

Hanging out with the green people

A friend of mine, (I'll call him Rick, cuz that's his name) is what many refer to as a 'green' person.

For those who aren't up on the lingo, he's an environmentalist, and in being one, he holds a unique philosophy about the world around us.

Over the years, he's held the environment in high regard, and with his most recent purchase, he has put his money where his mouth is.

It's a new car. And this car certainly reflects his respect for the planet.

You see, he's the proud owner of a Toyota Prius, one of the newest hybrid system cars, incorporating both a gasoline engine and an electric motor to power it. It's a 'green' car, both literally and figuratively.

The Prius is not a flashy, luxury car that would turn the head of everyone on the street. Instead, it blends into the urban landscape, without so much as a whimper—literally.

I went for a drive about town in his Prius and the first thing that struck me was the noise, or more accurately, lack of. It's virtually silent.

When one fires up the car, the 70 horsepower motor hums to life for a few minutes, until it has charged up the on-board batteries, then the 44 horsepower electric motor takes over. When that happens, the gas engine shuts down, and the electric motor makes virtually no noise.

Honestly, it's a bit uncanny to pull up to a stop sign and have the car sit there, absolutely silent, waiting for the traffic to clear.

But, as soon as one steps on the 'gas' pedal, it starts away, pulling into traffic like a conventional vehicle. If it requires more power, the gas engine kicks in, or out, on demand.

Although his Prius has less than 1,000 kilometres on it, Rick tells me fuel consumption on his first tank of gas was around 55 miles per gallon—in city driving conditions.

Some people have told me hybrid cars like the Prius are somewhat strapped for power ('gutless' was the most common adjective) but I had to

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Ted Brown

admit, I found it no less responsive than any other gas-sipping four-cylinder economy car.

It's more of a state of mind—we've been raised on the concept of 'noise equals power.'

The car is unassuming, looking a bit like a Ford Focus from the front, with the lines of a Corolla from the side view. The interior is nicely appointed, with lots of room for five adults.

Not only is it environmentally friendly, it's also a technical marvel, to ably seduce any techy. (Did I mention Rick is also a techy from hell?)

With all its bells and whistles, including a superb sound system, DVD player and an on-dash touch-screen displaying the status of everything happening to the vehicle, a techy like Rick simply smiles when he slides behind the wheel.

Toyota has fuel predictions of more than 60 mp/g city driving, but that's not what attracted Rick to the car. At a price of \$30,000, he admits buying a Camry at 0.9 per cent financing would probably have been more economically feasible.

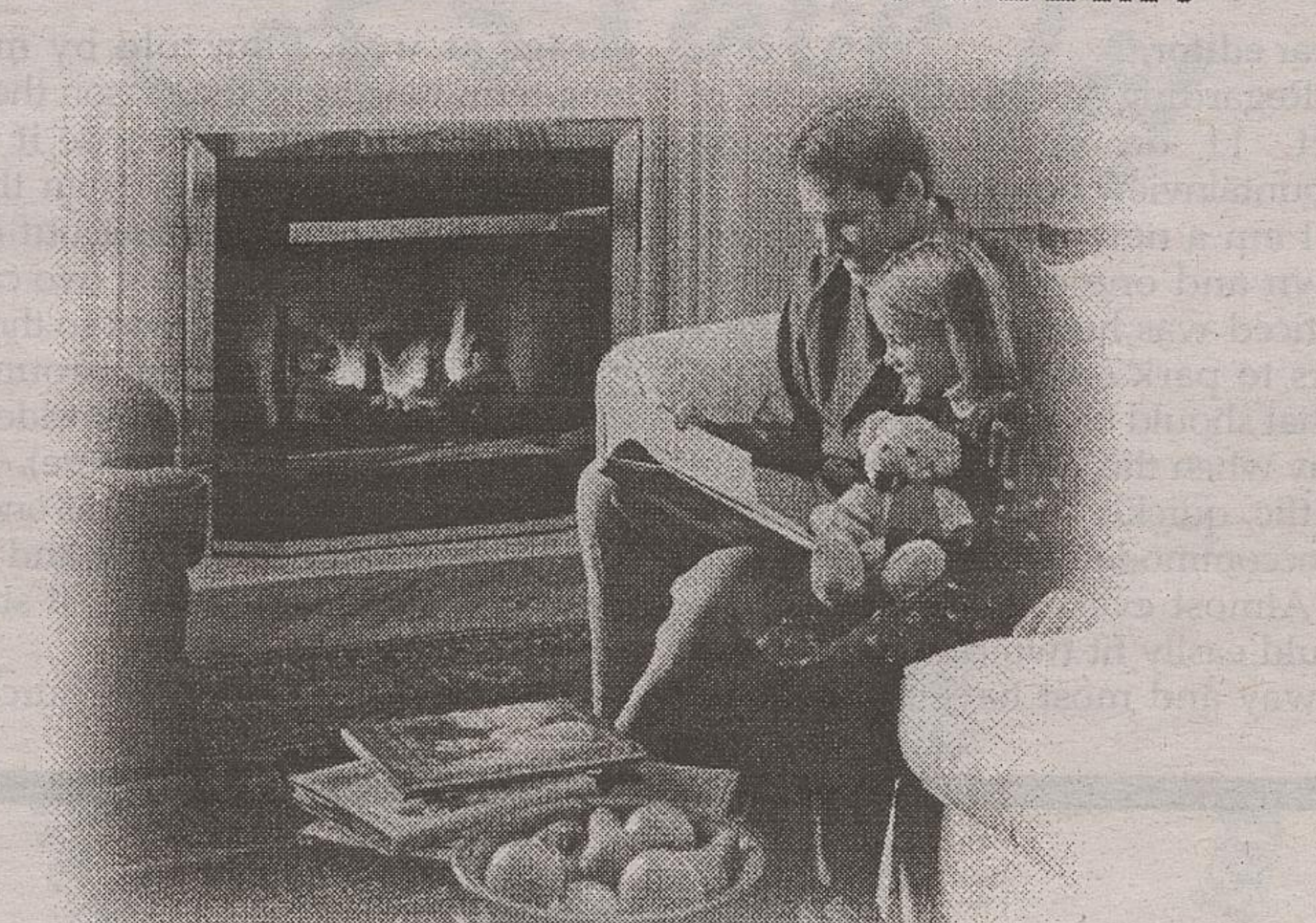
What Rick has bought is a philosophy fueled by his concern for the world.

Although it ain't for everyone, I honestly feel cars like the Prius will become more common on the roads as the 'green' people like Rick have a chance to assert their belief that the environment is precious.

And in doing so, make a quiet, bold statement.

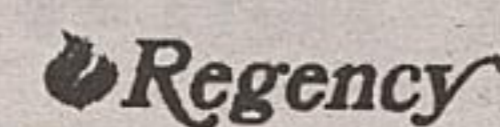
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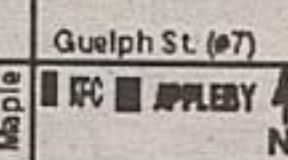
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