

# It's Nice to Share

Getting around is becoming a whole lot greener in Saskatchewan *by Lawrence Herzog*

**L**ORI REICHERT IS PART OF A GROWING group of unique motorists who have signed up with their local car-sharing club. She lives in Regina, close to where she works, and doesn't need a car all the time. "Sharing a car makes so much sense," she says of her decision to join the fledgling Regina Car Share Co-operative. "It will save a lot of money, yet still offer the convenience I need."

Founded in 2008 as a non-profit organization, the Regina Car Share Co-operative is aiming to have its first car up and running by end of this year, and then add another car in early 2010. "It's been an adventure in planning, paperwork and approvals, but we're finally up and running," says president John Klein, who got the co-op rolling along with founding members Shawn Fraser and Malin Hansen.

The pay-as-you-go service is an economical, convenient and socially conscious alternative to car ownership. The non-profit information website *carsharing.net* describes the concept as "flexible wheels for an urban lifestyle" and "a revolution in personal transportation – urban mobility for the 21st century." Indeed, car sharing offers the benefits of car ownership without the worries of overnight parking, theft, repairs and maintenance. And by sharing the financial, social and environmental costs of owning a vehicle, members effectively remove cars from the roads. (*Forbes* magazine reports one shared car represents 20 cars pulled from the road.) Car sharing also helps reduce the need for extracting, transporting and processing resources used by automakers. Last year alone, some 1.636 million light vehicles were purchased in Canada, gobbling up more than two million tonnes of steel, iron, aluminum, plastics, glass, rubber, copper and zinc.

Many cities across the country, including Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax, are now home to car-sharing ventures. And new ones are in the works for Saskatoon and Winnipeg. Car-share fleets range in size, the largest near-



ing 100 vehicles, and are strategically distributed around cities to be used by members.

The Regina co-op's self-serve online booking system (*reginacarshare.ca*) will give members access to the fleet 24 hours a day by simply logging on and booking a car. To join, members pay a \$500 one-time refundable share purchase, becoming part owners of the organization. They must also provide their Driver Abstract and a copy of their driver's licence, and pay a \$25 application fee. They then pay for distance and hours driven at \$5 per hour plus 50 cents per kilometre (for example, a two-hour rental driven 20 km costs \$20). The usage fee covers insurance, maintenance and even the fuel, all handled by the co-operative. "No insurance to pay, no oil changes, no tires to change," Reichert says. "It's a great way to have a car without owning a car."

Formalized car sharing began in Switzerland in 1987 and arrived on North America's shores in 1993 when the continent's first car share opened in Quebec City. Today, European Car Sharing (ECS) has more than 40 groups in nearly 600 communities in Denmark, Germany, Italy, Norway and Switzerland.

A study compiled by Susan Shaheen at the University of California, Berkeley, reports that by 2009 there were 16 car-sharing organizations in Canada, with 53,916 members

sharing 2,046 vehicles. Commercial ventures such as Autosshare and Zipcar rent cars by the hour, and now the big car rental companies are getting into the act. Last year, Hertz unveiled its car sharing initiatives in New York, London and Paris.

"It's one of those ideas that just makes so much sense, no matter which way you look at it," Klein says. Car-sharing co-ops appeal to a wide cross-section of motorists – from young singles who can't afford a car to middle-aged empty nesters who are leaving the suburbs and moving back into the cities.

"Even though I make a good wage, I don't want to spend all that money on a car," Reichert says. "The saving, when you add it all up, is thousands of dollars a year. I prefer to take my money and travel, and enjoy life." ▣

[reginacarshare.ca](http://reginacarshare.ca)

## car sharing pros and cons

- ✓ Saves money on depreciation, maintenance, insurance and registration.
- ✓ No need for overnight parking.
- ✓ Reduces eco-guilt and encourages a healthier lifestyle, with more walking and cycling.
- ✓ Improves air quality and cuts greenhouse gas emissions.
- ✓ Reduces congestion and associated road costs, lowers noise and reduces pressure to pave over green spaces for parking.
- ✓ Reduces the toxins produced and the consumption of resources in vehicle manufacturing.

- ✗ Need to book ahead, otherwise a car may not be available when you need it.
- ✗ Immediate unloading of vehicle required.
- ✗ Cannot claim vehicle payments or maintenance fees for tax purposes.
- ✗ Vehicle pickup and drop-off point may be inconvenient.
- ✗ Diminished freedom and flexibility. □