

Keys to Survival

The lessons of winter led to a final exam

By Jennifer Cansen

When I returned to my native New Hampshire after seven years in Chicago, I foolishly remembered it being less snowy here than it is there. But it was only a few days into winter when I looked out the window and saw just a tiny corner of my traction-challenged Honda Prelude; the rest was buried beneath an enormous snowdrift.

The Prelude is a car of summer — sporty, fun, impractical. It's also my ex-husband's baby. I'd had it meticulously detailed, removing both a sticky soda patch on the front console and a slew of loose sunflower seeds from the trunk. A family of four could have survived for weeks on the crumbs in the backseat alone.

But it was still his car. And, judging from the fact that it was now encased in a solid cocoon of ice I knew it lacked the horsepower to extricate itself from, it was time for a new one.

A quick search online revealed that the pre-owned car of my dreams was just a few towns over, at the Exeter Subaru dealership. I chipped the Prelude loose and headed over, drifting across the icy roads like an air hockey puck. The salesman were all outside digging cars out when I got there. I'm certain it was the easiest deal my guy ever made; I was practically flinging money at him even before he got his mittens off.

There was just the small matter of ascertaining the Prelude's trade-in value. I



tried to explain that it had had a rough life.

"Oh, I'm sure things can't be that bad. Mileage?"

"Ninety-five thousand."

"Has the car ever been in an accident?"

"Oh, yes ... let me see ... it was

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diagonally broadsided and nearly totaled by a drunk driver when it was new."

"Uh huh." He looks pained. "I'm afraid that's going to affect the trade-in value a bit." He makes some notes.

"— and a teenager backed into it in a parking lot a few years after that. Kid couldn't see around his Samoyed in the back seat."

"Okayyy ..." He's still writing.

"And maybe three years ago I drove into the side of our house." His pen stops moving. "It's a long story I don't really want to get into, but the whole passenger-side panel had to be replaced."

He sighs, turns the card over, and starts writing on it sideways.

"Anything else?" He's intrigued at the possibility there might actually be more.

"No, but the brake light comes on and off for no reason."

"An electrical problem. Anything else?"

"The check engine light came on about two weeks ago."

He looks up. "That means it won't pass inspection."

"Nope," I say cheerfully.

He looks defeated. "Well, I'm going to have our guy go out and have a look. He may want to take it for a short drive."

"He's taking his life in his hands."

"You're not supposed to say stuff like that, you know."

When their guy comes back, the trade-in value is scribbled on a small piece of paper and silently slid across the table. No negotiating is expected. We both know I'm lucky they're not charging me to haul it away. With obvious misgivings, they hand me the keys to my new-to-me Subaru and I drive off a happy woman.

Sayonara, Honda. **NH**