle, a check engine light may require less urgency than a flashing light. It always helps to consult with the owner's manual to help determine issues. Automotive retail stores and mechanics can connect the car's computer to diagnostic equipment that will issue a diagnostic trouble code (DTC) that can serve as a starting point to address check engine light issues.



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## The effects of infrequent driving on vehicle performance

**D**riving puts a certain measure of wear and tear on a vehicle. Whether a vehicle is used primarily for commuting or as a vessel to take travelers to parts unknown, wear and tear is inevitable.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, individuals may not realize that failing to drive their vehicles regularly also can affect performance. Here's a closer look at what can happen when vehicles sit idle for lengthy periods of time.

- **Battery loses its charge.** The battery in a vehicle is still being used even if the car isn't running. Batteries power various components in a car, such as the vehicle computer, phone chargers and more. If the engine does not turn over and help to recharge the battery, the battery will eventually die. People who drive infrequently may want to consider a trickle charger that's plugged in during periods of non-use.

- **Tire rot can set in.** Dry tire rot is deterioration that sets into the rubber. The material dries out and becomes brittle, causing splits and cracks to form. Driving with tire rot can cause tires to deflate.

- **Rust and corrosion can occur.** There is still plenty of metal in modern vehicles. A vehicle that has been exposed to salt or rain or one that is stored in a moist climate can be susceptible to undercarriage or engine rust. This may cause damage that's not easily repaired.

- **Damage from sap or droppings.** A vehicle parked in one location for a long time could be a target for bird droppings, fallen berries, sap, and other substances that are potentially harmful to the paint job. Leaving the car or truck out in the sun also means UV rays can cause clear coat over the paint to oxidize and begin to fail, which can produce blotchy or peeling spots.

- **Poor brake performance.** When vehicles are left to sit, corrosion could build up on the rotors and the brake pads may become less flexible. Moisture also may seep into brake lines, causing issues with pressurization of brake fluid. Each of these factors adds up to brakes that do not work properly — which is a big safety hazard.

- **Formation of tire flat spots.** When tires are not used frequently, the weight of the car can continually put pressure on the same parts of the tires, leading to flat spots. Tires also can lose pressure if they sit too long.

- **Oil and other fluids may lose efficacy.** Various fluids can go stale in a vehicle if it isn't regularly driven. Gasoline also may develop condensation, which can reduce efficiency and performance. Taking short trips helps avoid this issue.

Infrequent driving can cause damage to a car or truck. But many potential issues can be avoided by driving vehicles more often.



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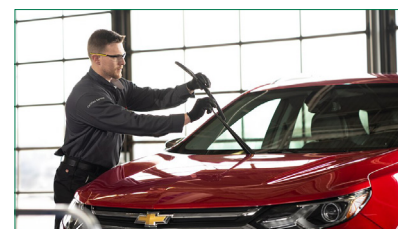
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## How marijuana affects your ability to drive

**L**aws governing marijuana usage have changed dramatically over the last decade. Once reserved exclusively for medical use, marijuana has now been legalized in 18 states, and data from the National Conference of State Legislatures indicates that medical use of cannabis products is now legal in 37 states, four territories and the District of Columbia. A similar shift has taken place in Canada, where cannabis was legalized with restrictions in 2018.

The shifting dynamic surrounding marijuana has been welcomed by millions of people, but the transition has left millions more wondering what the unintended consequences of legalization could be. One such curiosity concerns driving and marijuana.

Recognition of the effects of alcohol on driving ability is an important way to ensure roads stay as safe as possible for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. Ignoring or downplaying these effects could lead to accident or injury or even incarceration. Marijuana can impair driving ability whether it's taken for medical or recreational uses, and a medical marijuana exemption does not protect people from the legal consequences of driving while impaired.

According to the California Office of

Traffic Safety, marijuana poses a potentially significant safety risk on the road. Data from the COTS indicates that 42 percent of all drivers who were tested after dying in motor vehicle crashes tested positive for legal and/or illegal drugs. Though not all of those drivers had taken marijuana prior to being involved in fatal crashes, such data underscores how important it is for drivers to recognize how marijuana, even in places where it's been legalized, can impair their ability to drive.

### Marijuana and the brain

The COTS reports that marijuana affects the part of the brain that's responsible for body movement, balance and coordination. Drivers' brains and bodies may be slower to react after ingesting marijuana, which can increase their risk for motor vehicle accidents. In addition, the COTS notes that researchers examining the effects of marijuana use on the brain have determined that marijuana negatively affects attentiveness and perception of time and speed.

### Marijuana and risk-taking

The COTS indicates that the more marijuana drivers ingest, the more risks they



take while driving. That's an important point to consider, as many individuals insist they drive more cautiously after ingesting marijuana than they normally would. But caution dwindles as drivers increase their marijuana intake, potentially compelling drivers to take more risks on the road.

The COTS reports that the effects of marijuana are strongest within 30 minutes of consumption. In fact, drivers who drive immediately after consuming marijuana may increase their risk of being involved in a motor vehicle accident by as much as 35 percent.

Though millions of people are celebrating the legalization of marijuana, it's still important for drivers to exercise and emphasize caution when consuming cannabis.

### Marijuana, driving and timing

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## The principles of defensive driving

**D**efensive driving can prevent accidents and save lives. Defensive driving also could save drivers money on car insurance. With so much to gain from driving defensively, a refresher on the principles of defensive driving could benefit drivers of all ages.

### What is defensive driving?

Drivers undoubtedly have heard the term “defensive driving,” but may not fully understand what it means. In the simplest sense, defensive driving is an approach to driving that focuses on anticipating and reacting to potential hazards when behind the wheel. Defensive drivers apply various skills and techniques to defend against potential accidents caused by reckless drivers.

### Who can benefit from defensive driving?

Anyone can benefit from a defensive driving course. New drivers may benefit the most because it gives them a strong foundation for safe driving. A defensive driving course also may help drivers remove tickets from their driving record or remove points from a license for first-time offenders, indicates DefensiveDriving.org. Defensive driving courses also may help prevent high insurance premiums or rate hikes following a ticket or accident.

### The principles of defensive driving

Defensive driving courses differ, but the following are some of the basic principles of driving defensively.

- Be alert to surroundings. This is one of the most important aspects of defensive driving. Paying attention to the road and avoiding distractions prevents accidents. The National

Highway Traffic Safety Administration says removing one’s eyes from the road for five seconds while driving 55 miles per hour is like driving the length of a football field with your eyes closed. Drivers should scan the horizon, check blind spots and know what’s going on around their vehicles.

- Employ the three-second rule. Leave sufficient distance between your vehicle and the one in front of you. A driver should pass a stationary object on the side of the road no earlier than three seconds after the vehicle driving ahead of them has passed it.

- Don’t drive impaired. Drugs, alcohol and fatigue can adversely affect performance behind the wheel. Precise movements, fast-thinking and focus are adversely affected when driving tired or under the influence.

- Leave yourself an out. Figure out a way to avoid collisions at all times while driving. This includes not being boxed in by other drivers or barriers. This can be achieved by leaving significant distance between your vehicle and the one in front of you, by obeying the speed limit and ensuring there’s a lane to move into that’s free and clear.

- Avoid bad drivers. Steer clear of drivers who are acting recklessly, and give them a wide berth. Move over, slow down and keep an eye on these drivers to avoid a collision. Similarly, move over for tailgaters and avoid succumbing to road rage.

- Be courteous and follow the rules. Respect the rules of the road that you learned in drivers’ education classes. This includes wearing a seat belt, obeying the speed limit, slowing down for bad weather, and giving over the right of way to a reckless driver if it means staying safe.

Defensive driving is a strategy that can help reduce accidents and save lives.

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