

Autostarts



Ralph Seekins

One of the handiest and most valued accessories we have installed on all our family vehicles is an autostart. In case you haven't run into one, it's a remote controlled device that allows you to start your vehicle from distances of up to a mile away – depending on the model. The device has a hand-held transmitter small enough to fit on your key-ring that has a variety of control buttons. Some models have features like starting a vehicle at certain pre-set cold or hot temperatures, locking or unlocking the power door locks, setting vehicle theft alarms, starting and then stopping a vehicle based on certain time intervals, and more.

Mostly, I use mine to start my truck or car from the comfort of places like my home, my office, shopping center or our church to either warm up or cool down the vehicle interior before I leave the building. Typically, before parking and shutting down the engine, I pre-set the temperature control to the interior temperature I want when I'm ready to take off. Then, a few minutes before I want to depart, I walk over to a window

where I can see my truck and hit the "start" button. The remote control "beeps" a couple times with a pre-arranged signal to let me know the truck started and then I start gathering up my stuff to leave. After a few minutes, I walk to the truck, hit the door "unlock" button, get in, put the key in the ignition and turn it to the "run" position and drive away. (If I try to drive off without the key properly turned on, the engine dies – a simple anti-theft feature.) Warmed up in the winter and cooled off in the summer. Hey - how much better can it get?

An autostart can be installed on almost any recent gas or diesel model car or truck with either an automatic or manual transmission. However, a small number of some higher end vehicles have ignition systems that don't allow autostart installation. Your local installer can tell you if your vehicle will accept an autostart. And, before allowing just any installer to hook into your vehicle's electronics, check out their experience. How long have they been in the business? How many have they installed? What is their business reputation? A lot of so-called "installers" come and go and you want yours to be a solid player in the autostart business who will be there for years to come.

And, that reminds me of a very important point. An autostart is something you should never try to install by yourself – even if you are really, really, really good at reading

and following the directions that come in the box. Well . . . maybe you could get away with it if you're an automobile electronics expert with all the right tools. But, short of that qualification, I highly recommend you don't try it. If these handy systems aren't installed right, you just might end up with a rather large repair bill to fix or replace some of the other electronic systems in your vehicle. I'm personally aware of one self-installation that rolled the power windows up and down but wouldn't get to the first stage of starting the engine. That guy didn't save any money by trying to do it himself.

How popular are autostarts here in Interior Alaska? Well, a few weeks ago, our pastor asked the congregation to silence their cell phones and to please not activate their autostarts until he had finished his Sunday sermon. It seems that all the little "beep, beep, beeps" coming from the auditorium as folks started their vehicles just about as he was wrapping up were becoming a little distracting.

Get one and you'll soon be asking yourself – as I did – how in the world did you ever get along without your own autostart.

Ralph Seekins has more than 40 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 32 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln Mercury.

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