

Spew on This

Are lack of incentives and a tough economy driving motorists to recycle – rather than retire – their old rides? *text and photography by Paul Sinkewicz*

It sits in my driveway like an environmental albatross around my neck. The 1994 Dodge Dakota pickup truck was such a boon when I inherited it a year ago. Trips to the dump, the storage locker and the compost depot have all been easier thanks to my dad's old truck. I love the nastiness of its V8 rumble and the freedom to abuse the battle-scarred workhorse. Every new kilometre I add to its 313,000-plus total seems like a gift.

But nagging at my conscience has been the certain knowledge that at 15 years of age, it is a convenience that is doing a lot of harm to the clean Saskatchewan air. It is a vehicular embarrassment for a family that is conscientious about recycling and took the trouble to install energy-efficient doors and windows, a new furnace and upgraded insulation – I even sprang for a new set of LED Christmas lights. All those efforts and costs are virtually negated by using a pickup that makes me feel as dirty as the exhaust it spews. And it does churn out a lot. According to Natural Resources Canada, my rusty, trusty pickup contributes more than 7,200 kilograms of CO₂ emissions a year to the environmental crisis. A brand-new model would only put out 6,480 kg. In fact, my old '94 Dodge is the perfect example of the kind of vehicle the government is now targeting with its Retire Your Ride program. Launched in early 2009 with a \$92-million budget, the program's goal is to get at least 100,000 older vehicles off the road and into the scrapyard by March 31, 2011.

Ottawa estimates that of the roughly 20 million personal-use vehicles on the road in Canada, about five million are older than 1995. That's a problem because vehicles of that age (especially those even older than my ride) can emit up to 19 times more pollutants than models made after 2004. These older vehicles make up only one quarter of the total number of personal vehicles but are contributing about half the pollutants from cars and trucks in Canada. Newer vehicles conform to stricter emission standards and employ newer technology to achieve better fuel efficiency; gas mileage goes up and pollution goes down.



The writer's 1994 Dodge Dakota, targeted by the government's Retire Your Ride program, could be generating up to 19 times more pollutants than vehicles made after 2004.

It's the Thought that Counts

But critics can be forgiven for questioning the environmental resolve of the government after taking a look at the incentives offered by Retire Your Ride. Those incentives vary widely by province, but none of them are extravagant. Drivers in all jurisdictions are eligible for \$300 in cash, but in B.C., drivers who turn in a clunker have the choice of \$700 toward the purchase of a new bike, a year's worth of transit passes in the Lower Mainland (two years in Victoria) or a \$1,000 credit with a car-sharing organization. Those wanting to buy or lease a new vehicle can get up to \$1,250 toward the cost. Already a leader in environmental awareness, B.C. is the place to be if you're participating in Retire Your Ride.

Each province has its own environmental advocacy group partnered with the government to administer the service. Rewards in Ontario and Quebec also include hefty bike promotions, but not the beefier new-vehicle credit B.C. enjoys. At the other end of the incentive spectrum is Saskatchewan,

with only the \$300 base reward or options on public transportation, such as a \$1,000 Saskatchewan Transportation Company travel voucher, 12-month Prince Albert Transit voucher or six-month Saskatoon Transit voucher.

To see what I might get for my belching Betty, I log onto the Retire Your Ride website and plug in my personal information and then the truck's vehicle information number. That brings up all the particulars of my vehicle. Not just any old junker will do. It has to be in operating condition and have been registered for the previous six months, and mine has. The only thing to do now is click on the submit button, but I stop there. I am now a twitch away from practically giving my vehicle away. The rubber alone is worth a couple hundred



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bucks, so economically it doesn't make sense. You could part out your vehicle and sell the hulk for scrap for more money if merely getting rid of a vehicle was your goal.

The Grass Is Greener

In Canada, there is no big payday for doing the right thing for the environment. Governments in Europe and the United States set out aggressive incentives in their programs, but stimulating the economy after the meltdown of 2008 was the primary motive – although reaping an environmental benefit was definitely part of the calculation. In the U.S., the Car Allowance Rebate System (CARS) was signed into law in June 2009, and, by the end of summer, nearly 700,000 new cars took the place of clunkers on the nation's highways. The CARS program made the U.S. government treasury \$2.8 billion poorer after incentives of up to U.S.\$4,500 were paid per vehicle to automobile manufacturers, but there's no denying it retired a lot of rides.

Canadian drivers and automakers looked south and asked why their government wasn't doing the same thing, but Environment Minister Jim Prentice announced in September that Canada wouldn't be expanding its program and that Retire Your Ride was on track to achieve its original goals. By mid-November though, the government's own numbers showed only about 26,000 beaters had been retired. Thwarted by Ottawa's decision, Canadian automakers began offering their own incentives to spur car sales.

share a ride

Once you get rid of your old vehicle, it's time to find some new ways to get around. Retire Your Ride has partnered with Prince Albert and Saskatoon to promote public transit in those cities, and with the Saskatchewan Transportation Company to promote the use of its highway bus service.

Another option is carpooling. *Carpool.ca* is an Internet carpooling site that is easy to use and quickly matches up drivers and passengers by proximity to home and destination, and by the time of day travel is needed. It is meant to facilitate regular commutes to and from work or school, not for one-time or occasional trips. Or, in Regina, you can join the Regina Car Share Cooperative. □ -P.S.

carpool.ca



About 75 per cent of each old car can be recycled.

Hyundai, Ford, GM, Mazda, Chrysler and Volkswagen all announced plans tied to the Retire Your Ride program, but none have committed past 2010. Ford and GM offered as much as \$3,000 back, but staunch environmentalists probably won't be taking them up on their top-end offer, as it applies to their largest vehicles. There is little green street cred when cruising in a Lincoln Navigator or Cadillac Escalade.

The Bottom Line Matters

It is generally accepted that government figures for performance are never matched by real-world driving results. The fuel-efficiency numbers auto dealers advertise to tout their vehicles are best-case scenario figures, and, as vehicles age, regular maintenance becomes more important in maximizing efficiency. The older the vehicle, the more likely it is not achieving anywhere near its rated performance when it was new, and the more likely the owner is less able to afford to maintain it properly.

Conducted during the tougher economic climate of 2009, a study by J.D. Power and Associates found the recession in Canada had curtailed drivers' vehicle maintenance spending by seven per cent. The average amount spent on maintenance and repairs was \$856 in 2009, compared to \$920 in 2008. Darren Slind, Canadian automotive practice leader at J.D. Power, says that in a difficult economy, vehicle owners seem to be delaying what they perceive to be non-essential maintenance. "In the long run, this may prove more costly in terms of

vehicle reliability, but in the short term, consumers are dealing with other priorities," Slind says.

Another J.D. Power report shows that the recession pushed back new-vehicle purchases for many people who had intended to buy in 2009, and that more people are considering buying used rather than new. "Clearly, Canadians remain concerned about their employment prospects, and, until this improves, we won't see a meaningful increase in the number of vehicles leaving dealer showrooms," Slind notes. This means those five million older vehicles – the worst polluters – won't be leaving Canadian roads in a hurry.

The government rebate program Retire Your Ride is all but dependant on environmental altruism to save polar bear habitat and hinges on the generosity of those least able to afford to turn in their older vehicles. What is likely happening in Canada, then, is that cars that have already had every bit of usefulness wrung out of them – and are

now destined for the auto wreckers anyway – are being diverted to a better end environmentally. If incentives aren't the strength of Retire Your Ride, then recycling is. About 75 per cent of each old car can be recycled, and the fuel, oil and toxins used in the components are properly stripped out and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner. Those parts that can be sold for reuse are saved and the rest sent to the scrapyards for recycling.

For me, old reliable has a few more trips to the dump in her. The economics of the Retire Your Ride program don't make sense yet – not here in Saskatchewan anyway. But that old truck will never see the inside of a mechanic's garage again, either. It is too old (and too embarrassing) to keep on life support, so when the time comes it will enter the program. Until then, I'll just have to recycle a little bit harder. ▣

retireyourride.ca; environmentalsociety.ca; nrcan-rncan.gc.ca/com; tc.gc.ca/eng/environment-menu.htm

recycling angels

Car Heaven is a program started by Summerhill Impact (formerly the Clean Air Foundation) in 2000 to promote the responsible recycling of old vehicles in Canada. In 2007, Saskatchewan came on board.

During its first 10 years, Car Heaven has taken 89,730 old clunkers off the road and estimates it has prevented the release of more than 50,000 kilograms of harmful

emissions. It has also raised almost \$3.5 million for participating charities such as the Canadian Diabetes Association and Mothers Against Drunk Driving in Saskatchewan.

Drivers of a qualifying vehicle are given a \$50 charitable tax receipt and have their vehicle towed away for free. The auto recycler then disposes of the fluids and components of old vehicles in an environmentally friendly way. □ –P.S.

carheaven.ca