

[ROADSIDE ASSIST]

FRENCH RAVE



IAIN CURRY GETS ANSWERS

WRITE TO MOTORING AT
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As a proud owner of a 2018 Renault Megane RS 280 I was surprised to read David McCowen's review of the Megane RS Trophy. The Trophy, I assume, can only build on the RS 280 I have, which has brilliant handling and, for a performance vehicle, drives smoothly and has compliant suspension. Motor reporters seem to undersell French cars; I can't understand how you gave it only 3 out of 5! Steve Toms, email

David responds: "There are French car fans on the News Motoring team — Iain Curry treasures his 1989 Peugeot 205 GTi and I've owned my previous-generation Megane Trophy for four years. The new Trophy's 3-star review doesn't mean it's a bad car. The Trophy is quick, but stiffer than your car and not great around town. Key rivals such as the Honda Civic Type-R, Hyundai i30N and VW Golf GTI use multi-mode suspension to make them more liveable in town. Renault doesn't do that. It's also really expensive and the rear-wheel-steering adds weight and complexity while reducing driver confidence."

SHOP RESPONSIBLY

Is it safe for me to shop for a new car? It feels irresponsible with COVID-19 around, but I've plenty of time on my hands and I'm sure dealers will be doing deals as sales will be down? Luke Sharples, email

It's not really an essential journey, but car dealers are currently open for business. You're right, dealers will be keen to shift stock as showroom traffic has plummeted. All the car companies we checked with had implemented strict hygiene measures and safe social distancing at dealerships. Mark Flintoft from Mazda Australia said measures include: "Customer keys placed in zip lock bags for service drop off and pick-up; hand sanitisers across dealerships; test drives delivered to customers' workplace or home, and unaccompanied test drives." Car makers are also reporting increased phone and online inquiries so you might be able to do your wheeling and dealing without visiting the showroom.

PARTS SUPPLY

My car is due its 90,000km service, which includes a new timing belt and water pump. We're in lockdown so don't want to risk taking



FREE FIX

Re Expensive Seats, I have good news regarding the quoted \$7500 to replace my 2013 Mazda6 Wagon's rear seat complex with its broken latch. After persistently following up with Mazda Australia, they have agreed to pay for a new rear seat, costing \$4000. I'm being

charged \$210 in labour. I'm very relieved. Jacinta McCartin, email

Excellent. Seems Mazda recognised the ludicrous bill, and credit to them for paying for the new part. Even so, it is mystifying why you were quoted \$7500 when the total charge is now \$4210.

it to the dealership and hanging around in a potentially germ-filled waiting room. I'm still using the car as I need to get food and check on my elderly parents. If I do take it in, will the service centre even have spare parts with everything shut down? Louise McGrath, email

It's an important service to have done on time, but these are unprecedented times and your anxiety is understandable. Talk to the service centre and ask what measures they have in place to protect customers, and also if they have parts in stock. Good news is parts supply doesn't appear to be affected for now. For one, dealerships are open for urgent Takata airbag recalls if you're affected. Isuzu said: "We're not experiencing any parts supply issues." Mitsubishi: "No supply restrictions from our production facilities or parts suppliers." Mercedes-Benz: "No adverse impact to the availability of parts to dealers in Australia today." Hyundai: "Factories in Korea are now at full capacity, and no parts supply issues."

NO TO TOW?

Last week you recommended taking your own caravan to a dealership so you can test drive a tow vehicle to check it suits. This isn't possible as legally you need an electric brake controller fitted to the tow vehicle. No dealer would ever agree to allow what you suggest. Peter Brown, email

Au contraire. I checked with a few dealers, and while they said it's a challenge, it has been done. "We've allowed it with used vehicles, as people wouldn't want an ex-demo that'd towed 2.5-tonnes for example," said Alister Eiseman, manager at Queensland's Pacific Ford. Electric brakes are an optional accessory on Isuzu products, and Mark Harman from Isuzu Ute said:

"The answer is yes if a dealer has electric brakes fitted to their demo vehicle."

SORRY, WE'RE FULL

Re space saver spares, your comments about weight are irrelevant. Biggest issue is what to do with the tyre that's flat if it won't fit a space only designed for a space saver. If you have a fully loaded car, what do you do? David Palmer, email

Bolt it on to the bonnet like an old Land Rover Defender? Ask the passenger to hold it on their lap? Okay, fair point David, it is an issue. I've found some space saver spare wheel wells do still accommodate a full-size wheel and tyre — especially as the tyre will be deflated. My preferred option remains giving the customer choice: a full-size spare should always be optional.

FUEL AND FRANK ADVICE

If owners want to learn "real world" fuel use for their cars, I suggest joining the relevant Australian Facebook owners' forums and directly asking owners. They'll know better than optimistic manufacturer claims. Barry Shipsides, email

Re inaccurate fuel consumption figures quoted by makers, years ago I read in your newspaper a motoring writer who came up with a rule of thumb. Whatever was claimed, simply add 2L/100km to the figure. Joe Vella, email

Still relevant today. Unless it's a supercar. The twin-turbo V8 Mercedes-AMG GT R I tested last year quotes 11.5L/100km. In Melbourne traffic it averaged 99L/100km (the readout wouldn't go higher), and it took nearly 100 kilometres of open road to get the average below 20L/100km. Brilliant way to burn fuel though.



The importance of small business

NOW WE KNOW WHY IT'S SO VITAL

Geoff Gwilym VACC CEO



None could have predicted — even a few weeks ago — what has become of the current coronavirus situation, and how it's impacting virtually every Australian.

I am in constant contact with small and medium-sized business owners and what I'm hearing is frankly breaking my heart. At every turn the dreams and hard work of brave and adventurous people are in tatters.

This has brought home to me just how important small and medium-sized enterprises really are to this country. Australians are experiencing this firsthand right now. Restaurants and entertainment complexes have closed, chefs and comedians are unemployed and taxi operators have been devastated.

People are losing their jobs, and businesses — even entire industries — are going down: travel, hospitality, events... It goes on and on.

The automotive industry has been badly hit too. People have stopped buying cars and motorcycles, fixing the cracked windscreen has been shelved and replacing that bald tyre has been dropped from the priority list, for now.

I completely understand. But I do urge people to put safety first. If your vehicle is in need of repair, either don't use it or get it fixed if you can.

When things begin turning back to a form of normalcy, please do your best to support your local businesses — the bakery, the butcher, the cafe. They're going to need your custom more than ever.

And get that bald tyre fixed as soon as you can.

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

Share your thoughts
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