

Daily Herald

AUTOFOCUS

dh dailyherald.com

AutoSunday

Take time to drive car safely in winter

Since Old Man winter showed up in a big way this week, I thought I would share a few cold weather tips.

When you park your car for the night or at work, make sure you turn your wipers off. This way when you start your car they won't turn on. If you turn on the wipers when they are frozen to the windshield you can do bad and expensive damage to the wiper mechanism.

Always make sure the wipers are free from the windshield and the windshield is scraped clean before turning them on.

Also, always make sure you clear all the windows before driving. Have you ever seen someone driving down the street looking out of a little peep hole because they didn't take the time to scrape the windows? Not a good idea, so keep a good snow scraper and brush in the car.

Make sure that you keep your gas tank at least half full. If you have ever gotten stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic you know how scary that can be when running on fumes. Running out of gas can also be dangerous in frigid temperatures.

Don't have your car washed when the temperature dips down to the low teens or below. You could potentially freeze the doors closed or freeze up a door lock.

Have the air pressure checked in your tires. A low tire could cause a handling problem, not to mention the damage that can occur to the sidewall of the tire.

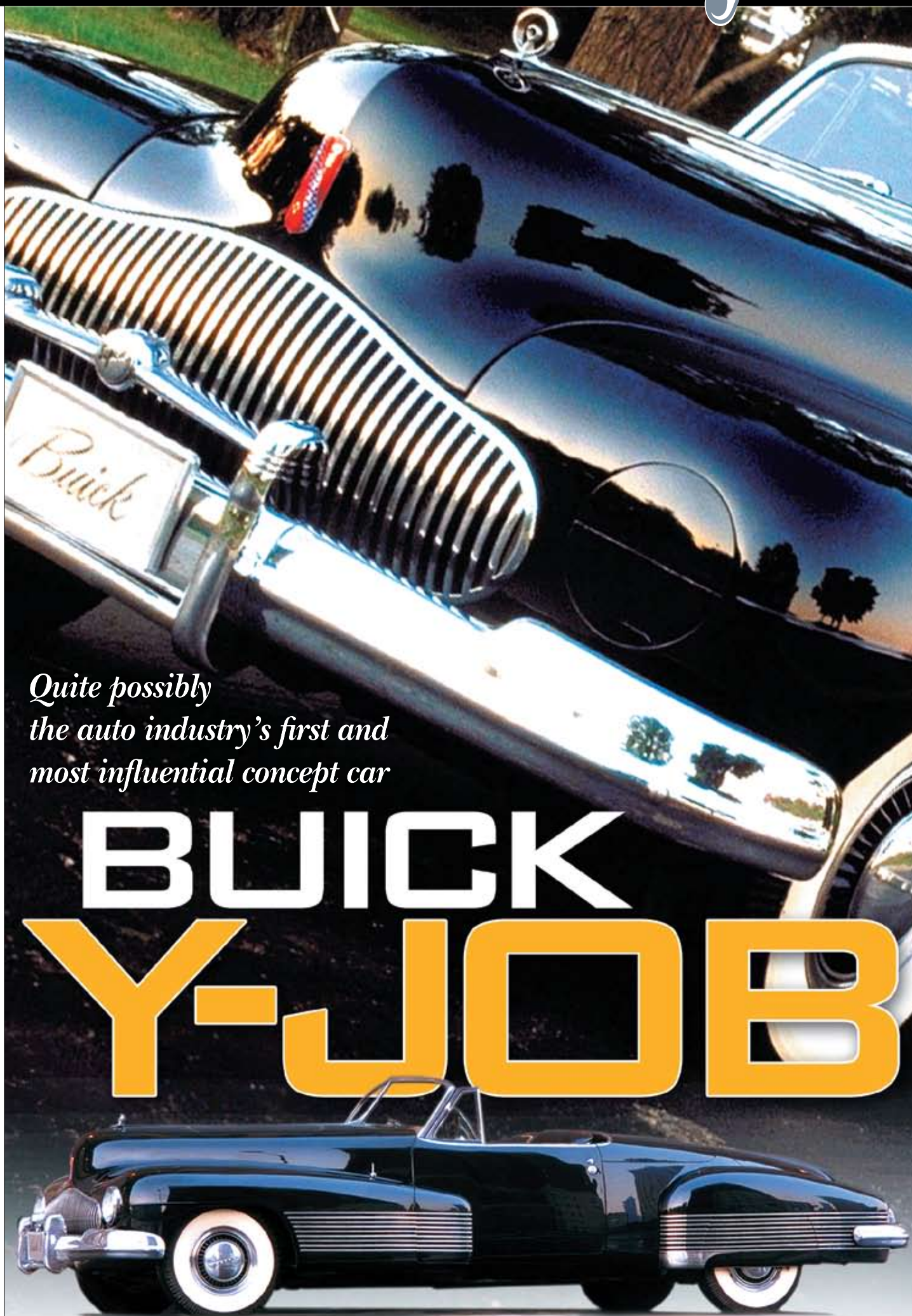
Q. I am returning a leased auto to Lexus of Schaumburg before the end of the three-year lease as I will be out of town when the lease expires. What kind of release forms should I get from them as they require payment to the normal end of the lease?

A. I am not 100 percent sure of all the ins and outs of leasing, but here is what I do know. You will turn the vehicle in to the Lexus dealer but I believe a third party will do the inspection. You should get some kind of a form from the dealer stating when you turned it in and what the mileage was.

Since you are not going to be around, you might want to take some pictures showing the condition of the vehicle inside and out. You did not say how early you are turning it in but it should not matter because as you said you have to pay until the end of the lease anyway.

Note: If you're thinking of donating your old car, it's a nice tax write-off for you and could help someone in need. There are several organizations that will accept donated cars. One I'm familiar with is the CARS Ministry of Willow Creek Community Church. For more information, visit willowcreek.org/cars or call (847) 765-0100.

• Douglas Automotive is at 312 S. Hager Ave., Barrington, (847) 381-0454, and 7218B Virginia Road, Crystal Lake, (815) 356-0440. For more information, visit online at douglasautomotive.com. Send questions to underthehood@dailyherald.com.



Quite possibly the auto industry's first and most influential concept car

BUICK Y-JOB



BY MALCOLM GUNN
Wheelbase Communications

Chances are you have never seen it, or even heard of it, but there's a little piece of the 1938 Buick Y-Job in every one of today's automobiles.

That's because this 20-foot-long dream machine just happens to be one of the first — if not the first — concept car to ever be built. From its hidden headlights to the tip of its massive rear bumper, the Y-Job is pure automotive sculpture that was never intended to be sold. It was built for one reason only: to stare into the face of the future.

Before its conception, most automakers really didn't look too far down the road. They simply went from rough sketch, to blueprint and then straight to the production line.

The Y-Job changed all that. The car was all about possibilities. It was a what-if peak into the future of four-wheeled transportation. It was a test of ideas, both practical and fanciful. Today we'd call the process "out-of-the-box thinking" or "pushing the envelope," but in the 1930s, the Y-Job was simply out of this world.

The idea sprung from the fertile mind of Harley Earl, who was head of General Motors' Art and Color Section. Earl's background made him perfectly suited to the role of stylist. Before joining the company in 1926, he had worked in Hollywood, Calif., creating custom bodies for Earl Automobile Works, a company founded by his father. Among the rich and the famous who patronized the business were silent movie stars Tom Mix and Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. The company also built aircraft fuselages, an area of

Fine Lines 1938 Buick Y-Job

design that would influence young Earl for the rest of his life.

Once at GM, Earl set about making a name for himself and impressing his new boss, Alfred P. Sloan, the company's president. It was the farsighted Sloan who recognized the merits of developing a separate styling department within the corporation's structure. This would, he reasoned, give GM a huge advantage over its competitors by injecting the creative process into what was then a purely engineering exercise.

One of Earl's first tasks was to work on the 1927 LaSalle, an all-new and upscale brand that would come to rival Cadillac. In March of that year, the LaSalle reached dealer showrooms and was an immediate success. Buyers raved about the car's longer, lower and wider stance, a theme that would be repeated on many of the designer's future

creations.

Not everything Earl designed was as successful as the LaSalle. Many of his early works were altered by members of the engineering division who viewed his Art and Color section as a direct threat to their independence.

Earl's development of the Buick Y-Job (the letter "Y" was used by the aircraft industry to denote a prototype) avoided outside interference from other GM departments as much as possible. The two-door convertible body was intended to sit on an existing Buick Century chassis and run with a stock 320-cubic-inch inline eight-cylinder engine that produced 141 horsepower.

Making the Y-Job streamlined and fresh meant lowering the body and lengthening its hood and boat-tail-shaped trunk. From the ground to the top of its raked and shortened wind screen the car was a mere 58 inches tall. The lowering was partially accomplished by installing tiny 13-inch-diameter wheels.

Earl also eliminated the traditional running boards and

installed flush-mounted push-button door handles and thin chrome strips along car's massive fenders to emphasize the concept's long and low styling. The nose retained a version of the Century's toothy grille but the removal of the headlight pods from their traditional spot atop the fenders and concealing them just above the bumper was an important contribution to the Y-Job's shape-of-tomorrow looks.

As a final touch, the first of what would become Buick's "bombsight" hood ornaments was affixed to the hood.

Although primarily a theoretical styling exercise, the Y-Job contained a number of important technical advancements, such as finned brake drums (another aircraft-inspired idea), power windows and a power-operated top that, when not in use, retracted inside its own compartment and was concealed by a hinged steel cover. Corvettes of the future would benefit from that clever bit of design magic.

Years before formal market research and focus groups were used to gauge opinion, Earl used the Y-Job for his day-to-day transportation. He could often be spotted heading to and from the office, no doubt receiving direct feedback as he cruised around the streets of Detroit.

After a career spanning more than 30 years with General Motors, Earl retired. By then, the Y-Job had spawned dozens of other dream machines produced by hundreds of designers, all with a mission to imagine the cars and trucks of the future and turn them into full-size, three-dimensional expressions of their skill and creativity.

Toyota Prius still tops in mileage

BY ANN M. JOB
For The Associated Press

There's a little something extra for car buyers who have their hearts set on top fuel mileage in the Toyota Prius. But they'd better not get tired of the car's wedge shape.

The world's best-selling gasoline-electric hybrid car is out for 2010 with slight increases in length and width, more horsepower, improved steering, upgraded interior and new features, but with the same shape as before and pretty much the same exterior styling.

It turns out the Prius' wedge shape, subtly honed so updates for 2010 aren't even likely to be noticed, helps make for an extremely efficient and "slippery through the air" coefficient of drag.

It's this smooth movement through air and lack of air turbulence that helps give the Prius a fuel economy rating from the federal government that's increased slightly this year, going from a combined city/highway 46 miles per gallon for a 2009 model to 50 mpg. This means the Prius remains the highest-mileage vehicle with internal combustion engine in America.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, of \$22,750 hasn't changed from 2009.

With each succeeding generation, the Prius has grown larger, and the 2010 mid-size model is no exception.

It's 0.6 inch longer, overall, than last year's model but rides on the same 106.3-inch, front-wheel drive platform. It's also 0.8 inch wider and tips the scales at more than 3,000 pounds, which is some 100 more than the previous car.

I noticed a heftier feel in the test car, and a more connected feel to the steering compared with the artificial feel that the steering had in earlier Priuses.

But the most noticeable improvement is the energetic power. The new Prius uses a 1.8-liter, double overhead cam, four-cylinder engine whose larger displacement from last year's 1.6 liters contributes to more horsepower — now 98 — and good fuel mileage because the engine doesn't have to work so much at high revs.

Even the continuously variable transmission works well to supply the power when needed. Some of this is due to the "modes" of travel that drivers can select to tailor the ride to their preferences.

For example, in the "eco" mode, the Prius seeks to maximize fuel economy, and the acceleration in the tester showed it with lackluster acceleration from stop lights. But in "power" mode, I squealed the tires.



COURTESY OF TOYOTA
The 2010 Toyota Prius delivers more horsepower than earlier models.

At a glance

Price as tested: \$33,079

Engine: 1.8-liter, double overhead cam, four cylinder engine with 60-kilowatt electric motor

City/highway fuel economy: 51/48 miles per gallon

Length: 175.6 inches

Wheelbase: 106.3 inches

Curb weight: 3,042 pounds

Built: Japan



Harley Earl's two-door concept car contained a number of technical advancements, including power windows.