

# Public school board approves \$354-million budget

By JASON MISNER

Special to The Champion

A hiring spree for 71 teachers will begin now that the Halton District School Board's 2005-06 budget has been unanimously passed.

But some trustees are fretting that next year's budget could look a whole lot different depending on how money is to be found to cover the cost of a late-year \$600,000 severance paid to former director of education Dusty Papke. He left the board June 30 through a negotiated settlement. Last week, all 11 trustees voted in favour of passing the \$354-million budget, which is an increase of some \$25 million over last year. Much of the increase — about \$17 million — is attributed to hiring an additional 42 elementary and 29 secondary teachers for the burgeoning school board, whose student population has grown by 11.2 per cent since 2001.

Board Chair Paul Tate said after the board meeting he's ecstatic the budget has passed, and that it bodes well for student learning in Halton. As well as the hiring of the extra teachers — all of them expected to be in the classroom in September — the board has also ratified another contract, this one involving custodians from CUPE local 1011. The board has also settled significant contracts with elementary and secondary teacher unions within the last six weeks.

"To me it's very important we're getting our employees up to the level where they are equitable with the rest of the province," Mr. Tate said. "We don't have to worry about labour (strife) for a time and that is very good. We can live within this budget. I don't think we're going to have too many serious issues."

"I'm happy about the budget."

However, trustees asked staff to explain how a deficit from the current budget year of 2004-05 — shown in the third quarter financial statements to be more than \$600,000 — could affect next year's budget. Carlo Kisko, the board's outgoing superintendent of business services, said if a deficit carries over to the next budget, "the expectation is you find it in the current year."

The areas in which to find the money to pay off a deficit would include learning materials, information technology and facility services, Ms Kisko told the board when asked where extra funding might come from.

In an interview after the budget meeting, Oakville Trustee Mary Chapin said she's upset at the potential of having to draw down monies for vital needs like maintenance, to pay off a deficit that would include the former director's severance. She said what makes paying a deficit especially tough is the budget, when crafted, is tight and provides little flexibility to account for large monetary increases during the year.

"I'm seriously concerned we'll have to roll over a deficit when

we get our fourth quarter statements," she said, "to cover \$600,000 deficit we know now is related to the director's departure. By November, when we have to revise (the budget), I expect it will look much different than it does now."

Ms Chapin is also bothered that the board's transportation budget is unchanged from last year of around \$9.9 million, and that the Province has yet to release parameters of how the construction of new schools will be funded — a pressing issue regionally. The board has in its plan to build four new schools, one each in Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville, at a cost of around \$28 million, with an opening date of September 2006.

Meanwhile, the board's 2005-08 \$43.4 million special education plan was deferred by a vote of 6-5 for approval until later this year.

Some trustees felt they needed more time to digest all that was contained in the budget.

Board Vice-Chair and Burlington Trustee Peggy Russell brought forward the motion of deferral, saying that while she rec-

ognizes all the hard work that went into crafting the important plan, she felt it's necessary that the new director of education, when hired, should have a say about the plan. She also felt the deferral provides more time for input from constituents.

Halton Hills Trustee Ethel Gardiner was against putting off approval of the plan. "To defer this is an insult," she said.

When asked by trustees about how applying for a portion of a \$40 million pot of special education money set aside by the Ontario Ministry of Education might be affected without an approved plan, staff told trustees it might impact allocation of those special dollars.

In a speech to the board prior to the budget approval, Heather Holden, executive director for the Learning Disabilities Association of Halton Inc., based in Burlington, felt the plan wasn't visionary enough. She said it should at least be a five-year plan that would better represent the needs of special needs students in Halton.

## Budget up 4.1%

• see REGIONAL on page A2

year, equaling approximately \$21.

Adding in the police service's numbers, the total estimated increase in Halton for 2006 is 4.1 per cent.

Council also endorsed that next year's water and wastewater rate-supported base budget be made on the basis of a 7.2 per cent increase, not to exceed 8.4 per cent, subject to further reduction as a result of federal and provincial contributions.

When asked if she supports a 4.1 per cent tax increase, Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline said, "It (the increase) is a real cost. I'm in favour of what it really costs."

She went on to say that if it takes a 4.1 per cent increase to run the municipality, then that's what's needed. "Would I like it (the tax increase) to be lower? Yes, I would," she added. "I am confident that staff are always looking for savings in costs."

She said she also thinks it's "wise and courageous" for elected representatives to apply real costs, even though it may not always be the most popular decision.

The budget won't come back to committee and council until November and December.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessy@milton-canadianchampion.com.

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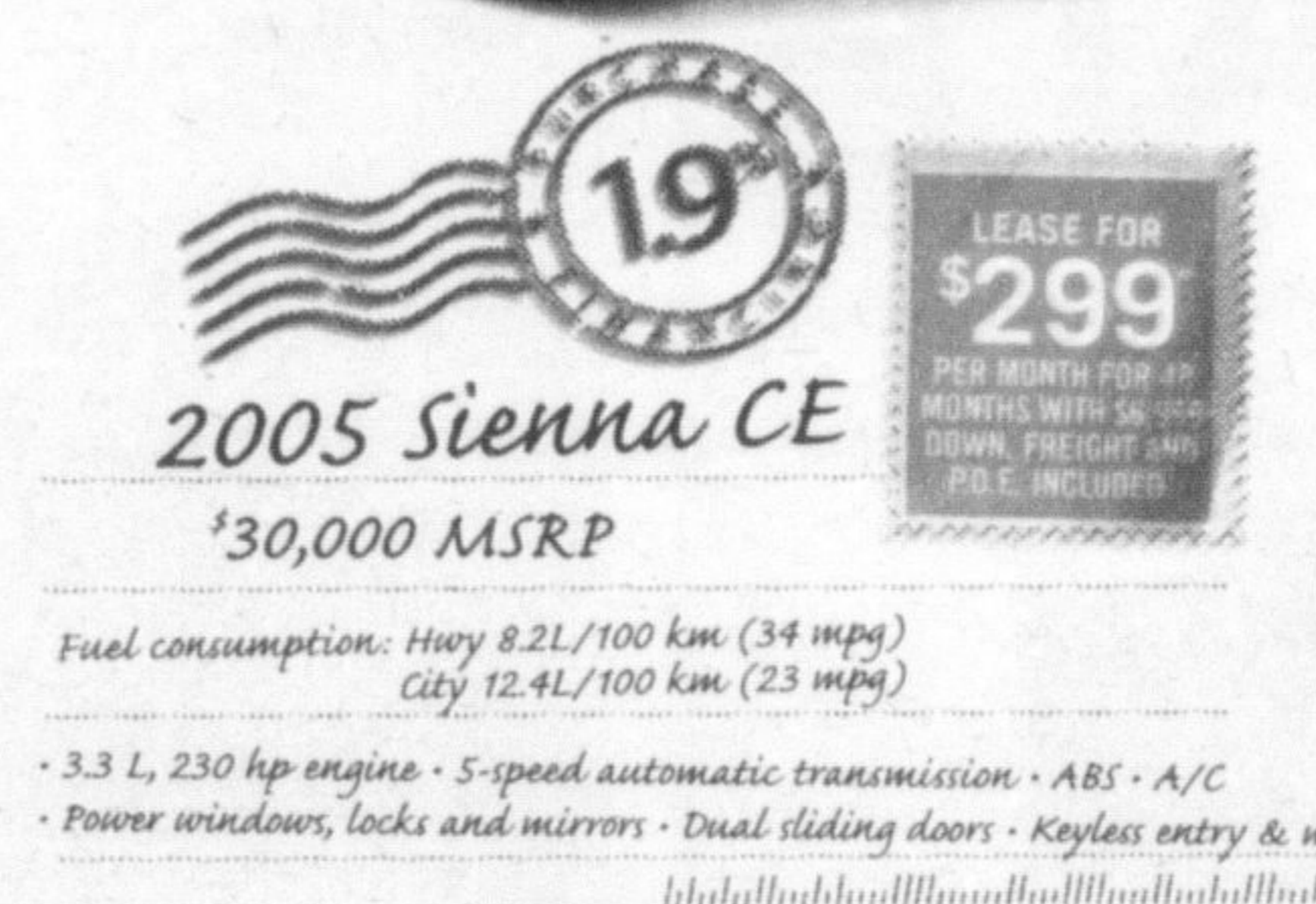


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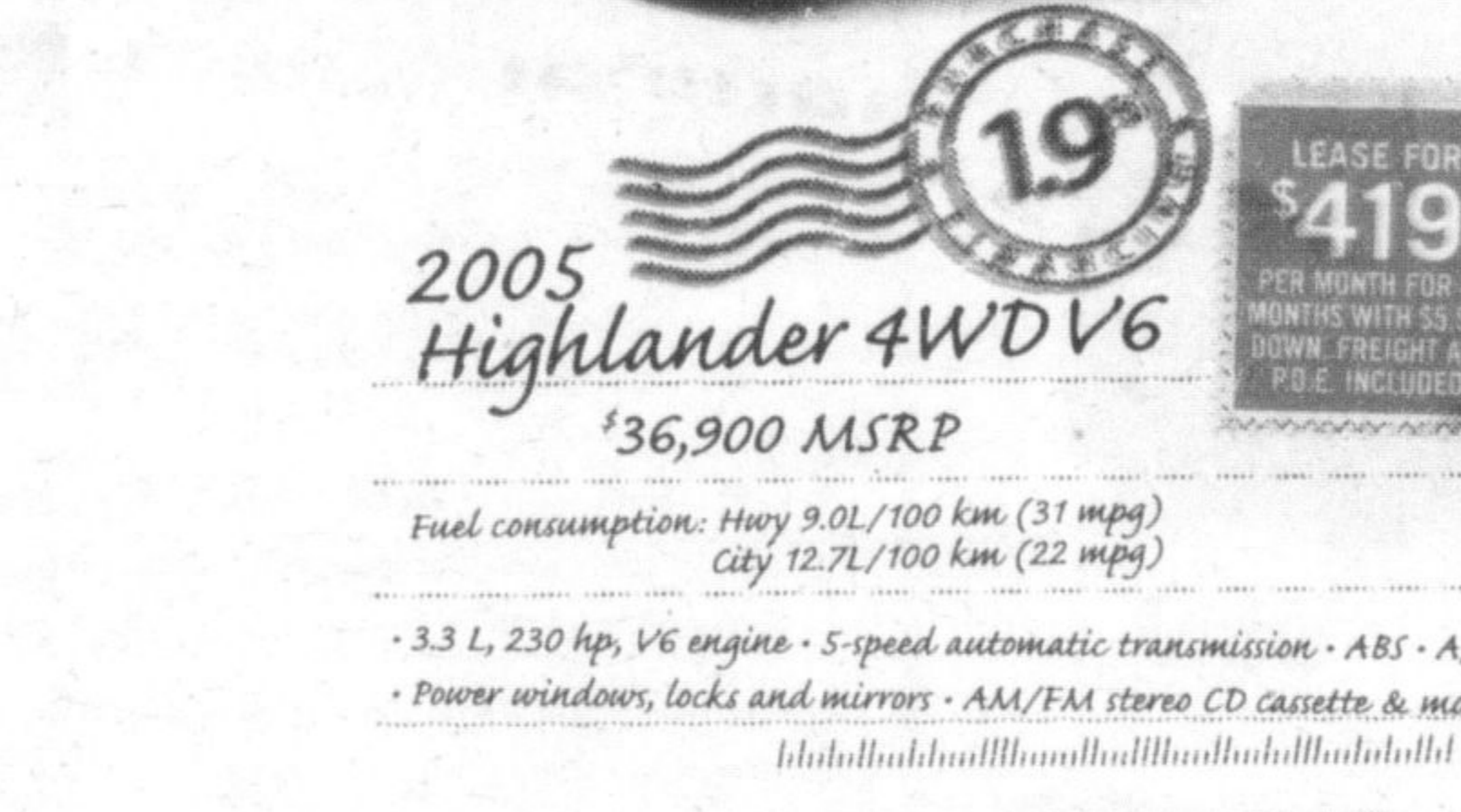


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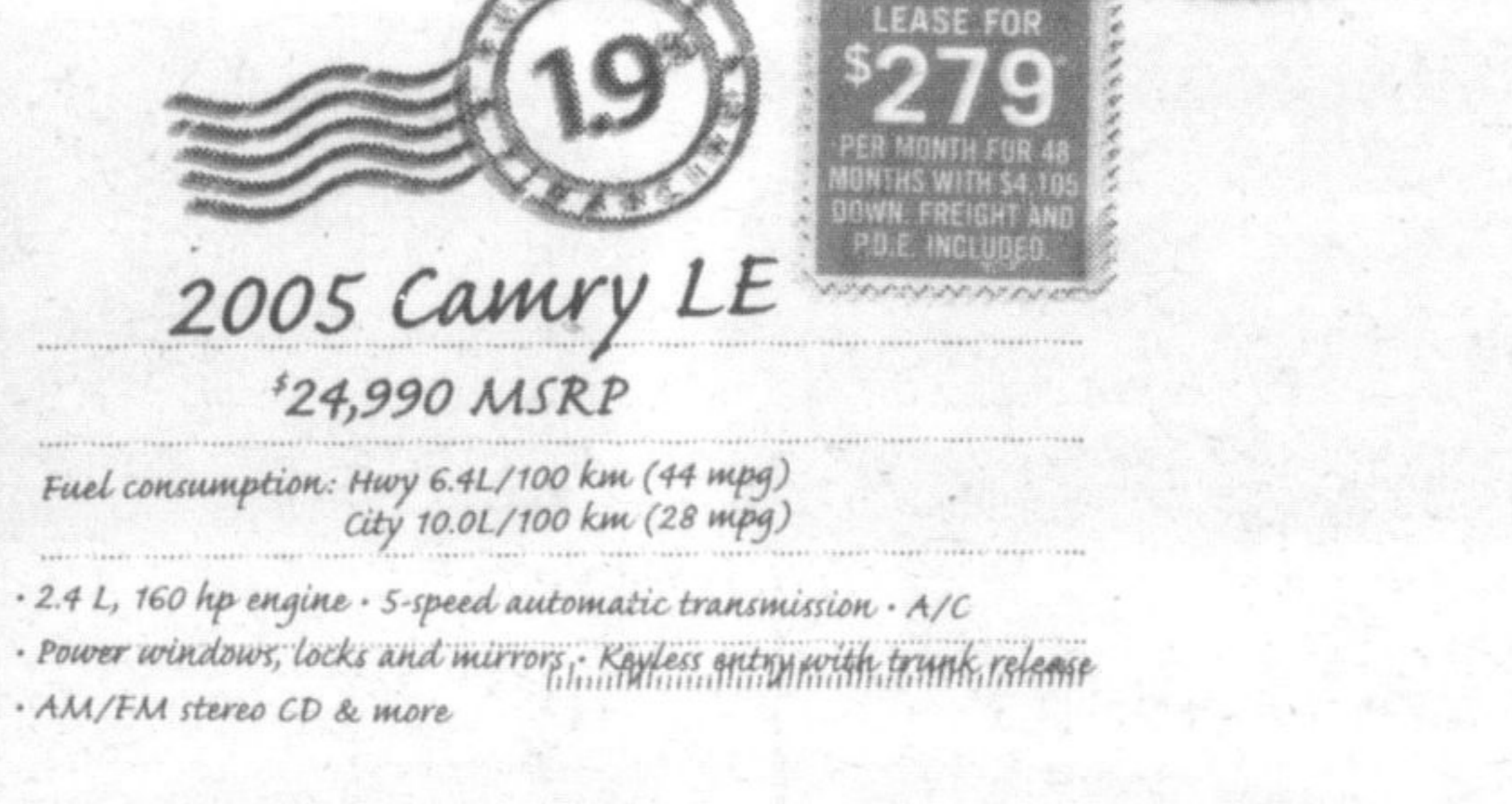


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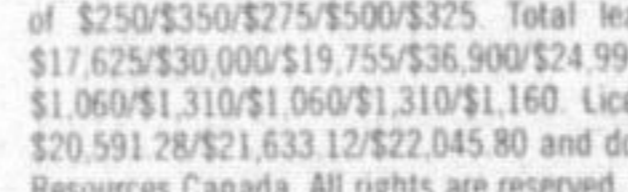
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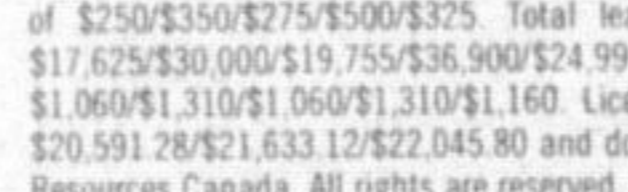
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