

TODAY'S CARS - BETTER OR WORSE THAN YEARS PAST?

By: Ralph Seekins

Question: My buddy says “they don’t build ‘em like they used to” meaning that today’s cars and trucks aren’t as good as those from years past. You’ve been working in the industry for 40 years. What do you think?

Answer: I agree with your buddy – and I thank God they don’t. Cars and trucks are better engineered and are more powerful, with better fuel economy, lower emissions, better durability and more driver and passenger safety and convenience features than ever before. Let me give you some examples.

Replacing spark plugs and getting a tune-up used to be a normal occurrence every 20,000 – 30,000 miles. Today’s vehicles can sometimes go a lifetime without the old fashioned tune-up or replacing spark plugs. And, the on-board electronic engine control and diagnostic computer will tell you if something is wrong and it’s time to make a trip to the “doctor.”

The passenger restraint and protection systems on today’s vehicles save lives and injuries like never before. Three point lap and shoulder harnesses are supplemented by front and side air bags that protect passengers in frontal and side collisions as well as roll-overs – something unheard of just a few years ago.

Some of the newer vehicles, like the 2010 Ford Taurus, offer things like adaptive cruise control that maintains a safe distance from vehicles ahead, adaptive headlamps that automatically swivel to light up the road around bends and curves, rear blind spot information systems, collision warning systems with brake support, a rear view camera, a voice activated navigation system, and a hands free SYNC mobile phone and media player.

Anti-theft systems like the Secure Code Next Generation Keypad unlocks all four doors and even the trunk without the need for a key using a customized five digit code that can be programmed to something you can easily remember like a birthday or anniversary.

On pickups and SUV’s, a trailer sway control works with a roll stability control to determine if a trailer is swaying and takes measures to reduce trailer sway.

Active parking assist is a new system that makes parallel parking stress free. With the simple press of a button, it will detect an available parallel parking space and automatically steer the vehicle into the space without touching the steering wheel while you control the accelerator, gear shift and brakes.

Cars and trucks today may have as many as 50 microprocessors that handle things like engine function, climate control, transmission shift points, anti-lock brake systems, traction control, stability control, spark plug timing, fuel flow and the air/fuel ratio and more. Your car or truck may even learn your driving habits and adjust the systems to give you the best performance based on your average demand. And, with today’s diagnostic systems, a simple plug-in can lead a qualified technician to the source of any problem in just moments.

And, for all of us here in Interior Alaska, the new all-wheel drive systems on our cars, SUV's and trucks have made winter driving much, much safer and a whole lot more enjoyable.

So, when I think of how far the automobile industry has come in the 40 plus years I have been in it, I marvel at how safe, comfortable, economic, durable and enjoyable today's cars and trucks are. Truly, they don't build 'em like they used to. They are light years better and getting better every year.