

[ROADSIDE ASSIST]

LOCKDOWN TIPS

IAIN CURRY GETS ANSWERS

WRITE TO MOTORING AT
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In the current COVID-19 lockdown, how's best to "hibernate" your car if it's not required for a couple of months?

Bruce Mitchell, email

Good question. If possible, and if our dear leaders permit it, give your car a brief run (or at least let it idle) every week or so. If that's not possible, you need to avoid flatspotting your tyres. Add about 25 per cent more to the recommended tyre pressure and give it a quick roll back and forwards each week. Leave the handbrake off and use bricks or wood to chock the wheels. Fill the fuel tank with premium fuel – not E10 – check no interior lights are left on, clean the cabin and wash and wax the body before hibernation. If you have a garage, consider using a trickle charger for the battery (I have one for my classic Peugeot), drop the windows a smidge for aeration and throw a cotton sheet over it for protection. Invest in a good quality car cover if you're storing outside. I also use a moisture absorber pot – they're only \$5 at the supermarket – in my car's footwell.

SAFETY FIRST

I'm a 75-year-old with a 23-year-old Toyota Corolla that's been very good, but now I'm taking my granddaughter to school I want a car with more safety features. My budget's about \$10,000 for something second-hand, and I like the look of a Mazda2 or Hyundai i30. What's your opinion?

Jenny McLeod, email

Your Corolla will probably outlive us all, but you're right to prioritise safety with such precious cargo. Crash structures and safety features have vastly improved in two decades. The Mazda2's a good all-rounder if you can tolerate the titchy boot and rear seat space, plus there's pronounced cabin noise on the open road. The current "DJ" generation was introduced in October 2014 and is just in budget. It's an ANCAP 5-star crash rated car, but lacks modern active safety gear in all early examples. A Hyundai i30's a safe, reliable bet, but for your budget you'll be looking at quite old or high kilometre versions. Consider a 2015 or later Skoda Fabia hatch or wagon (main picture). They're just in budget, feature auto emergency braking and rear camera, and the boot's large for a city car.

SERVO PRICE MADNESS

Why is there such a difference in unleaded fuel prices between servos? I use petrolspy.com.au and see in Adelaide it's selling for as low as 82.7c per litre, but five kilometres away it's 169.9c. That's over double the price! One BP sells at 89.9c, but another BP one kilometre away sells at 119.9c. Madness. Cheapest in Brisbane is 109.9c and Hobart 129.9c. Why's Adelaide getting such a good deal and not the rest of us?

Jani Hobart, email

Historically low fuel prices and we can't drive anywhere. So cruel. Fuel prices are mysteries at the best of times, but with barrels of oil ridiculously cheap and lack of demand for the go juice, sub-one-dollar pump prices are back. RAA spokesman Mark Borlace told me price differences are "literally about competition. The terminal gate price – what fuel's sold wholesale to the industry – is 83.8c in Adelaide and 83.6c in Brisbane. Prices per site change according to local competition. For example, Shell over the road from Costco will always be the cheapest Shell as they're trying to stay competitive." What about that 169.9c price? "Major retailers like BP try to spike the market; put the price up to see if anyone follows." Get a phone app or use a website to see where fuel's cheapest – there are numerous available, many being state specific.

BAG ME UP

Re Shop Responsibly, I had my car serviced at a Mazda dealership last week, and my keys weren't placed in a zip lock bag on arrival or departure.

Sandro Brunato, email

This follows a Mazda Australia spokesman telling



us recommended measures to dealers during COVID-19 included placing customers keys in zip lock bags. It didn't happen in your case, but remember these recommendations are very recent and dealers and staff (possibly skeleton staff right now) will be adjusting and hopefully have them in place now.

CARAVAN TAX

I'd like to point out another gouge on road tolls in Sydney, alongside Transurban raising tolls simply because they can. Caravans towed by a passenger vehicle totalling over 12.5m in length or over 2.8m high are charged as heavy vehicles, but only on the toll ways. It happens only in Sydney now, but watch it spread.

Glen Fearnett, email

Lobbing caravans in with B-doubles does seem unfair. Then again, Transurban also groups cars and motorbikes as Class A vehicles, which seems equally unfair. The price difference is huge. Let's take the M5 South West, fully owned by Transurban. Travel any part of it in a car or motorbike and it's \$4.84 with a Tag account. It's \$14.53 with a Class B vehicle, which includes caravans. Can we blame coronavirus? Nope. Let's blame Transurban's greed and the government for dishing out lucrative contracts to them.

BLACK SPOT

Why the craze for black vehicles? They're hard



to see, especially side on at night. A worry is flat bed utes with all the rear portions painted black, often with poor or no reflectors. Trucks are regulated to have rear parts white or reflective to avoid rear collisions, especially when parked.

Don Matthews, email

Research by the NRMA and Monash University a few years ago, which analysed 850,000 road accidents, showed black cars were 12 per cent more likely to be involved in an accident than white cars in daytime, but the figure jumped to 47 per cent at dawn and dusk. The data didn't include commercial vehicles such as utes, but you'd suspect figures would be similar or possibly worse – as you say, those ute trays can be very poorly illuminated. I'm a big fan of daytime running lights on vehicles. Maybe they should be mandatory for rear lights too.



OUT CLUBBING

I have a Holden Calais VF wagon and am considering changing to a smallish SUV. The main criterion is the boot can fit a set of golf clubs and buggy. Some reviews of the Kia Seltos suggest it fits the bill. Your thoughts and any alternatives?

Kerry Bee, email

The easiest way to make sure is to take your clubs

and buggy with you when you go shopping. The Seltos has a fairly large boot for its size, but some of these small SUVs can't fit a set of clubs without folding the rear seat. The Honda HR-V and Mitsubishi ASX are large for their class and also have a look at a Mazda6 wagon. Ironically, small sedans are often better at swallowing clubs, and they're not on show if you leave them overnight.



I spy

PROS AND CONS OF THE DASH CAM

Geoff Gwilym VACC CEO



Dash cameras certainly are a thing.

It's estimated one in five Aussie motorists have one fitted to their vehicle. And who can blame them?

Footage often assists with insurance claims and fleet owners can keep tabs on staff driver behaviour. They can make pretty entertaining YouTube videos too.

But while recording driver behaviour on public roads is acceptable there is one dash cam issue that's cause for concern: privacy.

When a vehicle's in a workshop for servicing, body repair or anything else, and the engine's engaged, a fitted dash cam will begin filming, capturing the private activities and conversations of individuals who may not have provided their consent.

Victoria's Surveillance Devices Act 1999 prohibits the installation, use and maintenance of optical and audio surveillance devices generally. People must not knowingly communicate or publish "a record or report of a private conversation or private activity that has been made as a direct or indirect result of the use of a listening device, an optical surveillance device or a tracking device".

What that basically means is that people cannot obtain and use images recorded in an auto workshop without prior consent. Doing so may put them in breach of the Act.

So if the owner of a business engaged in automotive services provides a statement to the effect that they and their staff do not wish to be recorded and ask that the dash cam be disabled, they're totally within their rights to do so.

It's a reasonable request. So please turn the dash cam off.

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



Share your thoughts
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