

Why are things no longer made to last?

by Mark Pavilons

Every week, as I chug to work in my fossil fuel burning vehicle, I long for something new, something that never breaks down.

There are more than 2,000 parts in an automobile and that's 2,000 things that can go wrong. I think I have replaced each one of those parts during my driving life, in the eight or nine cars I've owned.

And the fun continues with my 2002 Acura and 2002 Buick.

Granted, for 17-year-olds, they're in decent shape and so far, they start and run. I've had to spend more than I wanted to on both of these modern necessities.

I've always had a love-hate relationship with my automobiles. I love driving them, and feeling the wind in my face during the pleasant summer months. I enjoyed driving standard in my 1973 Super Beetle, 1980 VW Rabbit and now the Acura.

But again, there are those pesky moving parts.

Sure, I know that electric cars, with less than a dozen moving parts, will soon roam the landscape, and forever transform transportation as we know it.

Maybe my next vehicle will be an electric car. However, am I guaranteed that nothing will ever break, and I will never need costly repairs?

That led to me ponder the whole question of things built to last. It's no secret to anyone who's over 40 that things today are more disposable than ever. Modern contrivances aren't meant to last and are built with inferior metals and plastics, largely to save on manufacturing costs.

Repairs these days, on things like household appliances, laundry teams, even furnaces and air conditioners, are no longer feasible. We're living in a disposable society.

The last repairman we called looked at our 10-year-old Samsung refrigerator. His prognosis was a faulty motherboard, and it was not worth repairing. The motherboard is the brains of the new, modern technologically advanced gizmos.

Once this fails, for a number of reasons, the thing is toast. He advised sending it to the curb.

So, our expensive appliances are reduced to fancy trash within a decade.

I remember my parents having the same gold-toned washer and dryer for 25 years!

A few exchanged belts and refurbished motors perhaps, but they functioned pretty well for almost three decades.

My dad picked up a 1950s era Massey tractor at an auction, to putter around our back 40. We really didn't need the beast, which seemed monstrous to me when I was a tyke. It was quite a chore climbing into the driver's seat. But it was fun.

Will the average lawn tractor today last 40 years? You know the answer to that.

Let's turn our attention to our homes, and the roofs that give us shelter from the elements. Most of us have 20-year shingles, which

typically last 12 years if we're lucky. Not sure where the rating comes from or what agency reviews the longevity of shingles. They state that prevailing winds and harsh weather combine to impact the shingles. Isn't that what they're designed to do?

Today, a shingle replacement for an average home will ding you for upwards of

\$7,000 and more if you replace roof panels and do the eavestroughs as well. I don't know about you, but I don't have \$7,000 in my rainy-day fund for such a repair. As homeowners, why do we need to get a loan to fix something every 12 or so years? Typical subdivision driveways will cost about \$2,000 for repaving. You may get 15 years out of it.

Let's examine this on a smaller scale, shall we?

I remember deli meat lasting much longer than a week. Sure, my mom would go to the local deli and get the salami cut fresh from the hanging selection. I still remember when Bolton had a German deli and I can still picture the sights and smells of this really interesting place. And the bratwurst was to die for!

You have to be a conscientious shopper these days, to avoid getting ripped off.

My advice, read everything! Take note of the "best before" dates and even go as far as reading the ingredients to see what you're actually buying.

We have some food allergies in our home, and we're also paying closer attention to carbs and sugars. You'd be surprised at what your favourite foods contain.

It's no wonder North Americans are at their worst physical shape in history.

There's no reason bread should contain more than a dozen ingredients. Many foods are so laced with sugar it's crazy.

I've seen many different shades of beef on the shelf at some grocery stores and also picked packages that were long expired. Nothing seems to keep these days.

Some say it's because many fruits and vegetables begin their journeys from so far away, and spend their best days on the truck before they get to the store.

Consumers are also paying the price of skyrocketing fuel, reflected in the prices of our groceries.

The list goes on and on.

We're at the height of our technical prowess, yet we still have to iron out bugs in the latest smart phone, and cars continue to be recalled. Electronic devices break after three months; a pair of shoes with imitation leather wears after one season. T-shirts are so thin you can see right through them.

We're being buried in plastic and our planet is fed up.

We're tossing instead of repairing. Where's the sustainability when we're creating mountains of trash at breakneck speed? Why are we wasting so much, when many of our fellow humans are suffering, and have so little? Just some of the trash we toss every week at the curb would go a very long way in disaster-ridden areas of the developing world. If they saw what we have, and throw away, it would make them cry.

I long for simpler times and a lifestyle with fewer moving parts!

How about starting a plastic-free, back-to-basics, bartering commune on conservation land in the vicinity? Any takers?