News on the road

Get up to speed with recent motoring developments

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ERPs rebates
GOOD news for drivers island-wide: The Land Transport Authority (LTA) has announced a 5% reduction in Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) rates at certain roads and expressways during the school holiday period until the month-end. The charge will be waived entirely at selected gantries where the usual rate is 50 cents. Discounted rates will apply only during specific time periods. Visit www.ERP.sg for more details.

Autonomous car centre opens
Singapore's first centre for testing autonomous or self-driving vehicles opened at Jurong East on Nov 22. Located outside Nanyang Technological University, the 2ha centre is designed to test self-driving vehicle technology in conditions simulating those on local roads, complete with Jurassic vehicles and pedestrians.

Additionally, the test circuit features a rain simulator and flood zone to test the functioning of autonomous vehicles under weather conditions common to our tropical climate. The centre will house the development of autonomous vehicle technology as companies will be able to test out new and experimental ideas in a controlled environment.

There are currently at least 10 companies and research institutes involved in testing autonomous vehicles in Singapore. Ultimately, the aim is to get autonomous buses and shuttles onto Singaporean roads in order to complement human-operated vehicles. This new initiative is planned to begin in Punggol, Toa Payoh and the Jurong Innovation District in 2022.

Limiting car growth
LTA will cut Singapore's private passenger car and motorcycle growth rate to zero from February next year. It will, however, invest S$20 billion in new rail infrastructure, S$4 billion to renew and expand rail operating assets and $6 billion in bus contracting subsidies over the next five years, in a push to make public transport more efficient and accessible for all.

LTA's announcement led to a sharp spike in Certificate of Entitlement (COE) premiums as buyers flocked to purchase cars before the new regulations begin.

Cat emissions
The National Environment Agency's new Vehicular Emissions Scheme (VES) will kick in from Jan 1. Under this scheme, cars will be checked for hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and particulate matter emissions in addition to carbon dioxide. The VES rebate for a car will be determined by its worst-performing pollutant.

Keep this in mind when purchasing a new vehicle this holiday season!

Car-Free Sunday to continue
Car-Free Sunday will continue next year, where on the last Sunday of certain months, roads in the Civic District and Central Business District will be partially or fully closed to cars to allow walking, jogging, cycling and other fun activities.

This is in line with the aim of achieving a car-lite society, as envisioned by the Sustainable Singapore Blueprint 2015.

Electric cars
The first public testing of an electric car-sharing programme began on Nov 20. The car rental company behind this initiative, BlueSG, plans to begin service this month, with 80 two-door hatchbacks and 30 charging stations by the end of the year.

These will be spread throughout the island, with 10 in public housing estates, 10 in the city and two at Science Park and one north. If the service takes off, BlueSG eventually hopes to have 1,000 electric vehicles and 2,000 charging points islandwide by 2020, in a further boost to cut emissions and make Singapore's traffic more environmentally friendly.

Pay your dues
Toll excluders will have their work cut out for them as LTA implements a new system for collecting tolls at the Tuas and Woodlands checkpoints beginning next year.

Under the new system, motorists will receive ample time and warning to pay the toll, and will also receive an audio message reminder when the barriers are lifted. If motorists persist in not paying, LTA will be alerted.

These new measures follow stricter penalties for toll evasion that were implemented in August as LTA clamps down on this issue.

On the other side of the Causeway, Malaysia has announced that it will no longer charge a toll at the Johor Causeway for motorists on the Eastern Dispersal Link highway leading into Johor Bahru. This will come into effect on Jan 1 next year, marking the end of the fee that was first imposed in August 2011.

LTA will implement a more stringent toll collection system at the Tuas and Woodlands checkpoints next year.