

INDEPENDENT / FREE PRESS

Spring Car Maintenance

Don't neglect wiper blades

The passing of another cold, dreary winter means that you, as a driver, no longer have to contend with icy driving conditions that can make roads dangerous.

However, you're not in the clear yet. The effects of all that winter driving have probably taken their toll on the rubber edge of your car's wiper blades, says Lee Reighart of ANCO Wiper Blades, a division of Cooper Automotive.

"Road film, dirt, salt, petroleum products and the additional pollution in the air all contribute to the deterioration of the rubber wiping edge of wiper blades," Reighart says.

Here are some wiper-blade tips from the experts at ANCO:

- Windshields contaminated with waxes and oils will not allow windshield wipers to perform properly, causing poor visibility.
- Many types of windshield wipers actually will lift off the windshield at highway speeds. Use wipers designed with aerodynamic features to improve wiper performance at high speeds for clearer driving vision.
- Improperly performing windshield wipers that skip across windshields create annoyances and distractions that interfere with safe driving conditions.
- Inspect wiper blades every six months. Replace when worn, damaged or malformed.
- Ninety percent of all driving decisions behind the wheel are based on vision. Properly operating windshield wipers can improve driving vision for safer vehicle operation.

It's crucial to check the fluids

You fill your car's gas tank when needed, and check and change the oil regularly — but when was the last time you looked at your brake fluid?

Often overlooked as one of the essential components of your car's braking system, brake fluid is nonetheless the "lifeline" of that system. Most car owners fall into the "out of sight, out of mind" mode when it comes to brake fluid, and change it, or at least inspect it, only when they notice a problem with their brakes. Ignoring the fluid until that time, however, can result in costly service bills into the hundreds or thousands of dollars.

The question then becomes "How often should I change my brake fluid?" The MAP Uniform Inspection Guidelines, followed by service technicians throughout Canada, states that brake systems should be flushed and refilled with the correct brake fluid as specified in the owner's manual.

However, in many cases (particularly in domestic vehicles), the manual does not refer to the maintenance of the brake fluid.

"Without a specific recommendation from the manufacturer," says Ned Lineback, senior training specialist for Wagner Brake Products, "car owners should flush and refill their vehicle's brake fluid every two years or every 24,000 miles, whichever comes first."

"Brake fluid is formulated to absorb moisture, control rubber expansion, prevent corrosion and act as a lubricant," he continues. "And even though the fluid absorbs moisture, it can't continue to absorb it indefinitely."

Lineback says the constant heating and cooling experienced by brakes leads to moisture condensation in the brake system. After one year, the brake fluid of a typical vehicle will contain about two percent water; this grows to about three percent after a year and a half, and seven to eight

percent after several years.

"Water contamination lowers the boiling point of the fluid," he says, "and thus increases the danger of vapor pockets in the system, adversely affecting braking performance and accelerating corrosion. Cold weather turns the contaminated fluid thick and sluggish, potentially affecting system operation."

A complete flush and refill is something best left to professional mechanics, but adding fluid to the brake system is an easy chore and something every car owner can do. Simply remove the cover and diaphragm of the master cylinder (located in the upper right rear of the engine compartment), and add clean, fresh brake fluid to the full mark or within 1/4 inch of the top.

Check your owner's manual to determine which DOT grade of brake fluid your car requires. Be aware that not all brake fluids are equal.



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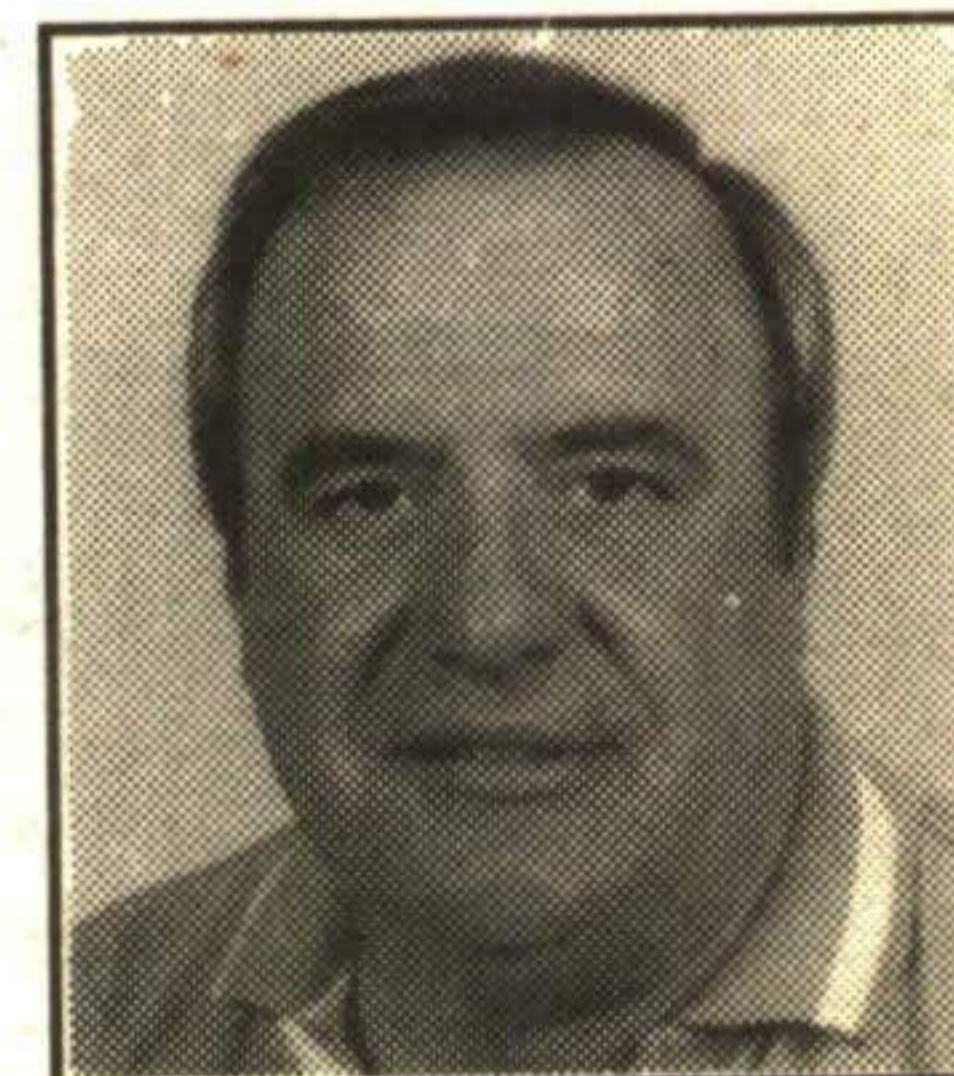
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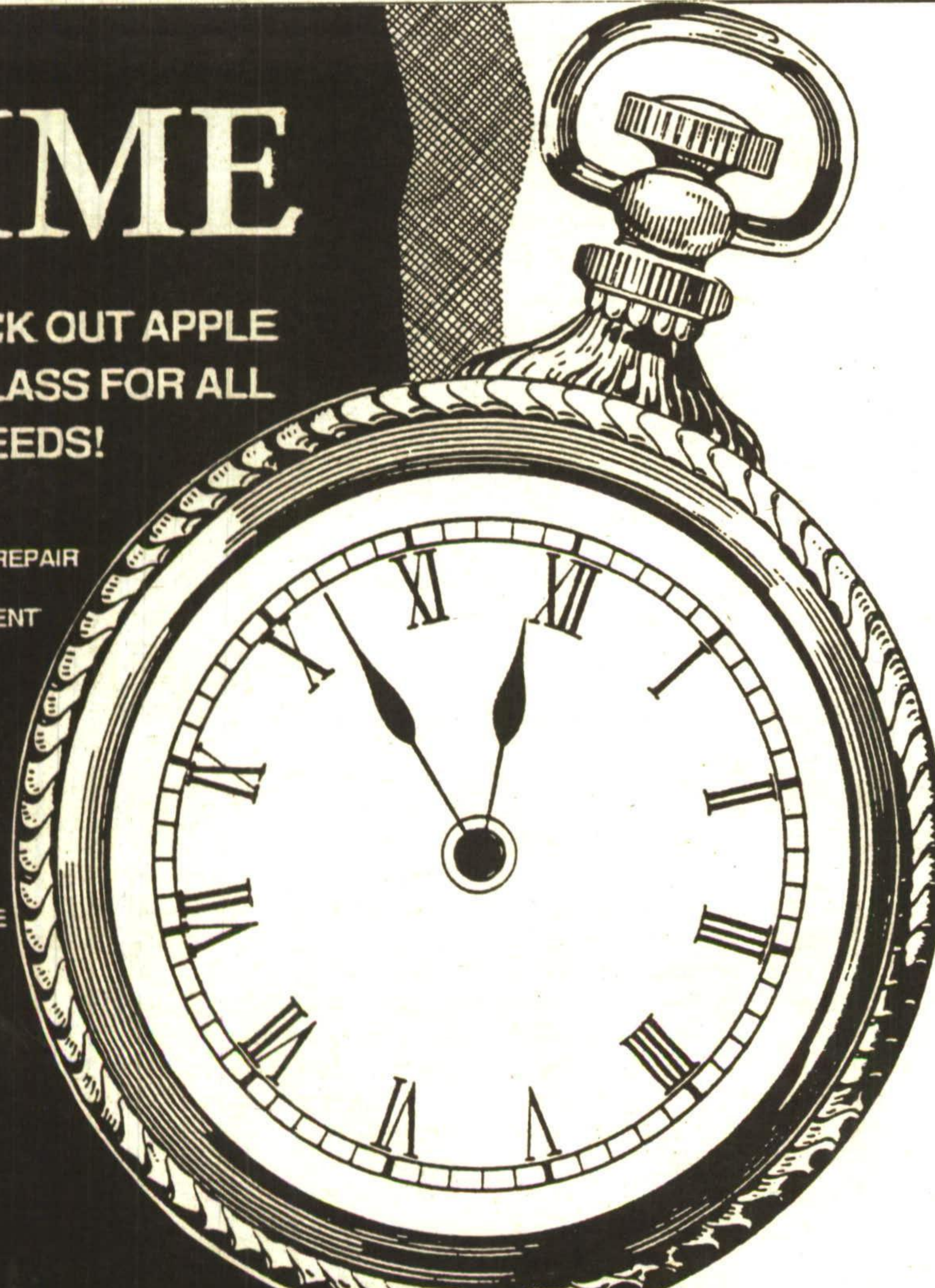
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