

Bob's Auto gets first pollution busting licence

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

For the next few months, Milton should boast the cleanest cars around.

After shelling out for some heavy duty equipment, Milton's Bob's Auto Service was the first licensed emission testing shop in Acton, Georgetown and Milton.

The licensing is part of the government's new Ontario Drive Clean Program. The program requires that cars and light-duty trucks between three and 20 years old take the emissions test.

The idea is to curb pollutants from cars, which along with buses and trucks are labeled the largest smog creators in Ontario.

The program ensures compliance by hooking itself around licence sticker renewals.

In other words, without proof the car has passed the test, a sticker won't be given out.

Testing began January 1, 1999, in the greater Toronto area, though enforcement doesn't start until April 1.

The program will spread throughout the province over the next few years.

Since January 2, the shop at 18 Commercial Street has been doing a brisk business cutting through the haze of vehicle emissions.

"We've been doing about a dozen cars a day," said Kevin Wilson, son of owner Bob Wilson.

The new business came at a cost. Aside from springing for the equipment, the shop also invested staff time getting three mechanics licensed as inspectors.

Two of them have gone on to earn a repair licence as well. That meant taking a course, complete with a written and practical test.

The test itself costs about \$30, not including taxes. A re-test is about half that amount, provided it's done at the same shop.

The procedure is as simple as driving in and waiting for a half hour or so while the vehicle is put on a dynamometer, a kind of treadmill for cars and light-

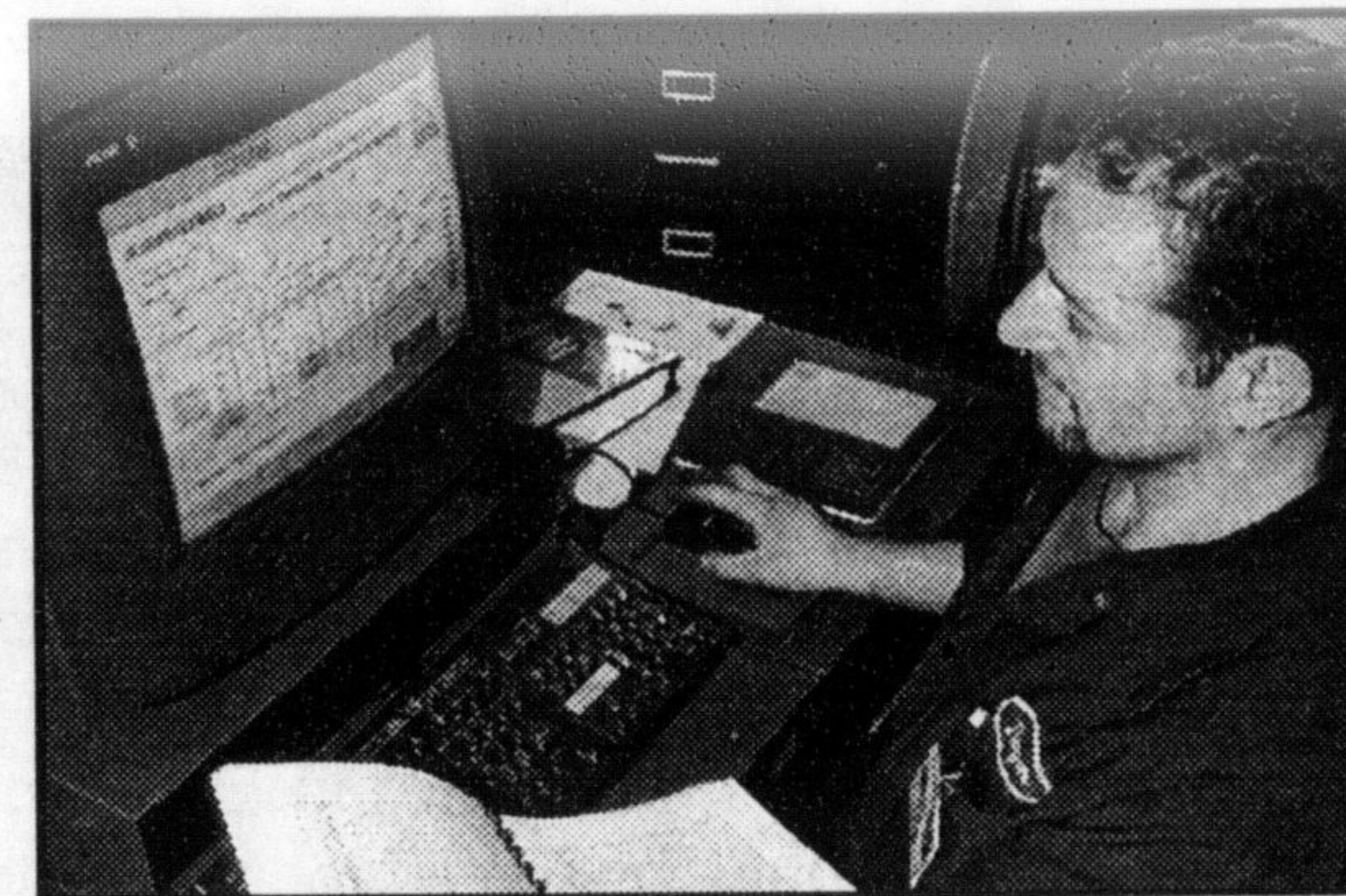


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Roger Lyles looks over the results of a vehicle pollution test.

duty trucks.

The treadmill lets the car 'drive' up to 40 kilometres per hour in one spot, allowing the inspectors to hook a probe to the tailpipe.

The probe measures environmental villains such as nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide.

Before even mounting the treadmill, technicians will inspect tires and exhaust systems to ensure the car is fit to be tested, said Mr. Wilson.

The readings take into account the make and year of the particular car, so that a 1985 car is not held up to 1996 standards.

"The specifications for each vehicle are in the computer," said Mr. Wilson. "Then it just prints out a report."

About 80 per cent of tested cars pass.

Of the remaining 20 per cent, most only need a tune-up to get the job done.

If the car fails, repairs are capped at \$200, ensuring that savings accounts don't go up in smoke as well.

If the car fails a re-test, a receipt from a drive clean shop proving that \$200 worth of repairs were made will buy two years of free time until the next test rolls around.

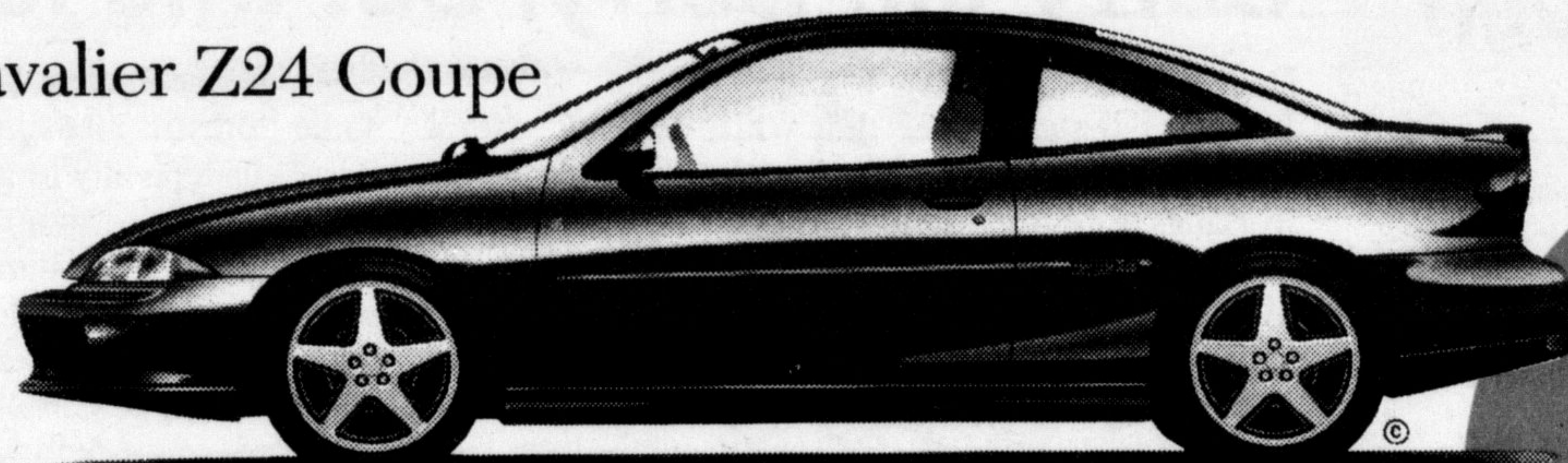
In 1999, even model year vehicles will be tested, with odd model year tests following in 2000.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Roger Lyles checks for vehicle pollution in his role as a certified emissions inspector for Bob's Auto Service. New legislation will make it mandatory for most cars to pass an air quality test starting this April.

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