



Small business

WHY IT'S SO VITAL

Geoff Gwilym VACC CEO



When we waved off 2020 – with no fireworks and some bitterness in our hearts – many thought we had seen the beginning of the end for Covid 19.

No one could have predicted at the time that Victorians would endure yet another two lockdowns in the first half of 2021.

But we have.

I speak regularly with Victorian small and medium-sized business owners, not only in automotive but in hospitality, retail and training.

What they tell me is frankly heart-breaking. At every turn the dreams and hard work of resourceful and adventurous people are in ruin.

This has brought home to me just how important small and medium-sized enterprises really are to this state.

Victorians are experiencing this firsthand right now.

Restaurants and entertainment complexes are re-opening after the recent circuit-breaker lockdown, but many of their chefs and waiters and reception staff are still unemployed or under-employed. The same goes for taxi operators, gymnasium staff, hairdressers and lots more.

Entire industries, like travel and accommodation limp on, if they still exist.

The automotive industry has been badly hit too but the signs are promising for a recovery.

The purchasing of new cars and motorcycles slowed right down, but now we are trending for a solid sales year. People put off fixing their cracked windscreen or replacing a bald tyre. Thankfully, motorists are getting around to proper vehicle maintenance.

I completely understand it has been a difficult 2021 for many vehicle owners. But I do urge safety first. If your vehicle needs repair, get it fixed.

Prepared by Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce in the interest of better motoring.

Share your thoughts
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ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

HYBRID CHOICES ARE LIMITED

IAIN CURRY GETS ANSWERS

WRITE TO MOTURING AT
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I'm 83 years old and looking for a hybrid sedan like Toyota's Corolla as they seem the best move for retired suburban couples. I don't want a hatch or SUV, it should have conventional tyres for driving comfort, preferably use 91 RON petrol and not be too low for easy access. A seven-year warranty would see me out nicely.

Brian Becconsall, email
 On the affordable hybrid sedan front, it's really Toyota or nothing. The Corolla Ascent Sport Hybrid is about \$31,000 drive-away, and its miserly urban fuel use will suit you well. It may be called "sport" but its tyres are big balloons for ride comfort, while the petrol engine drinks cheaper 91. Only a five-year warranty but service costs are super cheap at \$180 a pop. Try the Camry Hybrid too. There's more space and luxury and it's good value at \$37,500 on the road.

NOT THE PEOPLE'S CAR

I'd hoped to buy the new Volkswagen Golf 8 this year, and while your reviewer David McCowen said it's a class benchmark, we buyers will never know because we're simply not paying well over \$30,000 for a basic VW Golf. I understand it has more technology, but David also noted "cabin plastics are noticeably cheaper than past efforts," and it uses the same engine as before. Can't VW provide a no-frills, well-built Golf anymore? I'll be taking my business to Kia for its new Cerato to save myself \$10,000.

Maddie Eder, email
 It's not just Volkswagen. Many small cars such as the Mazda3, Toyota Corolla and Ford Focus are thousands more than the near-\$20,000 drive-away prices of a few years ago. They're safer and better equipped, while demand outstrips supply in many cases so drive-away deals are rare. That said, the Golf price jump is huge. I paid \$23,990 drive-away for my VW Golf 110TSI in



July 2017. The same grade new Golf 8 is \$33,500 drive-away; an increase of \$9500 or 40 per cent over four years. There's improved safety, connectivity, radar cruise control and a digital dashboard, but it will prove too pricey for many potential buyers.

DRINKING PROBLEM

Re: modern car owner's manuals, I've seen a quote showing how times have changed. "If you really think you're smarter than the previous generation, 50 years ago the owner's manual showed you how to adjust the valves. Today it warns you not to drink the contents of the battery." It'd be funny if it weren't true.

Glenn Ridgewell, email
 Yep, but you can bet somewhere in America somebody once drank a car's battery acid then sued for not being warned about the danger.

SMART STORAGE

Re: clever car storage, I bought plastic trays from the \$2 shop and fixed them using cable ties to the underside of each seat. In my wife's car, I've attached velcro to the trays so they grip the floor carpet, with easy access when you slide the seat back.

Peter Hanson, email
 Great cheap and easy solution if they don't affect your seat's operation.

CARRYING CHARGE

I heard on the radio about a couple travelling around Australia in a Nissan Leaf electric car. They travel about 250km per day due to range limitations. There are places in the outback or WA coast where charging sites must be more



PREMIUM TEMPTATION

I'm looking at buying a new Mazda6 GT SP, which costs about \$52,000 on the road. My wife said why don't I instead buy a Mercedes for that money? What do you think of the Mazda6, and what used Mercedes sedan would I get for similar money?

Stephen Harrington, email
 I'm a big fan of the Mazda6, but this generation is showing its age against fresher Mazda models. The GT SP looks cool, its 170kW/420Nm turbo engine's a cracker – albeit thirsty – and I'm sold on its heated burgundy leather seats. Its five-year warranty gives better peace of mind versus a used Mercedes, but I understand the temptation. A 2019 C-Class C200 is a decent all-rounder with a beautiful interior, but find one with lots of warranty remaining and good factory options. Try a used BMW 3 Series for something sportier. A 2019 model – especially the 330i – is worth spending money on.

than 250km apart. If they had a petrol or diesel generator, would it be adequate to charge the batteries to enable the trip to continue?

Jonathan Gamble, email
 Yes it would, and some EV drivers on such odysseys take a generator and fuel as emergency back-up. But the weight of one will, ironically, reduce the car's electric range. A generator takes a very long time to charge an EV's batteries, as will just plugging it in to a household socket: the latter takes about 17 hours for a Nissan Leaf with 40kWh battery. It doesn't take that long to top up batteries to get you to the next fast charger, though. Roadside assistance firms have started fitting on-board generators to top up stranded EVs.

OUTBACK TROUBLES

Re: you recommending a vehicle able to tow a 3000kg caravan, there's plenty of online discussion suspecting the Jeep Grand Cherokee's engine can seize when towing heavy loads, and good luck with a Land Rover in remote areas due to reliability issues and lack of dealership support. I've owned several SsangYong Musso diesel wagons from the mid 1990s and they've given good service with minimal problems.

Bob Hookway, email
 The internet is awash with horror ownership stories across every brand. The Musso famously used a Mercedes-Benz engine for reliability, but I'd say SsangYong dealer support would be worse than Land Rover's. Towing such weight in remote regions will always prove risky – it's a big ask for any vehicle – and the popular choice Toyota LandCruiser 200 Series was sadly out of budget in the instance you refer to.

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