Stranded Motorists Work to Survive in Snowstorms

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) _ It's not quite winter yet, yet three times this season, long lines of motorists have found themselves stranded on highways for uncomfortable, unnerving hours, wondering what to do next. Though it sounds like a nightmare, experts say they did the right thing by staying put.

"We didn't know what to do," said Suhani Bhushan, 19, who was among some 300 people who spent a frigid night inside a car on Highway 402 near Sarnia, Ontario, after drifting snow and blinding whiteouts made a mess of things last week. Buses and military helicopters freed everyone by Tuesday afternoon.

"No one wanted to talk because it was so cold," said Bhushan, who was stranded with her parents and sister.

Experts say the advice to stay in your car if stranded is especially true if there's no other shelter in sight and there's still gas in the engine to power the heat.

"There's nothing you can do out in the middle of nowhere," said Ben Jones, a state trooper in Indiana, where more than 100 motorists were trapped in their cars during heavy lake-effect snow near Valparaiso on Monday.

"It's best to just use your cell phone and stay in your vehicle until we can get out there and get somebody to get you out of there," Jones said.

The Department of Homeland Security urges travelers to know what they're headed into when they get on the road, and to be prepared with a disaster kit that includes blankets and a shovel.

"It's all about safety," agreed AAA spokesman Shaun Seufert in Buffalo, where hundreds of cars and trucks were stopped for nearly 24 hours on Interstate 90 on Dec. 1 and 2.

He listed the must-haves for winter driving: fully charged cell phone, small shovel, food and water, heavy gloves, scarf and hat, and a warning device to signal other drivers, like flares or reflective triangles.

Experts say stranded drivers should run the engine about 10 minutes every hour to warm up and to crack the window and keep the tailpipe clear of snow to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

The reminders came as snow and bitter cold that plagued the Midwest for days landed on parts of Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. The frigid air stretched into the deep South, where hard freeze warnings worried Florida vegetable farmers. Hundreds of schools were closed or opening late.

Felix Puyarena of Buffalo was in no danger of becoming stranded in a car. Despite temperatures in the teens, he rode his bicycle about a mile over plowed streets Tuesday to get to a subway station, then took the train to a medical appointment.

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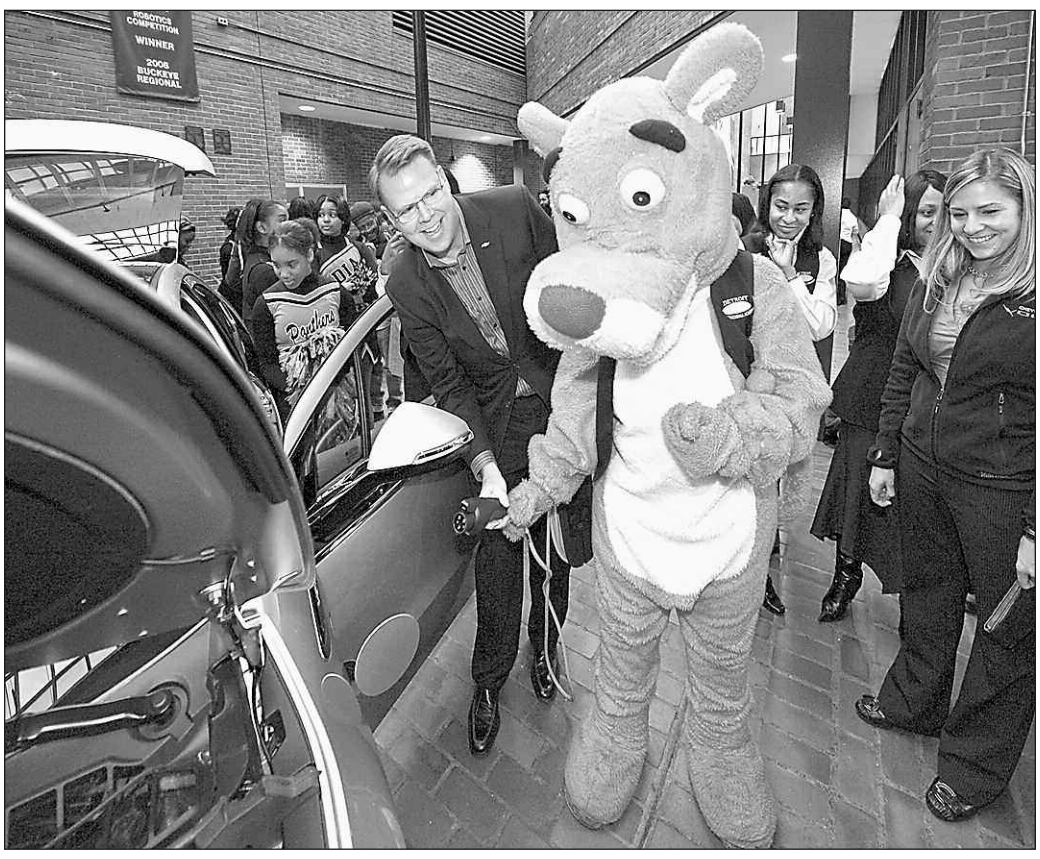


Chevrolet Vice President Jim Campbell assists the Pink Panther in recharging a Volt following the auction sales announcement in Detroit last week.

Chevrolet Dealer Rick Hendrick Buys First Volt at 'Auction' for $225,000

DETROIT – Rick Hendrick, owner of Hendrick Motorsports and chairman of Hendrick Automotive Group, has purchased the first Chevrolet Volt offered for sale.

Proceeds will benefit science, math, engineering, and technology education initiatives through the Detroit Public Schools Foundation.

The vehicle, bearing the vehicle identification number BU10002, was sold for $225,000 through an online auction that closed Tuesday, Dec. 14.

"This was an opportunity to own a piece of history while giving back to the community," said Hendrick, an avid car collector. "I have been a Chevrolet dealer for more than 30 years, and the Volt is one of the most exciting and important new cars since we opened our first dealership in 1976.

"Hendrick Motorsports has been racing Chevys since 1984, and any success we've had is due to the quality of our people," continued Hendrick, who has won a record 10 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series car owner championships.

"The Detroit Public Schools will prepare the next generation of talented engineers and technicians who will help Chevrolet and Hendrick Motorsports compete at a high level on the racetrack every weekend."

Detroit Public Schools Foundation President and CEO, Chacona W. Johnson, believes the donation will make a meaningful difference for many Detroit students:

"With Mr. Hendrick's contribution, we have the opportunity to inspire thousands of children to learn about science, technology, engineering, and math," said Johnson.

"That inspiration will help make Detroit Public Schools students more successful in higher education, and better prepared for careers in the 21st century workforce."

Here are a few examples of what the foundation could provide to Detroit students with $225,000:

Send 4,500 students to compete in a science fair

It costs $50 per student to compete in the annual Science and Engineering Fair of Metro Detroit, including entry fees and bussing expenses. The fair is open to students in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties, from grades six through 12. Each year up to eight students from the Detroit competition may be selected to participate in the International Science and Engineering Fair.

Provide 800 kits for robotics competitions – the $280 kit for the FIRST Lego League robotics competition includes everything a team needs to build an autonomous robot. The competition, for students in grades four through eight, is based on students' scientific research, as well as their robotic construction and programming.

Send 140 students to NASA space camp – it costs $16,000 to send 10 students and chaperones to NASA space camp in Huntsville, Ala., including tuition and travel expenses. During the five-day camp, students apply classroom math and science skills to shuttle training missions, such as moon walking practice and orbiter-egress training.

"Every aspect of the Volt – from its aerodynamic shape to its battery chemistry – is a testament to the importance of math and sciences," said General Motors North America President Mark Reuss. "Now, the first Volt will help cultivate the next generation of engineers who will build upon the Volt's innovative technologies."

The Chevrolet Volt is an electric vehicle that can operate under a range of weather climates and driving conditions with little concern of being stranded by a depleted battery.

The Volt has a total driving range of up to 379 miles, based on EPA estimates. For the first 35 miles, the Volt can drive gas- and tailpipe-emissions-free using a full charge of electricity stored in its 16-kWh lithium-ion battery. When the Volt's battery runs low, a gas powered engine/generator seamlessly operates to extend the driving range another 344 miles on a full tank.

Chevrolet began shipping Volts from Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly last week. Hendrick will take delivery of his Volt later this month.

Also, the first Volt sold at dealer-retail occurred in New Jersey last week.

California Warms to EV Car Chargers

By DAISY NGUYEN
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) – An alliance of automakers, utilities, regulators and clean-air advocates released an ambitious plan last week to make California a national leader in accommodating electric vehicles with charging terminals available in thousands of homes, office buildings, shopping malls and other sites within the next decade.

The California Plug-In Electric Vehicle Collaborative touted its plan after the first-ever Nissan Leaf, a mass-market, all-electric car, was delivered to a customer in Redwood City, Calif., over the weekend.

Meanwhile, the first 150 Chevrolet Volts left a Detroit auto plant on Monday and were expected to arrive in California showrooms in the coming days.

Work is under way in the state to upgrade existing charging terminals and install thousands more to accommodate electric vehicles.

One company is even developing a network of "switching stations" where motorists can pull in and swap out their spent batteries.

"All eyes are on California. It will host without question the largest rollout, the greatest numbers of EVs in the country, and it will also have the charge and switch infrastructure," said Jonathan Read, president of Ecotality, which will soon begin installing 1,600 public charging stations in San Diego and Los Angeles that resemble a giant iPod with a cord and plug attached.

The plan, which supporters believe could serve as a model for other states, outlines steps to get charging stations easily installed at homes and then in high-traffic public areas and apartment buildings to encourage drivers to switch from gasoline-powered vehicles to plug-in electric vehicles.

The collaborative hopes to provide a positive experience for early owners of electric vehicles so they can spread the word. Its goal is to see a million plug-in hybrid and battery-powered cars in the state by 2020.

The plan recommends making installation of home charging stations affordable by offering rebates from the state and regional air quality districts. To further lower costs, the state could reduce registration fees for battery-powered cars, and utilities could offer cheaper charging rates during off-peak hours when there is less demand on the electric grid.

Through the alliance, automakers can notify utilities where customers will likely plug in to prevent a "clustering" of electric vehicles charging in a neighborhood all at once and overloading the system, advocates said.

"We want the whole process from getting the charger, figuring out which one to get, getting it installed, having it operate, all of that to be a seamless, easy exercise because in a sense you're replacing the gas station with the charger in your house," said Ted Craver, chief executive of Edison International, the parent company of Southern California Edison.

Businesses and municipalities should get incentives to add plug-in vehicles to their fleets, thereby exposing workers to the technology, the plan said.

When automakers first trumpeted battery-powered cars in the 1990s, California installed about 1,300 public charging stations at homes and in public places. Those stations mostly went unused when carmakers pulled the plug on some of their early electric models.

The California Energy Commission said it is upgrading those stations to meet new industry standards and accommodate the latest plug-in electric vehicles.

The commission is helping to fund more than 4,000 residential and public charging stations through state funds. Additional money from the U.S. Department of Energy will go toward charging stations in San Diego, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay area and Sacramento.

Advocates said past efforts to introduce electric vehicles to the mainstream car market fizzled because gas prices were low, batteries were weak, and carmakers and utilities were not working together.

"This time is not going to be a repeat. You can say the last time was a dry run," said Roland Hwang, transportation program director of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The unusual partnership between government, private companies, environmentalists and public health advocates is key to ensuring that electric vehicles will take off in California, said Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board.

"Nobody is forcing us to do this; it is actually all of us getting together and saying we all have a common stake in the success of this new market, what can we do to make that happen," Nichols said.

Early reviews from consumers have been positive.

2011 Jeep Compass Borrows Design from Cherokee

Offering unsurpassed 4x4 fuel economy and off-road capability in the compact-SUV segment, the new 2011 Jeep Compass features a stunning new sophisticated design, with cues coming directly from the brand's premium icon, the new Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Coupled with a host of interior refinements, and improved ride and handling characteristics in all conditions – courtesy of upgraded steering and suspension systems – the new Jeep Compass offers a unique blend of premium styling, capability, efficiency and value that is unmatched in the compact-SUV segment.

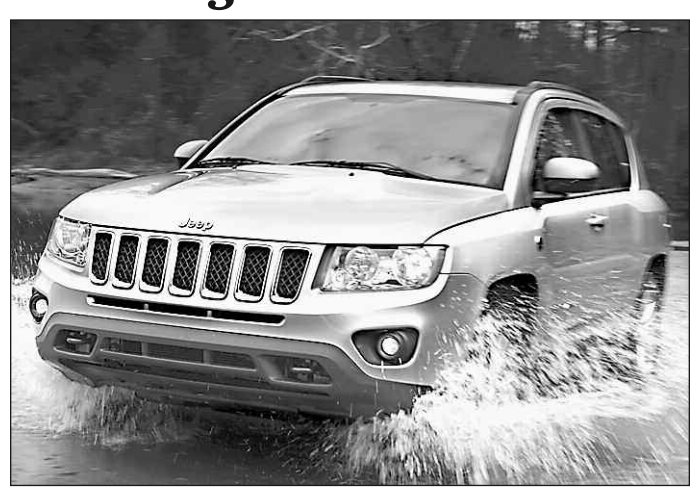
"With the new 2011 Jeep Compass, we've applied the premium design cues of our award-winning new Grand Cherokee," said Mike Manley, President and CEO — Jeep Brand, Chrysler Group LLC. "Combined with new interior appointments, and refinements to the suspension and steering systems, Jeep Compass provides consumers the ultimate combination of styling, capability, fuel economy, efficiency, safety and value in the important compact-SUV segment."

Delivering the packaging and interior flexibility of an SUV with the performance, handling, fuel economy and price of a compact car, the new 2011 Jeep Compass also boasts more than 30 safety and security features, including standard side-curtain air bags, electronic stability program (ESC), electronic roll mitigation, Hill-start Assist (with manual transmission), side curtain air bags for all rows and available front-seat-mounted side air bags.

Chrysler says that the new 2011 Jeep Compass has a distinct family resemblance to the all-new, premium 2011 Jeep Grand Cherokee.

With a new hood, new front fenders, new fascia and new headlamps as well as a new grille that has been detailed with a small dose of chrome surrounding the traditional seven slots found on all Jeep vehicles, the new face of the Compass features a more serious, yet sophisticated, appearance. Forward lighting performance is improved with the use of quad reflector headlamps, and the fog lamps are now high output projector lamps. Adding an element of muscle, the hood has been enhanced with a subtle power bulge. The result is a vehicle that projects an attitude that is much more serious and conveys the Compass' capability in all weather and driving conditions.

New brightwork throughout the exterior lends an upscale touch without compromising the off-road performance of the Compass. A band of protective cladding has been added for 2011, serving to fend off debris when driving in challenging weather conditions or off-road, and providing a new appearance.



2011 Jeep Compass

This trend continues with enhancements to the rear of the Compass. A new rear fascia, new body-color rear spoiler and subtle, upscale touches including new LED taillamps and on the Limited model, bright trim on the step pad and a chrome exhaust tip adorn the new 2011 Jeep Compass.

Topping it off, a new set of roof rails were designed with a slimmed down appearance and a small amount of brightwork. The 2011 Compass sports new, standard 17-inch aluminum wheels, and 18-inch aluminum or chrome-clad wheels are available on Limited models.

USDA Supports New 'FlexFuel' Marketing Program

The Clean Fuels Foundation announced last week that they are working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to expand public awareness on fueling options available to owners of flexible fuel vehicles (FFVs).

The FFV awareness effort is targeting several areas across the country to increase the use of ethanol blends in Flex Fuel vehicles.

"Breaking through the blend wall begins with the 8 million FlexFuel vehicles on the road today, and reaching these drivers to make sure they know they can use ethanol blends up to 85 percent," said Agriculture Under Secretary for Rural Development, Dallas Tonsager.

Tonsager also noted FFVs of any age can use E15 or any other gasoline-ethanol blend up to E85 and can take advantage of favorable market pricing on these blends when offered.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is also supporting the effort, and EPA spokesman Paul Argyropolous said, "More frequent use of higher blends of ethanol in FlexFuel vehicles is one avenue that can further support meeting the volume requirements of the renewable fuel standard, which in turn results in addtional greenhouse gas reductions.

"When fully implemented, the program will reduce GHG emissions equivalent to taking 27 million cars off the road. This awareness effort is another avenue in which federal and private interests can work together to attain these goals." Organizers of the awareness effort say they will be focusing on several different areas that already have FlexFuel pumps. Ohio, Florida, Georgia, Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Washington, D.C. areas will be among the states targeted.