

Free Battery Wellness Clinics from AAA

October is Fall Car Care Month and AAA East Central is hosting Free Battery Wellness Clinics to celebrate. State-of-the-art diagnostic equipment will confirm whether your battery will hold a charge. If a new battery is needed, one can be installed on the spot. The high-quality, AAA-branded battery comes with a three-year, free-replacement warranty, and AAA members receive a discount. Battery checks will be available from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at these AAA office locations:

Tuesday, Oct. 10

Independence

- 5700 Brecksville Rd., 216-606-6300

Thursday, Oct. 19

Lyndhurst

- 2725 5356 Mayfield Rd., 440-473-0700

Tuesday, Oct. 24

Strongsville

- 17220 Royalton Rd., 440-783-3395

No appointment necessary. If your battery fails the test, new batteries will be available for purchase and installed on the spot at a special AAA Member price.

Free Car Seat Roundup October 19

Children deserve the best protection we can give them, so don't forget to check the expiration dates on your child safety and booster seats. Exposure to sun, cold and heat, as well as general wear and tear, degrade the plastic and foam in the seats, so they begin to lose their effectiveness. Many car seats in storage have also exceeded their "life span" and should be collected and destroyed. AAA will be hosting the following Free Car Seat Roundup: Thursday, October 19 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at AAA Independence, 5700 Brecksville Road. For more information, call 216-606-6300.

AAA Shred Event October 21

AAA East Central is hosting a free event Saturday, October 21. Members are invited to bring up to five storage boxes (nonmembers, three boxes) filled with paperwork containing personally identifiable information for free-on-site shredding to reduce the risk of identity theft. All shredded materials will be recycled. The time is from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the AAA Independence branch office (5700 Brecksville Road).

Ship sends Celebrity Cruises to new heights

About-to-launch *Celebrity Ascent* set rise above expectations

Celebrity Cruises has a history of sitting near the top of the best cruise lines worldwide. Its detailed ships offer the finest amenities that create the ideal vacation at sea.

Its nearing the launch of its newest ship – a vessel that keeps Celebrity rising near the top of the cruise line ladder. It even has the perfect name: *Celebrity Ascent*.

Celebrity Ascent will debut in November. The *Edge Series* ship is a resort at sea. It shines brightly among the industry's newest vessels ready to set sail.

Guests will enjoy signature experiences, including a unique outward-facing design that maximizes views and outdoor areas, allowing guests to connect with the surrounding environment. A robust food-and-beverage program includes more than 30 choices from casual to fine dining, as well as spacious and sleek staterooms, that cater to all travelers from solo and couples, to multi-generational family groups.

Incorporating all the features that made her sister ships in the *Edge Series*, *Celebrity Ascent* will offer favored signature experiences, like:

The Theatre – It takes entertainment at sea to a new level with state-of-the-art technology and experiential, imaginative performances.

The Rooftop Garden – The ultimate



TAKE ME HIGHER – *Celebrity Ascent* will set sail in November, taking the cruise line's *Edge Series* to a new level. Image: Celebrity Cruises.

outdoor haven, where guests can enjoy live music, movies, infinity float pools and even al fresco dining at the Rooftop Garden Grill.

The Spa – Holistic wellness takes center stage through 120 destination-inspired treatments, the SEA Thermal Suite features eight distinctive therapeutic experiences inspired by nature, plus specialty treatment beds, a full-service salon and barber.

The sprawling Resort Deck – It features a main pool lined with cabanas, two-story martini-glass-shaped hot tubs

and The Solarium, an adults-only, tranquil spa-inspired retreat.

The Sunset Bar designed by Nate Berkus – An international beach club ambiance meets fresh sea breezes and boundless views.

The Magic Carpet® – The world's first cantilevered lounge and gathering space at sea sits on the edge of the ship, offering a new way to drink, dine and socialize.

Inventive culinary experiences – Like the three-story Eden Bar and Restaurant that features floor-to-ceiling views, or the fully immersive and animated Le Petit

Chef dinner.

The Grand Plaza and Martini Bar – Stun guests with an interactive chandelier and jaw-dropping Flair, Flash, Fusion bartender shows.

Modernized accommodation options – Like the Infinite Veranda® that transforms from window to terrace with the push of a button, and the AquaClass® staterooms built with thoughtful design and exclusive amenities.

Celebrity Ascent travelers also will enjoy enhanced entertaining offerings like:

Nightly entertainment – The ultimate nightlife experience treats guests to an open-air celebration with live performances, live music and a DJ.

New production shows – Three spectacular new shows in The Theatre, new interactive digital experiences and shows in The Club and new engaging immersive shows in the Eden Bar and Restaurant – all featuring world-class dancers, vocalists, musicians and specialty artists.

Redesigned Casino floor and new games – It will feature a new gaming floor complete with a new layout, new design and new slot machines.

Redesigned Art Gallery – The space is thoughtfully reimagined, allowing guests to better experience priceless art pieces, and enjoy exclusive auctions and

even column with other columns

Hennessey unveils Mustang Dark Horse

There is no limit to the impact of the Ford Mustang. It gets better – one generation at a time. Hennessey Performance recently unveiled the newest version of Ford's leading sports car.

It boasts high-performance, supercharged upgrades for the seventh-generation 2024 Ford S650 Mustang Dark Horse. The comprehensive turn-key package dramatically boosts engine output and enhances the appearance of the most recent iteration of America's iconic pony car.

Ford's redesigned "S650" Mustang Dark Horse is fitted with the automaker's naturally aspirated Gen-4 Coyote 5.0-liter V8. It upgrades the Dark Horse with GT500 connecting rods and a dual throttle body to earn a factory rating of 500 horsepower.

The vehicle can be ordered with a Tremec six-speed manual (3.73 gears) or Ford's 10-speed automatic (3.55 gearing). Regardless of the transmission choice, the track-focused Mustang features upgraded multi-piston Brembo performance brakes on both axles.

Hennessey's experienced technicians, who have been "making fast cars faster" for 32 years, fit the Mustang's V8 with a high-performance supercharger and a high-flow air-induction system, upgraded fuel injectors, and a new fuel pump. Calibrated with an HPE Engine Management software upgrade, the "H850" Dark Horse produces 850



PONY EXPRESS – The 2024 Mustang Dark Horse packs as much as 850 horsepower. Image: NewsPress USA.

horsepower and 650 lb-ft of torque – a 70% increase in power.

To complement its potent powerplant, the Hennessey "H850" Ford Mustang Dark Horse is visually enhanced with a stylish carbon-fiber front splitter, carbon-fiber side skirts, and a carbon-fiber rear spoiler.

Completing the exterior cosmetic enhancements are a set of stunning forged aluminum alloy wheels. Hennessey's embroidered head restraints are fitted to the seats, while Hennessey's badging and script adorn the quarter panels and rear fascia. Unique "Heritage" graphics are optional.

"Our supercharged Mustang builds have continually been customer favorites over the years, and Ford's improved S650 platform will prove to be its most capable," said John Hennessey, company founder and CEO.

AAA Travel partners with review platform

AAA's recently launched Trip Canvas just got better. The Club is partnering with Feefo, the world's largest reviews platform, to enhance the Trip Canvas experience.

Trip Canvas is AAA's one-stop destination for users to plan their next vacation. Built-in travel savings, discounts and know-how can be found on the platform, and users will be able to see more than 18,000 reviews and ratings collected by verified AAA Members.

These reviews showcase feedback from AAA Members for hotels across the nation at which they stayed. This complements AAA's Diamond designation – awarded to hotels and restaurants that pass rigorous onsite inspections conducted by trained experts who evaluate the guest experience by using consistent, objective criteria.

The unique combination of verified-traveler reviews and AAA's unbiased professional inspections provide an unparalleled one-stop shop. This effort will continue to expand with the addition of cruise and tour reviews later this year.

Feefo's verified ratings and reviews help AAA Members see what fellow consumers thought of their hotel experience from cleanliness, staff, room and location. These reviews, combined with AAA Inspector reviews, provide a holistic view of service-level expectations and cleanliness to travelers. AAA also will benefit from the business-building insights Feefo's artificial-intelligence technology and tools provide.

"We are delighted to support the exciting launch of Feefo's verified reviews and analytics platform on Trip Canvas," said Tony Wheble, Feefo CEO. "This is a great testament to the strong relationships we have been building over the past year with AAA and their fantastic team all across the U.S."

"We value the voice of our members and those who chose to travel with AAA," said Paula Twidale, senior vice president of travel for AAA. "Trip Canvas is a dreaming tool designed for planning vacations, and having the benefit of others' experiences will help travelers curate their perfect trip."

New Cedar Point coaster is a rising star

Top Thrill 2 world's best triple-launch ride; debuts next year

Cedar Point is synonymous with thrill rides – particularly roller coasters. It's arguably the No. 1 thrill-ride destination in the U.S. Heck, it's even called The Roller Coaster Capital of the World®.

Located in Sandusky, the theme park boasts 17 roller coasters. They rank from death-defying to moderate; excitement is a given.

Cedar Point will add to its arsenal in 2024. Top Thrill 2 will debut. It will be the world's tallest and fastest triple-launch strata roller coaster. It redefines roller coaster innovation.

Cedar Point first pioneered the strata coaster – known as a roller coaster eclipsing a height of 400 feet – in 2003. Top Thrill 2 has not one but two 420-foot-tall towers – the equivalent of 39 stories – putting riders in the driver's seat of an unparalleled theme-park experience.

Top Thrill 2's formula allows riders to immerse themselves as they join the CP Racing Team and climb one of three sleek, high-performance racing vehicles. Each of the coaster's trains will feature open-air seating, providing heart-palpitating views on the world's first and only dual-tower vertical speedway.

Fueled by an all-linear synchronous motor (LSM) launch system, riders will



DROP IT – Cedar Point's newest roller coaster, Top Thrill 2, includes a pair of 420-foot towers. It will debut in 2024. *Image: Cedar Point.*

burst down the straightaway, reaching speeds of 74 mph, racing toward the sky on Top Thrill 2's original 420-foot-tall "top hat" tower. After experiencing weightlessness during the "rollback" – the coveted fan-favorite moment when the train's momentum isn't great enough to make it up and over the tower – the train shifts into reverse

and into its second launch, reaching speeds of 101 mph.

Riders will speed into a backward climb at a 90-degree angle on the track tower. Following a flash of weightlessness, the train shifts into drive and races forward into its third launch, clocking in at the ride's top speed of 120 mph.

It's an unprecedented experience that is only getting started.

Crossing over the **top-hat** tower, the train decelerates momentarily before diving into a 270-degree spiral and crossing the finish line. It's the ultimate ride – but would you expect anything less from Cedar Point.

"Top Thrill 2 will be the boldest and most advanced roller coaster Cedar Point has ever introduced. It's another one-of-a-kind that could only be built at Cedar Point," said Carrie Boldman, vice president and general manager of Cedar Point. "Our stamp on the industry is in roller coaster innovation, and that's solidified as we redefine the strata coaster into a mega-thrill that our guests will come from far and wide to experience."

Cedar Point has spent decades setting the standard in roller coast innovation, having introduced many of the tallest and fastest rides worldwide. It's the first park to introduce **the first** roller coasters 200-feet tall (the Magnum XL-200 hyper coaster), more than 300-feet tall (the Millennium Force giga coaster) and more than 400-feet tall (the former Top Thrill Dragster strata coaster).

Seekers of the greatest thrill rides on the planet needn't look further than Sandusky. Their mecca awaits on the shores of Lake Erie.

Thieves preying on catalytic converters

Prized metals make vital vehicle part a prime target

By Peter Bohr

After a day's work, Cathy Cobb switched on her Honda Element, only to be startled by a noise that could wake the dead. It was the second time in less than a year that a thief had ripped apart her car's exhaust system to steal its catalytic converter. The first time, the Honda had been in her driveway.

Catalytic converter theft has become an epidemic. From 2008 to 2015, vehicle owners reported 25,394 thefts, according to the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB). Since then, thefts have accelerated dramatically – 3,389 in 2019, 14,433 in 2020 and 52,206 in 2021. These numbers reflect thefts for which claims were filed with insurance companies.

Since the mid-1970s, nearly all gasoline-powered cars and trucks have been equipped with one or more catalytic converters, which are a part of a car's exhaust system. Catalytic converters scrub toxic gases and pollutants from the engine's exhaust using platinum, palladium, and rhodium.

Increased world demand has sent prices of these metals soaring tenfold from a decade or so ago. In early March 2022, rhodium was valued at nearly \$20,000 an ounce, palladium \$2,900 an ounce, and platinum \$1,100 an ounce.

Armed with little more than a wrench or a hacksaw, a thief can slither under a vehicle and remove a converter in minutes. Pickups and SUVs like Cobb's



QUITE A STEAL – Catalytic converters can fetch big bucks for thieves. *Image: NongAsimo. Adobe Stock*

Element are popular targets because they sit higher off the ground, making it easier for thieves to get to the converter.

Scrapyards typically pay a couple of hundred dollars or more for converters. Some converters from hybrid vehicles can fetch as much as \$1,400 because they contain more precious metals and they degrade less because the hybrid's gasoline engine doesn't run continuously. In turn, scrapyards sell converters to recyclers, which extract the metals.

Replacing a converter isn't cheap, running anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars, depending

on the vehicle and on how much damage a thief inflicts on the exhaust system.

About half of U.S. states have proposed or enacted legislation to address catalytic converter theft. A federal bill — the bipartisan Preventing Auto Recycling Theft (PART) Act – is being considered by Congress.

Unfortunately, catalytic converters are likely to be stolen from anywhere cars are parked, according to the NICB. So, what's a car owner to do to discourage thieves from swiping their converter? Here are the best ways to prevent that

from happening:

- If you have a garage, always park your car there rather than leaving it in the driveway.
- If you have a carport or parking space, install motion-detector security lights and set a car alarm.
- During the day, when you drive to work or somewhere away from home, avoid parking in isolated areas.
- Buy an antitheft device. Converter-protection devices have been developed for many vehicles frequently targeted by thieves. Depending on the vehicle, the shields cost \$140 to \$340, plus installation, which takes about an hour. For many vehicles, muffler shops can bend and weld rebar to form a cage around the converter.
- Etch your license plate number or VIN number on your car's converter to make it more easily identifiable to the police.

Fortunately, Cathy Cobb's comprehensive auto insurance policy covered replacing a stolen converter – although she had to pay out-of-pocket deductibles. And even though she purchased a protective shield for her most recent converter, she's now extra vigilant, making sure she always parks her beloved Honda in her garage.

Veteran automotive journalist Peter Bohr has been writing about cars for more than four decades.