

Bought a lemon? Know the law

By ANDY TRINCIA
Staff Writer

If you're in the market for a new or used car, it pays to know your rights if the car you buy turns out to be a "lemon." Under North Carolina's Automakers Responsibility Act — the so-called "lemon law" — a consumer who has purchased a defective new car on or after June 23, 1983, has the right to a hearing before an arbitration panel or even to sue the automaker.

For the lemon law to help the consumer, the manufacturer and dealer must be unable to repair the defects after a "reasonable" number of attempts, and the consumer must be deprived use of the car because of defects for a reasonable time.

Although the N.C. law doesn't define "reasonable," experts say there are some guidelines consumers can follow to know when to take action.

"Four repair attempts and 30 days without use of the car would probably be viewed as reasonable," said Jane Grimes, consumer protection specialist with the Attorney General's office.

"The first step you would take is to check the warranty to see if the manufacturer has a dispute resolution procedure which meets federal requirements," said Grimes. The resolution procedure includes arbitration panels set up by automakers often in conjunction with the Better Business Bureau.

The next step is to write the dealer and manufacturer notifying them of intent to revoke acceptance of a new car.

"If consumers don't get an acceptable result within 60 days of the letter, we recommend consumers consult attorneys and stop car payments," said Grimes.

Because the lemon law is relatively new, no figures were

available on successful cases involving arbitration or lawsuits.

"We know of some successful cases and we get many inquiries, but I can't tell you numbers. There are just no figures," Grimes said.

Unfortunately for used car buyers, the lemon law covers only new car sales.

"The situation with used cars is very bad," said George Leggett, another consumer protection specialist with the N.C. Attorney General's office who deals with used car sales, repairs and odometer rollbacks. "There's a misconception with the public with the time in which you can rescind the sale of the car and there are a large number of used cars being sold 'as-is' — that is, the dealer's not responsible after the car leaves the lot."

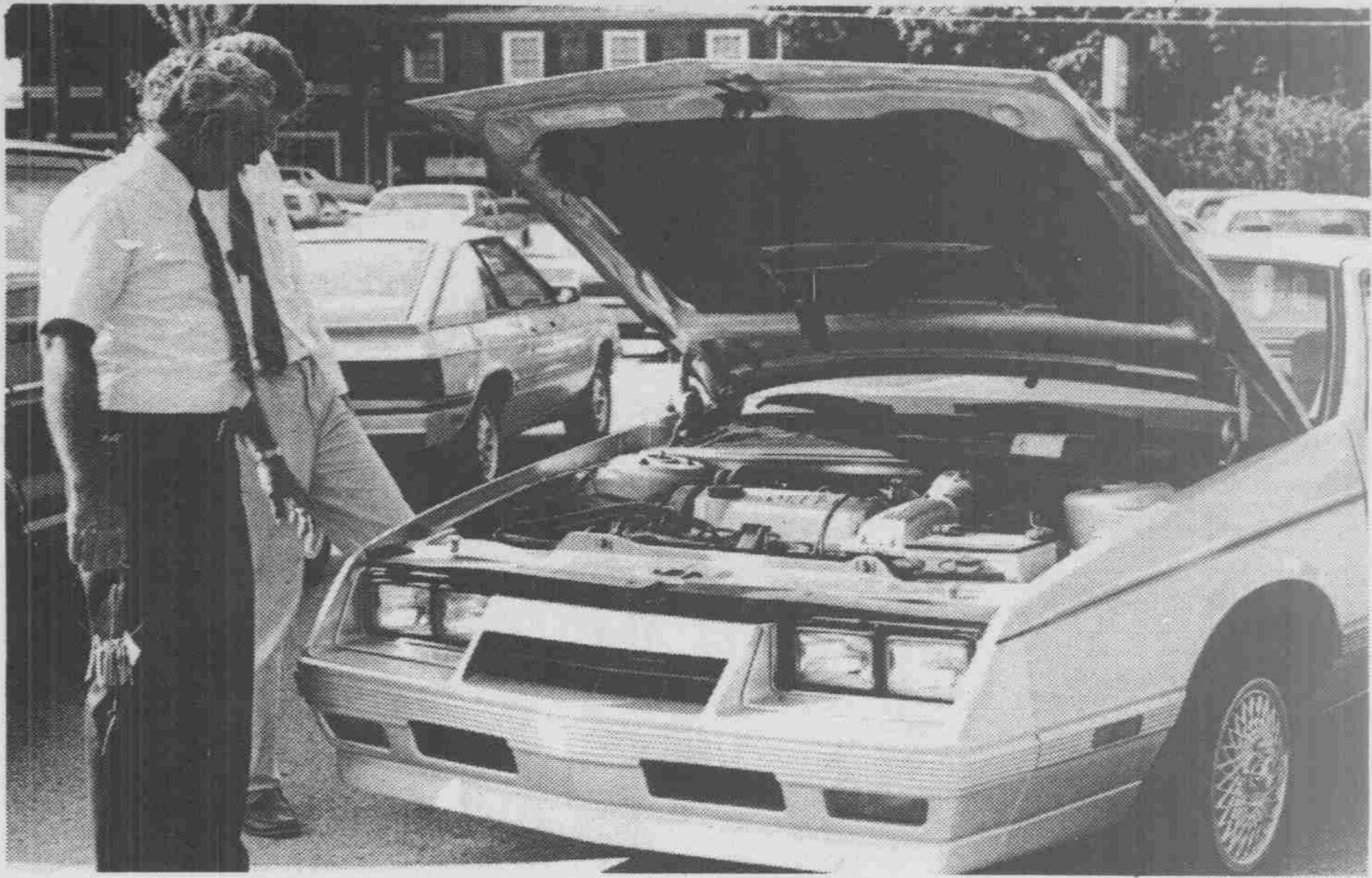
Although the lemon law only covers new cars, there is hope for those owning a defective used car. A federal statute, the Magnus-Moss law, says a used car must be able to pass inspection and be "fit for the purpose of a used car." Used-car dealers are required by law to inspect their cars.

"Magnus-Moss gives buyers legal ground to sue used-car dealers or rescind a purchase. However, it's not always easy to do so. It depends on the dealer's warranty or service contract. Legal rights vary from dealer to dealer," Leggett said.

"Deal with a reputable dealer. Always have a used car checked out by an independent mechanic. Don't simply rely on the dealer's mechanic. Get all promises in writing, too," he said.

Chapel Hill used-car dealer Buck Copeland says no customers have approached him about the lemon law.

"I haven't had anybody ask me about it. There's not a thing in the world he can do if he's signed an as-is agreement," said Copeland, sales manager of Yates Motor Co. at 419 W. Franklin Street.



Some laws in North Carolina can provide a degree of protection to unfortunate dud car buyers



Debbie Wells (right), a member of a chapter of Yokefellow Prison Ministry, talks with three inmates in a Hillsborough prison

Volunteers bring inmates fresh air

By SHARON SHERIDAN
Staff Writer

The Orange County minimum security prison in Hillsborough lacks the barbed wire, armed guards and barred cells of a Hollywood-style prison. Many inmates work or study outside the prison. Sometimes inmates spend a day or weekend "outside" with an approved sponsor. But always, when the day's work or the weekend's leave ends, they must return to the prison buildings behind a wire fence in Hillsborough.

A local volunteer group, a chapter of the Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina, visits the prison Tuesday evenings and allows inmates to talk to concerned outsiders.

"There're a lot of guys who look forward to this night," said Oliver Phillips, inmate or "inside" Yokefellow coordinator at the prison. "Any time you can communicate with somebody from the free world, it makes a big difference. Yokefellow gives us a chance to meet people who seem to be concerned, they have some sort of caring for what you're going through."

Founded in 1955 by Dr. D. Elton Trueblood, a Quaker, Yokefellow is an interracial, interdenominational Christian organization that ministers to inmates in prisons throughout the United States.

"Our job is to be 'yoked' with prisoners and to take on part of their burden, at least to care about them and with them," said Patrick Grace, "outside" coordinator of the local Yokefellow chapter and Ph.D. student in Italian/Medieval Studies at UNC.

"Our main thrust is a conversational ministry to topics and situations brought up by inmates," he said. "The key thing is that it's a responsive ministry. It's modeled on the fellowship concept of what happens after church services."

Yokefellow volunteers do not lead Bible studies or church services at their weekly meetings, although they would be supportive of such programs at the prison. Religion only is discussed if inmates introduce the topic.

"They have other components of Christian life available to them," Grace said. "Our job is to provide the fellowship atmosphere and to stay away from being preachy. We reach a lot of prisoners who would not come to the other Christian activities."

A.J. Bubnis arrived at the prison a month ago and attended his second Yokefellow meeting there Aug. 28.

"Of all the events they offer, this is the one event that I don't miss," he said. "I'm very negative on most of the activities, but this is different."

Yokefellow volunteers listen to the

inmates, while other groups want inmates to listen to them, Bubnis explained.

The prison houses between 95 and 110 male inmates, program assistant Bradley Rudd said.

Generally about 30 inmates and 12 to 15 volunteers attend each Yokefellow meeting, Grace said.

Meetings begin with an hour of conversation on topics introduced by inmates in groups of five or six inmates and two or three volunteers. A church or student group then serves refreshments. Students from the Newman Center in Chapel Hill provided refreshments Aug. 28, for example.

The inmates and volunteers spend about half an hour consuming refreshments and socializing. Sometimes groups provide music. At the evening's end all join hands for a prayer.

"I think you can look around for yourself and see people enjoying themselves," Phillips said. "They are just free to talk about anything they want to talk about."

"You sort of look forward to seeing people Tuesday night," he said. "They act like they're glad to see you, too."

The chance to talk with new people at Yokefellow meetings is important because talking with people in the prison becomes redundant, inmate Chuck Shadduck said. "You only have so much new information you can talk about."

"And talking relieves tension. If you kept your frustrations bottled up in you, you'd just end up getting in more trouble," inmate James Suggs said.

Some inmates can talk to outsiders more easily than other inmates or prison staff.

"People will often open up to you and tell you things they won't even tell their families," Grace said. "They have a great need to talk, and sometimes they don't quite know who to trust in the prison among their peers."

Several inmates said they think it is important for outsiders to talk to inmates and see what prison is like.

"I think it would be a good learning experience for people from the outside," Shadduck said. "They tend to stereotype the type of people that are here. We've got every type of individual here."

David Fleischfresen said he would like young people, beginning in the fourth or fifth grade, to learn what prison is like.

"If I really realized what it was like, I probably would have thought twice," he said.

Anyone interested in the Yokefellow program can get more information at the Campus Y.

Festifall applications now being accepted

The Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation Center is now accepting registration for Orange County residents who want to participate in the annual Festifall Street Fair, to be held Oct. 7 from 1-6 p.m.

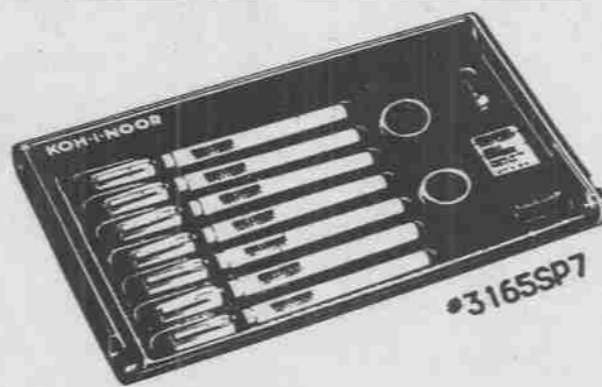
Only residents of Orange County will be able to participate in the fair, and proof of residency will be

required at the time of registration.

Registration forms may be picked up at the Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation Department offices located on 200 Plant Rd. Registration began Sept. 4 and continues through Sept. 21. For additional information, contact the Parks and Recreation Department at 968-2784.

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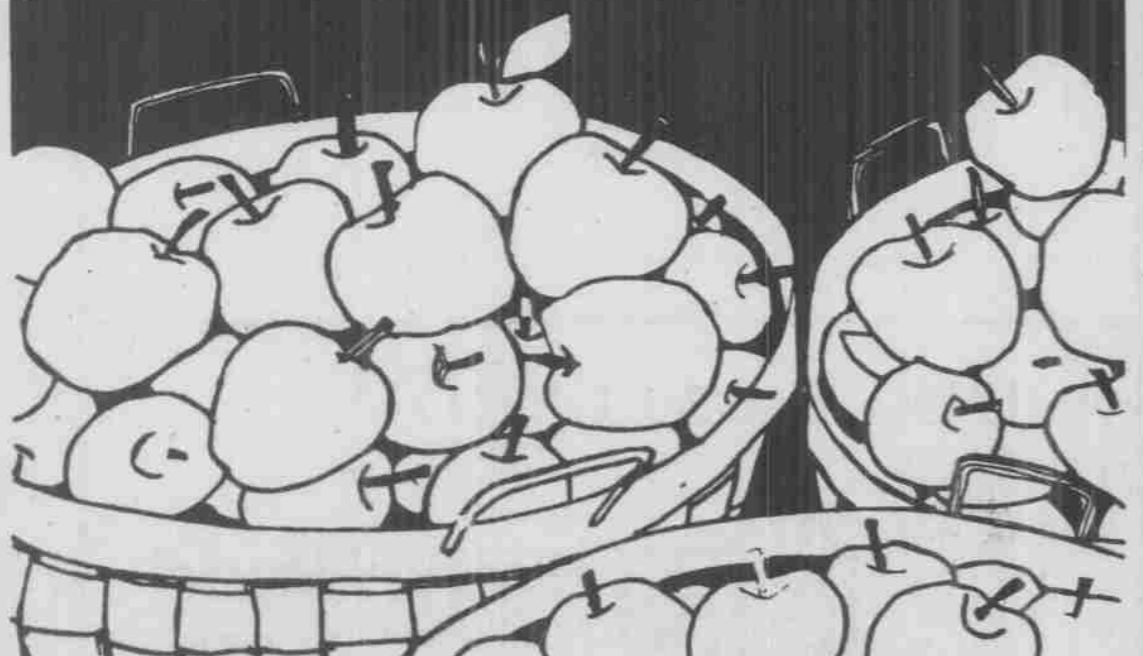
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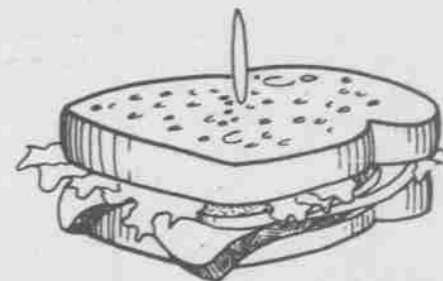


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