

Auto Sunday

Tire air sensors can improve gas mileage

Q. In the recent colder weather, when I start my truck I get a tire warning message that my right front and left rear tires are low. I've checked and pressures are always 35 psi. After warming up or resetting, the message goes away. This is a 2008 Silverado 1500 four-wheel drive.

A. Well it's a new day isn't it? Now our vehicles tell us when the tires are low on air.

All new vehicles now are equipped with some type of TPMS (Tire Pressure Monitoring System). This is for fuel economy and safety purposes, which is good. The bad part is that it is another system that can fail and need repair.

Each tire has a sensor in the wheel that relays information to the onboard computer. In most cases when you rotate your tires or perform a tire repair, a reset of the TPMS system will be required. The other thing that you need to be careful of is that you have the right amount of air in the tires. If you have 35 psi in all four tires and the truck calls for 30 psi in the front and 40 psi in the rear, this would be enough of a variance to turn on the light.

This is just an example; I am not stating those are the pressures your truck calls for, but make sure you check the label on the driver's door jamb and set the tires to what that label says. If the light still comes on after doing that you will have to bring the vehicle in to have it tested to be sure the sensors are OK. If they are, have a reset of the TPMS performed.

Winter tread

As we head into the winter season it's important to have good tires on your car. Worn tires can contribute to a loss of traction, steering and braking, especially when the snow flies. Per the new recommendations from tire manufacturers, the best tires should always be on the rear of the car. I know this seems counter intuitive but the reasoning is sound. If the front tires have better traction there is a strong possibility that the front of the car will stop faster than the back and the car could spin out of control, especially on a slippery surface. It is better to sacrifice a little traction on acceleration than to have an accident because you lost control trying to stop.

If you have a car that struggles with winter traction, a set of winter tires on all four may be just the answer you are looking for. Some of these luxury sedans are almost useless in the snow, but put a set of winter tires on it and it handles in the snow like a different car.

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GM analyst predicts solid sales month

DETROIT — U.S. auto sales could top an annual rate of 10.8 million in November, General Motors Co.'s top sales analyst said Thursday. That would mark the first month this year that sales jumped to such levels without the aid of Cash for Clunkers rebates, which boosted sales in July and August.

One man's frustrations led to a novel concept

BY JASON STEIN
Wheelbase Communications

He was just plain frustrated. Warren Avis would land at airports across the United States and wait ... and wait ... and wait. Sometimes he would have to walk for miles from the airport terminals before he would find a ride to pick him up.

Airport ground transportation? Unthinkable.

Rental car companies? Never heard of them.

And if you wonder how Avis, the man, created Avis, the car-rental giant, you only need to look back to the early 1940s to see one frustrated man with a brilliant idea.

Captain Warren Avis, a military pilot in World War II, knew something about air travel and he knew something about cars.

As a Ford dealer in suburban Detroit, Avis valued customer service and he knew a bad deal when he saw one. So, naturally, as a pilot, Avis continually became frustrated when ground transportation was not available at airports when he returned home from missions overseas.

After the war, he realized other travelers thought the same way.

He had a solution: car rentals. Although Hertz was already offering a transportation service, its branches were located in major cities, but not at their airports.

Avis was among the first to foresee the rapid development of commercial aviation following the war. He reasoned that the growth in air travel would lead to a need for some means of transportation once people had landed at their destinations.

So, before Christmas in late December of 1946, with \$10,000 of his own money and \$75,000 borrowed against his name, Avis began his car rental business: Avis Airlines Rent-a-Car System. The company was the world's first car rental operation located inside the boundaries of an airport. Almost simultaneously, an Avis location opened at Miami International Airport, then the country's busiest rent-a-car market.

He wouldn't know it, but Avis was about to lay the groundwork for an entire industry.

Business and vacation travelers went crazy.

The idea of a national airport rental-car system was a valid one.

But could it be that simple? Step off a plane and rent a car, then return it at some point in the future to the same location? The simplicity of the idea was ingenious. Could it work?

Avis expanded his business at a

Pro-Files

Automotive legends and heroes

steady pace primarily by licensing local independent operators to do business under the Avis name at airports. New York, Chicago, Dallas, Washington, Los Angeles and Houston soon joined the Avis System.

By 1948, system operations were opening in downtown locations to serve hotels and office buildings and the word "Airlines" was dropped from the compa-

ny's name.

By 1953, Avis launched franchise operations of Avis in Europe, Canada and Mexico.

"I didn't think it was anything other than giving the customer an option I never had as a traveler," Avis once said.

But Avis went one step further, introducing a number of innovative business practices that would also help the industry. He would pioneer national franchise licensing, corporate credit cards and better customer service practices. All of these business firsts became the gold standard in the industry.

Interestingly, Avis himself wouldn't last long in the industry he helped develop. In 1954, he sold the company to a Boston-based financier and the owner of U-Drivit Corp., another car rental company, for \$ 8 million. Subsequently, that company opened a number of outlets throughout the United States and introduced the innovative concept of a nationwide one-way car rental system. Customers could rent a car at one place and leave it at their destination with no need to return it.

From the 1950s on, Avis changed hands many times as it was repeatedly sold and bought by a number of companies. In addition, the company entered into alliances with other car-rental companies in England, Ireland,

France, Germany, Switzerland and Scotland.

In 1973, Avis launched its innovative Wizard reservation system, the company's cornerstone technology. The company continued to change ownership through the 1970s and '80s, becoming employee-owned in 1987.

That same year, Avis introduced the Roving Rapid Return, a handheld computer terminal allowing customers to bypass the Avis counter. In 2000, the company introduced Avis Interactive, the first Internet-based reporting system in the car-rental industry.

Today, Avis is the second-largest

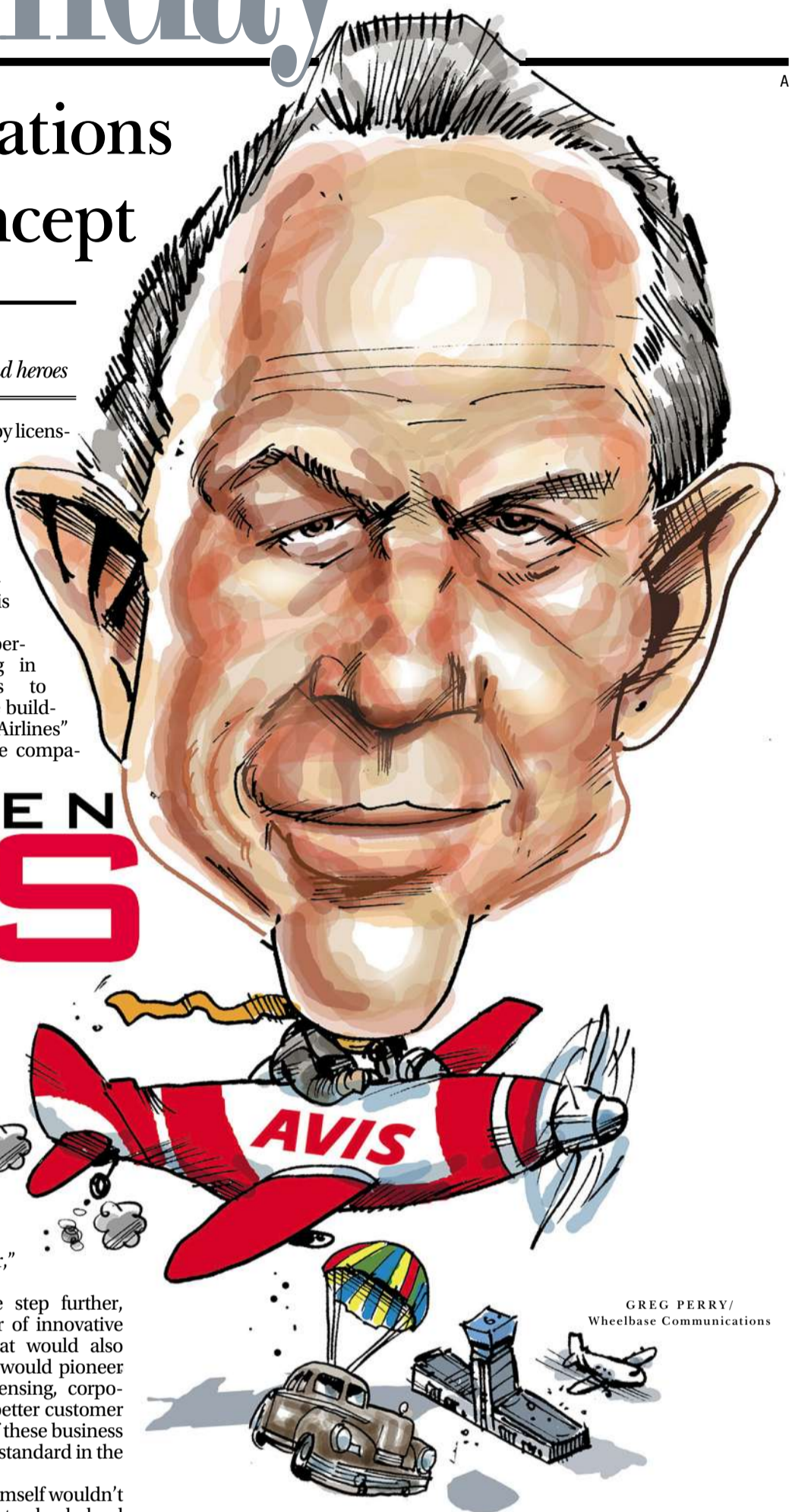
company of its kind in the world. Two locations became 4,200 locations in 160 countries.

And as for Mr. Avis? He faded away ... almost.

In 1985, he joined a group of investors who wanted to buy Avis Inc. from Beatrice Cos., which put it up for sale. But the price had jumped to \$400 million.

He eventually turned it down. He didn't need the hassle. His legacy was already cemented in every rental counter at every airport in virtually every city in the world.

• E-mail feature writer Jason Stein at www.wheelbase.us/mailbag.html.



GREG PERRY/
Wheelbase Communications

Acura adds V-6 to TSX sedan for first time

BY ANN M. JOB
For The Associated Press

What can be wrong with a car that's a Consumer Reports' recommended buy, earns top crash test ratings, delivers commendable fuel economy and is competitively priced?

If the car is in the compact luxury sedan class, it better offer a six-cylinder engine in order to be considered a real contender. This is a key reason why Honda's luxury brand, Acura, has added a V-6 to its TSX for the first time.

Company officials expect just 20 percent of 2010 model TSX sales to be V-6 models. But the new, 280-horsepower engine, plus revised suspension tuning and 18-inch, high-performance tires make the TSX undeniably sporty, not just mildly sporty.

Best of all, the TSX continues with competitive pricing in both four- and six-cylinder models.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is up just \$150, to \$30,120, from the base price for a 2009 model. The 2010 price is for a base,



ASSOCIATED PRESS/Courtesy of Acura

With added power, the 2010 Acura TSX with V-6 engine feels more at ease at higher speeds.

front-wheel drive TSX with 201-horsepower, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine and either a six-speed manual transmission or a five-speed automatic.

The starting retail price for a 2010 Acura TSX with 280-horsepower, 3.5-liter V-6 is \$35,660. A five-speed automatic transmission with Sport-Shift, which can be shifted manually without a clutch pedal, is the only transmission for the V-6.

Competitors include the

BMW 3-Series with 230-horsepower six cylinder, which starts at \$34,425 for a 2009 model with manual transmission. With an automatic, the 3-Series sedan with six-cylinder engine starts at \$35,750.

The Lexus IS 250 with V-6 generates 204 horses, which is about what the four-cylinder TSX has, but was priced at \$32,180 with manual transmission as a 2009 model. The Lexus IS 350 with 306-horsepower V-6 and automatic has a starting MSRP, including

destination charge, of \$37,630 for a 2009 model.

Of course, there's still the matter that the TSX is front-wheel drive, while the BMW and Lexus are rear-drive cars. And sports car enthusiasts argue that rear-drive provides true sports car handling.

But there's little doubt that the new TSX is well-equipped, and its federal government fuel mileage ratings are on par with other luxury, six-cylinder-powered sedans.

Standard features on every TSX include seats trimmed in perforated leather, power-adjustable and heated front seats, power moonroof, Bluetooth phone interface, high-intensity discharge (HID) headlamps, XM satellite radio with complimentary service period, and USB and auxiliary jack connectivity ports built into the center console.

The test Acura TSX V-6 had excellent fit and finish, with no body gap or trim piece out of place even a smidge. And the engine, with 254 foot-pounds of torque peaking at 5,000 rpm, punched the car forward easily from stop lights.

Even though the TSX with

At a glance

Price as tested: \$35,660
Engine: 3.5-liter, single overhead cam, 60-degree V-6 with VTEC
City/highway fuel economy: 18/27 miles per gallon
Length: 186.1 inches
Wheelbase: 106.4 inches
Curb weight: 3,680 pounds
Built: Japan
Destination charge: \$810

V-6 is some 200 pounds heavier than the four-cylinder TSX, it sure doesn't feel like it. The car feels light and more at ease at high speeds than the four-cylinder TSX, thanks to the increased engine power.

The shifts were smooth through the transmission, unless I worked it manually for even more gusto. The Sport-Shift actually held downshifts so I could use engine braking on downhill.

In city traffic, this Acura got up to speed limits so quickly I had to consciously watch the speedometer to keep from going over.