

Issues & Answers

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE NEWS AND THE NEWSMAKERS

Clearing the air

Ontario's new Drive Clean puts cars through an emissions fitness test

BY JENNIFER BROWN
STAFF WRITER

Auto shop owners such as Art King have made the investment — now they hope it won't backfire on them.

King, owner of Tool Box Auto Shop in Newmarket, is one of the first in Ontario to become an authorized Drive Clean car emission test facility for the province's air quality campaign.

King paid \$70,000 for the test equipment and will also be required to pay another \$1,000 for the licensing fee to conduct the tests, which will begin in April.

The tests are part of a new Ministry of the Environment emission testing program requiring cars and light-duty vehicles four to 20 years old in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton-Wentworth area to pass a clean air test every two years.

The test involves accelerating the vehicle on a treadmill-like machine. A probe, placed in the tailpipe, sends readings on the pollutants in the exhaust to the computer.

The computer averages the readings and compares them to emission standards for the car and its year.

This will reduce smog by 22 per cent — that's a huge, huge improvement on the air quality we have now — that's 62,000 tonnes of pollution that will no longer go into the air to be breathed.

King said the \$30 test fee will never cover the cost of the machine and he hopes to recoup the cost in repairs on cars examined by the dynamometer.

"If we relied on the test it would never be paid for," said King, who will also face competition from several other shops in York Region which will also be licensed to have the dynamometer.

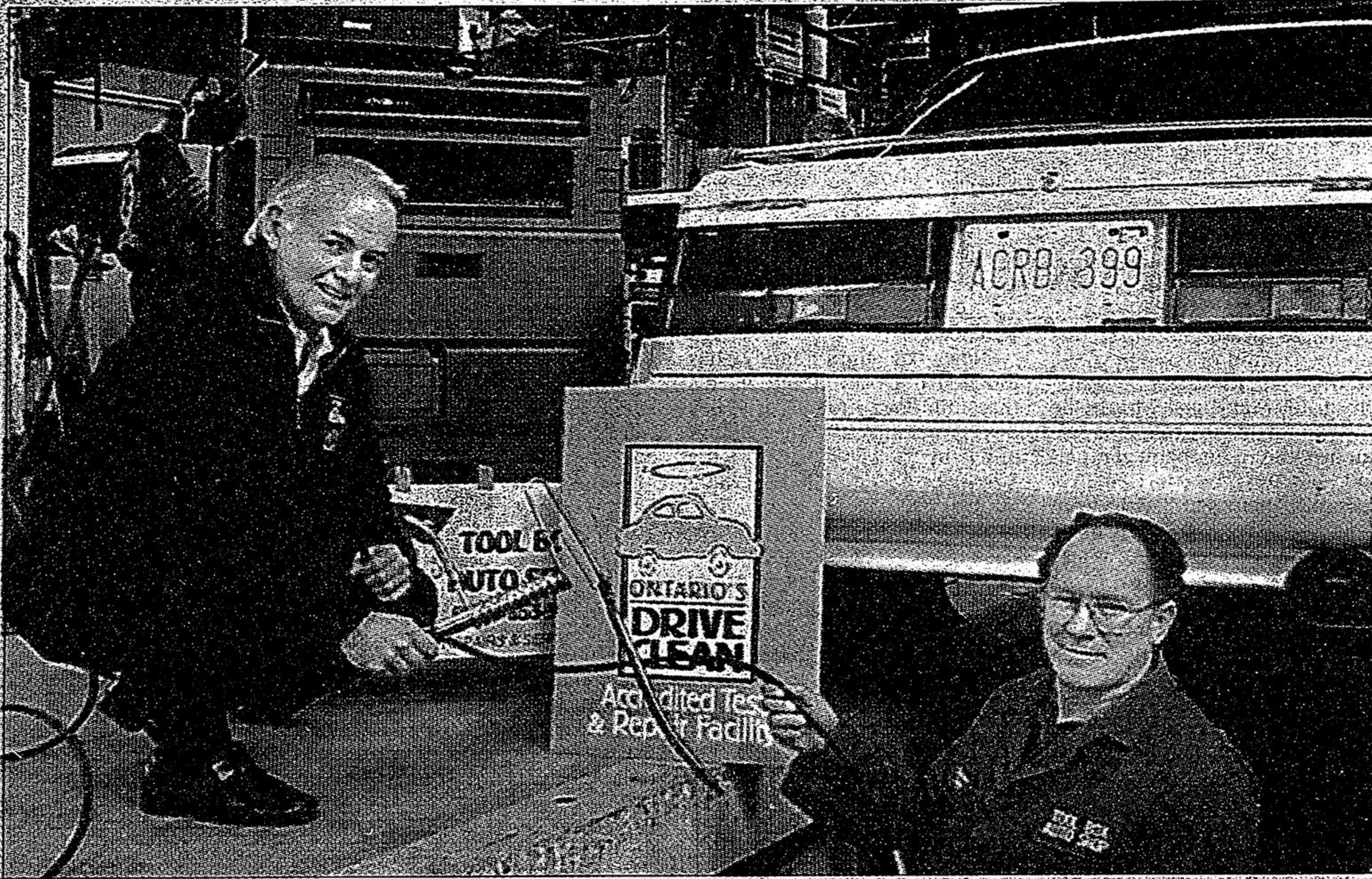
The province is spending \$4 million to educate the public on the importance of the emission testing.

"Smog is a very difficult problem to deal with and is particularly bad for kids," said Minister of the Environment Norm Sterling as he attended the opening of King's Drive Clean facility wearing a Drive Clean fleece sweater.

"We thought the best way to attack it is to attack the source of smog causing emission."

The test takes about 20 minutes and costs \$30 plus tax.

Of that \$30, the shop keeps \$20 to pay for their mechanics' time and the cost of the dynamometer.



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Environment Minister Norm Sterling, left, was on hand to help auto shop owner Art King launch the province's Drive Clean program. King is one of the first auto shop owners in York Region to become an authorized Drive Clean car emission test facility.

York Mackenzie MPP Frank Klees said the province will restrict the number of machines per town, but with 120,000 cars to be tested this year, each community will need access to several machines.

If a vehicle needs repairs, the owner can get a one-time only "conditional pass" by showing that at least \$200 worth of relevant repairs have been done at an accredited Drive Clean facility.

Sterling said the machine is built to prevent fraud and tampering with results.

If anyone tries to tamper with the system, it will shut down.

Linked automatically to the Ministry of the Environment, the computer sends a notice via the auto shop indicating if a car has failed the test.

"We don't take the cars off the road," King said. "But if it doesn't pass, the owner can't get it licensed."

This year, owners of even numbered model cars from 1980 to 1996 and renewal

dates of April 1 or later will be sent notices and required to pass the test in 1999.

Model years to be tested in 2000 will be those from 1981 to 1997.

If your birthday and vehicle license renewal occurs before April 1, you will be exempt until 2001.

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Sterling said heavy duty trucks and buses will be subjected to the emissions testing in the summer.

He said there are 200,000 trucks and buses compared to 4.7 million light passenger vehicles.

It is estimated an average of 20 per cent of vehicles will fail the emission test. Those cars will have to pay another \$15 to have the vehicle tested again.

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And smog is a problem in York Region said medical officer of health Helena Jaczek.

"We have air quality advisories every year and we will be getting our own air quality monitoring station in the future," said Jaczek, noting cases of childhood asthma have been increasing.

In 2001, Drive Clean will be expanded to include almost the entire area from Peterborough to Windsor.

For more information or to find the nearest test site, call 1-888-758-2999 or visit the web site at www.driveclean.com.

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