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# Tough negotiations lead to new police contract

By **HOWARD MOZEL**  
Special to The Champion

The Halton Regional Police Association (HRPA) and Halton Regional Police Services Board have ratified their new

three-year deals with both uniformed and civilian members.

Halton police officers had been without a contract since December 2002 and negotiations — which HRPA President Dave

Atkinson said were punctuated by several “ups and downs” — began in October 2002.

“They were difficult and time-consuming and broke down two different times but

we persevered and came up with a settlement and did not have to take it to a third party,” said Mr. Atkinson. “We’re happy with the result.”

The new contracts (which will expire December 31, 2005) feature a 4 per cent increase fully retroactive to January 1, 2003 and 3.75 per cent fully retroactive to January 1 of this year. A further 3.75 per cent increase will take effect January 1, 2005.

“The whole deal puts us in line with everyone else,” said HRPA administrator Paul LaCourse, referring to other Ontario services.

As a result, at the end of the contract the base wage of a 1st Class Constable in Halton will be \$69,282. As it appears at the moment, explained Mr. LaCourse, this would make these officers the highest paid (by a rough average of a mere \$30) in Ontario.

Truth be told, however, that position is only temporary since a number of police services — including Toronto, Hamilton, London, Durham, Waterloo and Peel — have yet to negotiate their 2005 pay increases. At that point, said Mr. LaCourse, Halton will no longer be at the top.

The announcement that deals were struck January 20 was originally made two days later at a police services board meeting by outgoing board member and negotiating team leader Jack Brewer.

Details were then outlined to the memberships during three sessions held February 11.

## Budget approval decisive

Voting took place February 12, 13 and 16. Ninety-seven per cent of uniform personnel voted in favour of their contract, as did 88 per cent of the civilian membership. Mr. LaCourse characterized the settlements as ones that will benefit the interests of both police and Halton residents.

“It’s a fair deal for taxpayers and the memberships,” he said. “People are still paying more for cable and Internet than what the chief is asking for in his budget.”

The previous collective agreements, approved in February 2000, represented a total 10.4 per cent increase in wages and benefits over the life of the contracts. Mr. Brewer also led the board’s negotiating team on that occasion. At the end of the former contract, the top salary for a first class constable was \$61,888.

One important component of the new deal is an improvement to what’s called “retention pay,” or money paid to officers based on their length of service (starting at eight years) as both an incentive for a job well done and to help keep them from joining services in other jurisdictions.

“We look at the retention pay as an investment to keep people here longer,” said Mr. LaCourse.

Since 2001, 30 officers have retired, 38 have gone to other services and 16 left for other reasons — the total of which represents 17 to 23 per cent of the entire complement. One reason officers leave, Mr. LaCourse explained, is to work in areas with a cost of living lower than Halton’s.

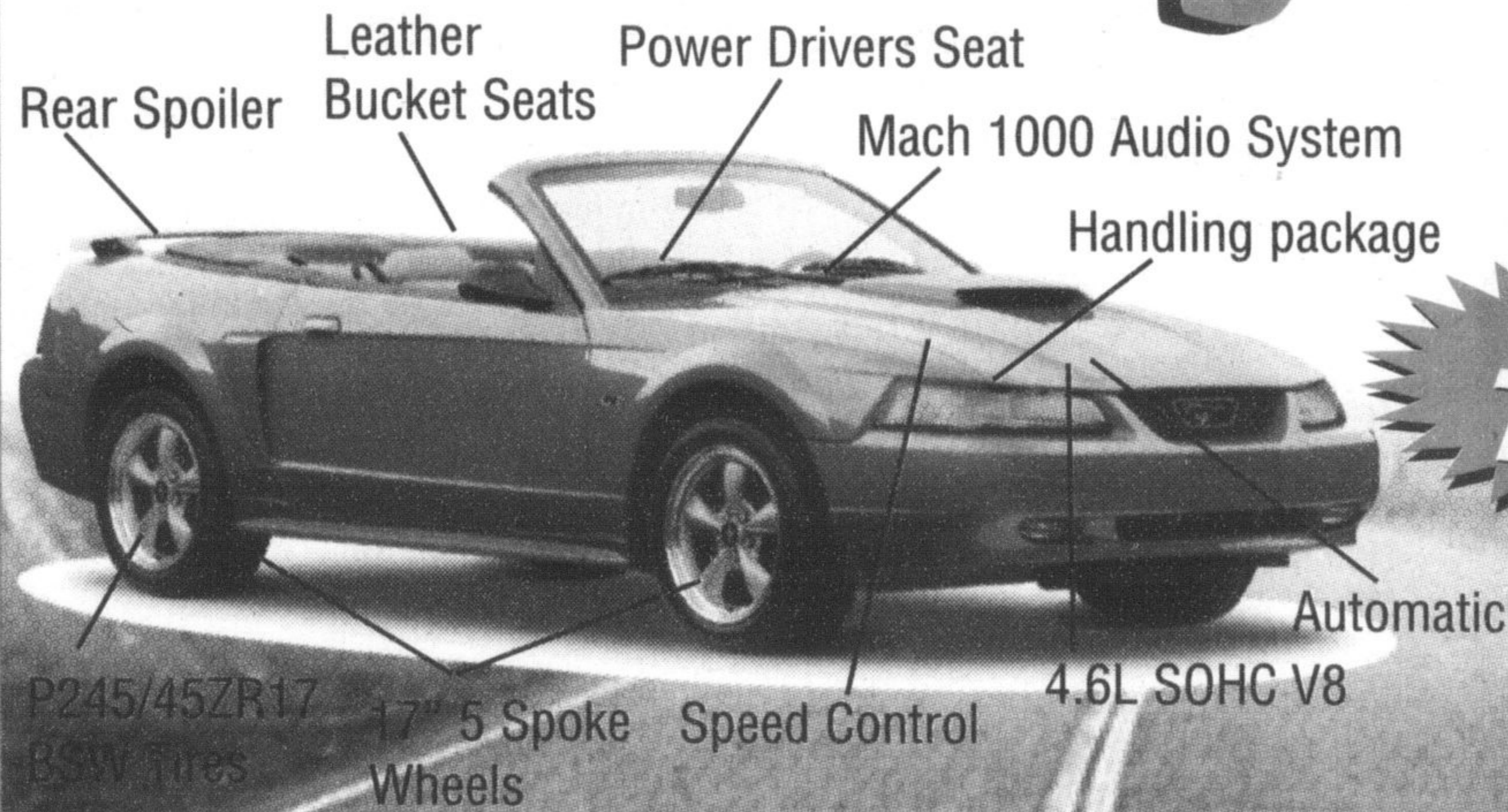
“The cost of living is huge here compared to many other jurisdictions,” he added. “Retention pay is a good investment to attract and retain quality people.”

At present, said Mr. LaCourse, a “large number” of Halton police officers have five years or less of service and some financial mechanism must be in place to help make them stay.

“Retention pay is a step in the right direction for paying police officers as the professionals they are,” said Mr. LaCourse. “Safe communities don’t just happen by accident and police officers play a large role in that.”

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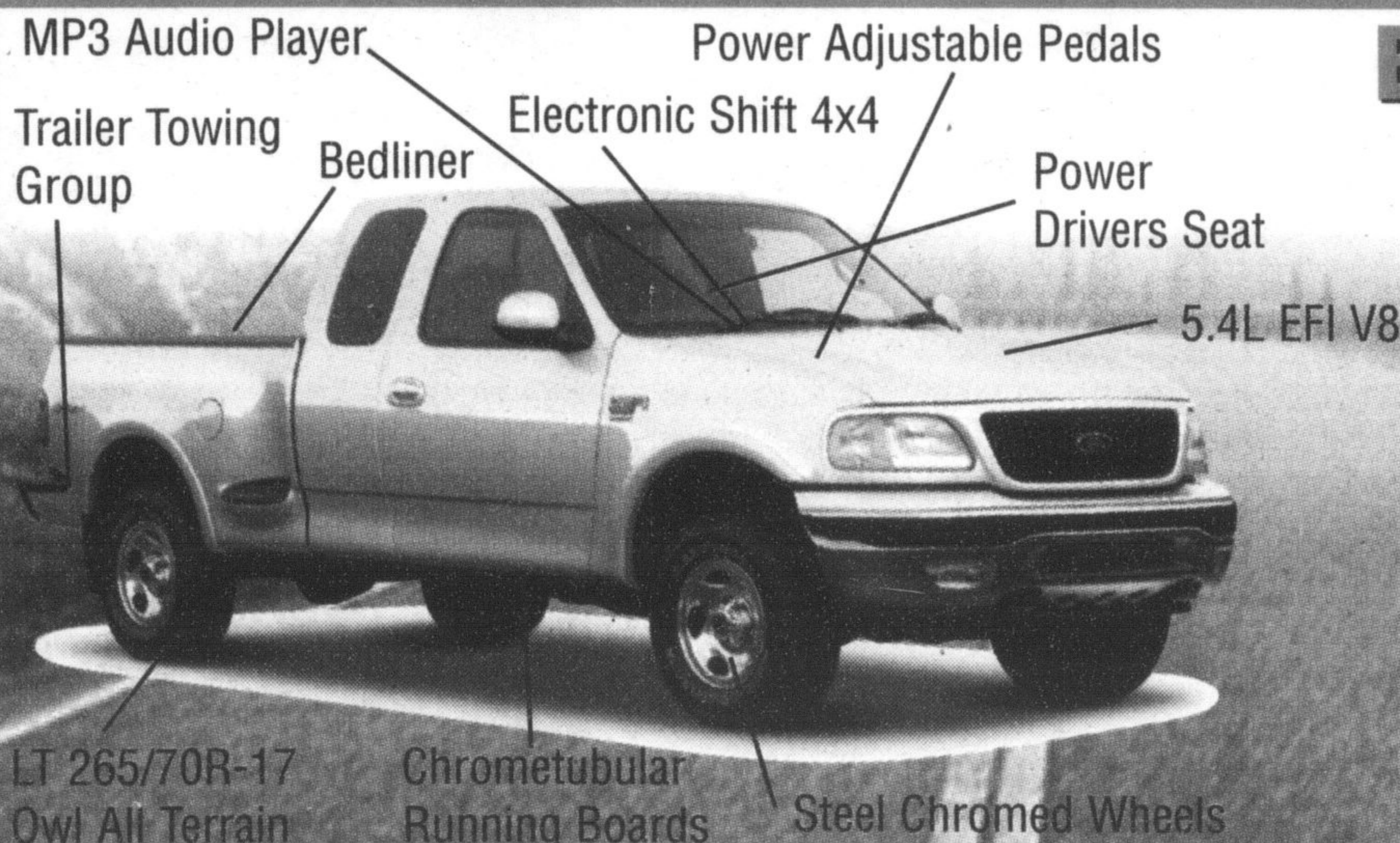
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