

HOW TO QUIT SMOKING IN 30 DAYS

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Science & Mechanics

**40TH YEAR
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**MAKE YOUR CAR
LAST 10 YEARS**

**A TAXI MECHANIC
TELLS HOW**



By Franklynn Peterson

A man who can keep a taxicab running for one year on the streets of New York should be able to keep his own car going for 10 years. He does!

A TAXI MECHANIC TELLS



How To Make Your Car

Joe Jaschke gets 10 good years out of his car! Detroit would go broke if everybody found out what Joe knows about keeping a car in good mechanical shape. And he doesn't only drive it to church on Sundays.

Cars which Joe works on are another matter—they last only one year. In that year, however, those Dodge Taxis have logged 75- or 80,000 miles. That much taxi mileage is just about equivalent to 10 years of driving with an average man or woman behind the wheel. After taxis have seen one year's service with Joe behind the wrench, they still bring a retail price of about \$1100 on a used car lot.

Joe Jaschke is a foreman for the 57th Street Maintenance Corp. which keeps a fleet of 110 cabs on the rough streets of New York. Joe learned much of the inside story on maintenance during the war when he had to keep taxis in shape for 500,000 miles! It was a rough time to be a mechanic—spare parts were as scarce as cars and gas—but he soon learned the common-sense rules of

proper maintenance.

For his own driving, Joe used to sit behind the wheel of a 1954 Olds, but he retired that in 1964 for a Checker. Taxis were so much in his blood by then that he felt more comfortable behind the wheel of a roomy Checker. Besides, Joe says, "the metal's a lot better in it."

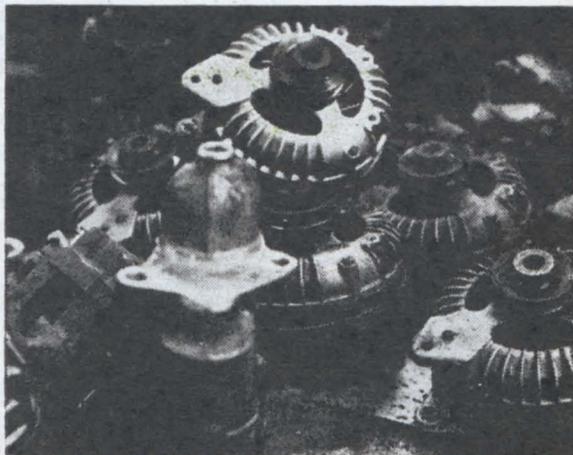
Every week the 57th Street garage gives each of its cars a complete tune-up. Plugs and points are guaranteed for 10,000 miles but the average cab rolls 7000 during a single week. New Champion plugs and AC points go in once a week.

Joe's mechanics use timing lights to set the distributor but some of the drivers like what they call a "snappier pick-up" and re-set the timing outside the company's garage. "They just want zip and faster pick-up," Joe complains, "even if it pings." And *that* fouls up the sparkplugs and pits the points faster.

The average car should be able to go a year or more on a set of plugs and points—but there is no economy in stretching them too long. Bad plugs or points will only dirty



Shop foreman Joe Jaschke (left) is seen on the job at the 57th Street Maintenance Corp. where a fleet of 110 taxis are maintained. One of his men is under the cab changing the oil, something they do twice a week (or every 3500 miles!). Below are some burned out alternators, the result of overheating.



Last 10 Years!

up the engine and put more strain on moving parts when you try to coax out the same power you once had with *clean* plugs and points.

Oil gets changed twice a week in taxis and greasing is done at the same time. A private driver would be wasting his money to have lubrication taken care of so often. Once every 4000 miles is good unless the car doesn't run up that much mileage in three months. If the family jalopy only goes to church on Sunday, better have the oil changed once every season to get rid of the moisture and acids which accumulate during non-use.

Put in the best oil and grease money can buy. You may save a few pennies by pouring 10¢-a-quart Ole Moonshine Motor Oil into the buggy, but it'll end up costing you dollars for repairs and may even cut some years off your car's life expectancy. Same goes for parts—Joe and the 57th Street garage put in only genuine, factory OK'd parts.

With their standard six-cylinder engines,

the Dodge Taxis manage to get 10 or 11 miles per gallon in rough-and-tumble stop-and-go, bumper-crushing New York City traffic. A company with 110 cars on the road is pretty concerned about mileage; they're pleased to get that 10 or 11 mpg.

As a rough but well proven rule of thumb, Joe says that good mileage and long life both come from the same good maintenance procedures.

Taxis all drive with heavy-duty batteries. They last longer and give better service during their lifetime. Standard, factory-installed batteries are just barely able to handle the load. If your car is parked overnight on the streets in cold weather or you use your headlights frequently, it would be a good idea to get the bigger battery when the car comes to you.

An alternator puts out more amperage than the old generator used to, but neither of them are powerful enough to recharge a dead or dying battery. The alternator is fine for replacing the amount of current you are

(Continued on next page)

Make Your Car Last 10 Years

using at the moment. In fact, its electronic circuit is set for doing exactly that. Once you try to recharge a weak battery or give a "boost" to a car with a dead battery, the alternator and its electronic parts begin overheating. And heat spells short-life for the alternator, making this another area where you can save a few pennies one place while losing dollars elsewhere.

Keeping it cool is another good warning for transmissions. Pushing a stalled car may be a noble bit of good-Samaritanism, but it doubles the load on your transmission and heats up all its moving parts.

Snow driving represents another hazard for people who don't know how to handle a stuck car. Keep this in mind next winter. Tromping down on the gas pedal and listening to the supersonic whine of burning tires may be lots of fun—but it sure generates heat. It literally burns off a layer of tire rubber. And it heats up transmissions something awful.

A gentle rocking motion can help get you out of a small snowbank, as long as you don't shift from reverse to forward while the gas pedal is pushing out the floorboards. Once the wheels begin to slip, you may as well stop and try something else. Spinning tires will only melt the snow or ice and make matters all the worse. No matter how hard you tromp on the accelerator, she ain't a-gonna go . . . unless you're lucky enough to be parked on a very thin sheet of ice which the heat can melt.

If you plan to snow-plow your way into a slippery situation, better carry chains. Even those much-advertised snow tires can't help you beyond offering a bit better traction on moderately snowy streets. Like Joe Jaschke keeps saying, "If you keep the transmission cool, it will last for the life of your car."

The 57th Street taxis have disc brakes fore and standard drum brakes aft. All the brakes are checked weekly. Disc brake pads get replaced every 20 to 30,000 miles, standard shoes about 15,000. Although you might be able to stretch the life of your brakes a bit longer, it really doesn't pay. First of all, you have to pay a mechanic to pull the wheels in order to check that the old brakes are still safe. If you ignore that check-up, and they aren't safe, you'll soon

be paying to have some bent metal replaced—or worse!

Taxi cabs in the 57th Street Maintenance fleet wear 6-ply Firestone tires and they hold out for 22 to 25,000 miles. Joe can't recommend the 6-ply treatment over the usual 4-ply tires for you because "they're too hard riding for a family car." *Consumer Reports* likes Michelin-X steel-belted radial tires and so does Joe. They cost a small bundle to start with, but they should last 40,000 or more miles. Figured on a cost-per-mile basis, they're cheaper over the long run than something on the bargain shelf. With tires, as with almost everything else you can put on or in a car, you may not always get what you pay for, but you never get something for nothing! It costs.

Pot holes are a big culprit on Joe's list of auto gremlins. "They knock everything out." Hitting a few pot holes dead center shortens tire life, knocks wheels out of alignment, loosens nuts and bolts all over the place, and causes drivers to do dangerous things like stopping short or swerving, leaving behind a trail of bent metal.

Even if all of the mechanical aspects are well cared for, a neglected body can keep your car from living 10 years. Frequent washings and waxings are not just valuable for appearance—they protect the sheet-metal!

Usually car washes miss the most important part—underneath. That's where salt from the road collects and starts eating away the metal before it shows. Cabs don't have to worry about this because in one year no car is going to rust through. Joe cleans his own car's bottom like a baby's, because that's where short-life begins. And once rust gets a solid start, there is a lot of grinding and scraping involved to get rid of it—just like cancer in a human body.

Today's jalopies may seem "tinnier" than the old Model-Ts and Model-As, but Joe Jaschke likes the scientific undercoatings. "They're the first real step toward cutting down body corrosion."

We'll see you again about 1980. After following Joe's advice on keeping your car young for 10 years, you may want a refresher course for those new-fangled things which will be appearing by then. ●

JOE GUTTS TESTS A DODGE TAXI



Photos by Larsen E. Whipsnade

**It may not look very sporty,
but our all-around road tester reports it will
pick up more honeys than a Hemi Challenger**

As with so many of the literary gems that have graced this space, this one was conceived during the latter stages of a somewhat lengthy lunch in the restaurant of the Gramercy Park Hotel—a nearby watering spot of some repute.

"Gutts," His Honor the Editor had said to me that morning, "Frank Peterson is doing an article for us on how a taxi mechanic keeps his vehicles running despite the incredibly hard use they take. I'm meeting him for lunch today to discuss the piece, and since you are supposed to be the auto editor of this magazine, I guess you should come along." Never one to pass up an offer of free food and maybe a drink or two, I quickly accepted his enthusiastic invitation—and so there the three of us were.

We got right down to business, and then another round of business. It was during the third round of business that Editor Tony Hogg proposed that we do a road test on a taxi to see just what kind of a beating they do take, and by the fifth round of business I was agreeing that it sounded like a great idea. Frank, who, after all, had nothing to lose, concurred most heartily in everything we said. By the time we got around to coffee and brandy ("I'll just have another Heineken's"), it was all set.

Back to the office to make a few phone calls, and bright and early next morning I reported to the Enterprise Cab Company's garage, where a brand new Dodge Taxi was waiting for me. Only by now, of course, it no longer seemed like quite so great an idea.

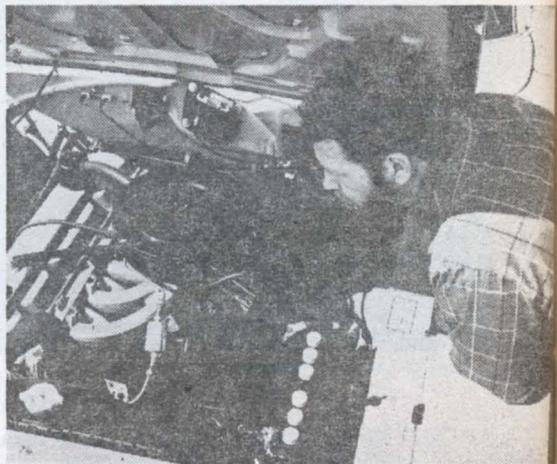
I was remembering that point in my long and varied career when I hacked for a living out in Los Angeles. It's really not the easiest way in the world to make a buck, and certainly has more than the normal share of aggravations—most notably stupid customers and low tips, often the two combined. Now here I was, going back on the streets, even if only for a day.

While waiting to get my cab gassed up, I chatted with a couple of other drivers. Some of their tips: "Stay in midtown if you can—that's where you make the dough" . . . "Whatever you do, keep away from the airports" (I later found out why) . . . "Don't take no crap from nobody" (a philosophy in keeping with my own). In addition, I learned that the loud yellow color of my cab is required by the New York City Hack Bureau for all "medallion" (licensed) cabs, and that the average New York cab runs around 7000 to 8000 miles a month. Fleet owners generally replace their vehicles after about 18 months, while owner-drivers may run up as many as 300,000 miles on their machines before putting them out to pasture! My sources further told me that about 80 percent of New York City cabs are Dodges, and that Dodge actually makes a special model for the City—a Coronet that is factory-modified to meet Hack Bureau specifications. So much for the background. Assuming my gruffest, surliest cab driver's attitude, I headed my hack out of the garage.

A half block away, I forgot everything I had been told, and suddenly recalled one of the fringe benefits of hacking, for there on the corner was this lovely young thing in a most delightful miniskirt waving at me.



Trunk space, as you can see above, is cavernous. The fact that taxis don't carry a spare helps some. Gutts tells us he is studying the taxi maintenance manual, but a magnifying glass reveals it to be a back issue of "Sexology."



Back on the job (above) our man inspects the 145-hp Slant Six. Not exactly Super Stocker material, it gets the job done. Always the chivalrous sort, Gutt's helps a charming young fare disembark at the airport. (left).



Even though she was carrying a small suitcase—a dead giveaway as to her destination—I immediately dropped my gruff cabbie's manner, resumed the widely renowned Gutts charm, and raced to the curb. The vision got into the back seat. "La Guardia Airport, please," she smiled.

Smiling back in my most sensuous manner, I headed the taxi toward the parkway to see what I could find out, which was quite a bit. Her name is Pat, and she works as a sort of "gal Friday" for a couple of fashion designers. She was heading for Columbus, Ohio, to spend a few days with her parents. She shares an apartment on the East Side with a girlfriend who is a researcher for a publishing company. She is one of a bunch of "groupers" who have rented a cottage for the summer on Fire Island. And yes, she does think there is something exciting—mysterious, perhaps—about bearded men.

I also found out some things about the Dodge Taxi. For one thing, a Super Bee it ain't, despite the similarity of colors. For a muscle car, the 225-cubic-inch, 145-horsepower Slant Six engine will never replace the 440 Mopar wedge. With automatic transmission ("You can't find anybody who knows how to drive a manual," the garage foreman had told me) and a 2.94 rear axle ratio, you're not likely to take many Hemi-Cudas at the light—unless you intimidate them, as any good New York cabbie will frequently do. Still, the Dodge Taxi is made for the street, not the strip, and it does get you where your fare wants to go. But if you normally tool around in a Camaro SS 396, the Taxi may take a little getting used to. It's no jackrabbit.

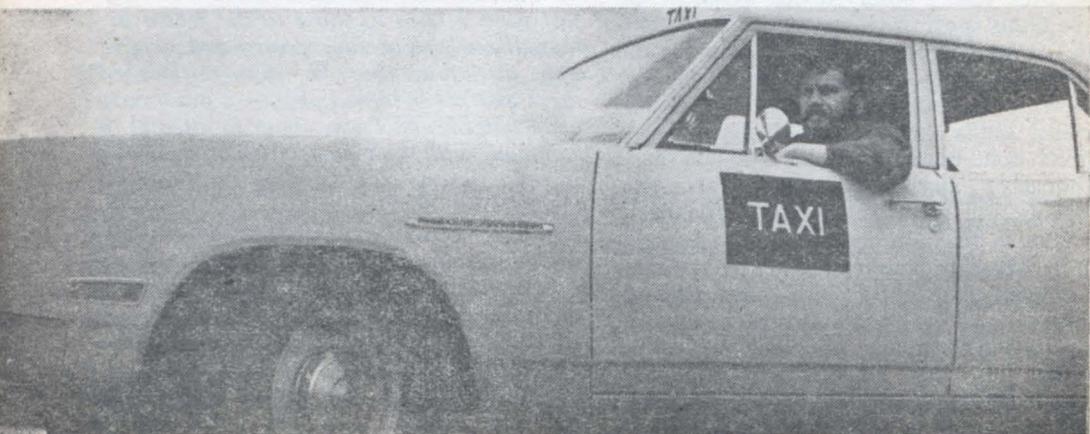
Stopping is a lot better than going. Front brakes are single-piston Kelsey-Hayes discs specially developed to meet the taxi specs (now the standard Coronet discs), and they do the job beautifully with minimal fade. They are manual, not power. Steering is power, very handy for maneuvering in heavy traffic.

As you might expect, heavy duty parts are used throughout—alternator, cooling system, shocks, torsion bars, springs. The stiff suspension, along with "six-ply-rated" 8.25-15 tires, add up to a rather hard ride. Fine with me, but maybe not quite as comfortable as passengers might want. Heavily padded seat cushions ease the seat-of-the-pants sensation.

Those tires, incidentally, are rented, not purchased, by the big fleet owners. That accounts for their rugged construction—the renters want to make sure they get plenty of mileage out of them, since they are paid by the mile. This also accounts for the lack of a spare.

Total price of the Dodge Taxi (as I had it, and not including the rented tires) is \$2960.95, plus shipping. Of course, if you order 300 at a time you're likely to command a big discount.

Options, which are more likely to be found on owner-driver cabs than on fleet cars, include a 318-cube V8 engine rated at 230 horsepower, plus all the usual goodies to which we have become accustomed, such as radio, stereo, air conditioning and the like. About 60 percent of the owner-drivers buy air conditioning, while practically none of the fleet owners do. Wait until the next union contract comes up and that picture



Would you accept a ride in a taxi from this man?

Joe Gutts Tests a Dodge Taxi

may be changed.

Owing to my skillful hack driving, we arrived at the airport more than an hour early for Pat's flight. I suggested that I might keep her company, she agreed, so I flipped on the "Off Duty" sign and accompanied my little sweetness to the observation deck, where we spent a pleasant 45 minutes or so. By the time she boarded the plane, I had arranged to meet her at the airport upon her return the following week—this time, in my civilian capacity. Of such chance meetings are wonderful friendships born.

Back to the hack, and now I found out why the regular drivers hate the airports. It happened to be a non-rush hour, and about 20 cabs were in line looking for fares, of which there just weren't any. After about a half hour at the end of the line, I headed back to the city, empty. The mathematics of it is, since you are likely to be going at least one way without a fare, a trip to the airport means that you get paid only half of what it is worth. In my case, it was even worse than that, since I had forgotten to collect from my lovely passenger, and had to make up what was on the meter from my own measly earnings, which up to that time totaled \$00.00.

Things looked up a little bit after that. I spent most of the rest of the day ferrying executive types (average tip: 25¢) around the City, which is the sort of thing the Dodge Taxi seems to do best. It handles very well in traffic, and is quite at ease in the maddening stop-and-go driving of mid-Manhattan. For an intermediate-sized car, there is more than adequate accessibility to the back seat. I observed this when, in the true Gutts spirit of chivalry (and leg watching), I hopped out to hold the door for the exit of my only other excitement of the day—two little dolls who work at the UN, named Gilda (she's from England, but I didn't hold that against her, despite Basil Thursday) and Marte (Norway). This hacking is a great way to make friends.

Late in the afternoon it started to rain. In the finest tradition of cabbies everywhere, I flipped on the "Off Duty" sign and decided to head back to the garage. I was driving up Park Avenue when the cab ahead of me—also "Off Duty"—went through a big puddle and drenched some poor guy who was standing at the curb trying to hail a hack. Seized with a sudden compassion.

I pulled over in front of the miserable wretch and said, "Hop in, Mac." He did.

It was Basil Thursday.

Like I said earlier, it can be a very aggravating job. Wordlessly, and using every bit of cabbie's skill at my command to make the trip as quickly as possible, I took him to his pad, collected the fare plus a unanimous one-shilling tip, and headed for Sparks Pub.

After several coldies, I regained enough strength and composure to call up Enterprise Cab Company and tell them I quit and they should come pick up their taxi. Thus ends another chapter in the thrilling annals of Joe Gutts, great author, lover, bare knuckle fighter, et al.

A Footnote by Basil Thursday

Inasmuch as this issue of S&M includes varying reports on taxicabs, and in my capacity as Assistant Automotive Editor of this magazine, I should like to report on a most curious incident that occurred recently. It was a beastly night, raining and all that, and I was standing at curbside attempting to summon a taxicab to take me to my quarters, when some cad bore down on me and caused a large splash, splattering me with filthy water right up to the monocle so that I could scarcely see. Immediately thereafter, another cab pulled up and the driver invited me to board (thinking back, I believe that this fellow thought he recognized me as someone else, for he addressed me by the name "Mac"). I entered the vehicle, and, before I could even tell the driver my destination, was whisked away at a terribly fast pace. I tried to shout to the fellow behind the wheel to slow down, and to give him directions, but he simply slouched there and never turned about—a most surly chap indeed, and I was about to attempt to summon help from outside when suddenly, to my amazement, we arrived at my dwelling. Despite his strange and rude behavior, I tipped the man quite generously—but he roared off into the night without so much as a "Thank you, gov'nor." I tried to catch a glimpse of the blighter as he drove off, but all I could see was that he was badly in need of a shave.

At any rate, I had noticed during my wild ride that the vehicle had held well to

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