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It just keeps getting better

by BRIAN LOCKHART

The 1961 movie, Breakfast at Tiffany's, opens with a famous long shot in Manhattan.

It is just after dawn, and the street, a big city boulevard lined by tall buildings, is deserted. There are no cars and no people at all.

A lone taxi is seen approaching in the early morning light. It slows, then stops in front of the famous Tiffany's jewellery store.

Audrey Hepburn, AKA Holley Golightly, emerges from the taxi and spends a few moments eating a pastry and drinking a coffee, while gazing at the expensive jewellery in the store's window.

She is dressed in evening wear, and it is obvious she has been out all night. The movie never really explains what Holly does for a living; however, she seems to make her money by dating various men, so the rest is left up to the imagination.

The story revolves around Holley and a writer named Paul, played by George Peppard, who develops a romantic relationship. The movie was a big hit. It was based on Truman Capote's novel.

As a trained filmmaker, I always appreciate the work that goes into an opening shot in a movie.

Yet, when I see that film opening, I always think ?? that taxi has the worst shock absorbers I've ever seen!

As it comes down the boulevard, the taxi looks like a boat riding over waves. When it comes to a stop, it bounces up and down a couple of times before settling down.

That got me thinking about advances in automotive technology over the years.

It was once common to replace car shock absorbers. There were even auto shops that specialized in shocks.

I've never replaced shock absorbers in any car, and don't know anyone who has either. They just seem to make them better, and they last the life of the car.

When I was a kid, it was very common to see cars with the wheel wells rusted out. If you had a car that was over five years old, it was pretty likely your wheel wells were showing a lot of wear and tear.

Some wheel-well rust cases were pretty severe.

You just don't see that anymore. They still rust, but not nearly as badly as they used to.

Advances in preparing the metal during the production phase have really taken the rust out of the auto world.

Back when most, if not all, cars were Rear Wheel Drive, it was a common sight to see someone stuck in the snow. Other motorists would get out of their vehicles to push the car out.

Usually, after rocking it a few times, the car would move, the driver would wave, and everyone continued on their way.

I knew guys who would throw sandbags into the trunk of their car just to get some added traction in the rear when winter arrived. We had an Oldsmobile Cutlass, and they were notorious for having a light rear end.

When cars went to Front Wheel Drive, the added weight of the engine made a huge difference when driving in snow. People still get stuck, but not nearly as often as they used to.

The invention of all-season radial tires also made a huge difference in winter driving. The old bias-ply tires were inexpensive but absolutely horrible and dangerous in wet driving conditions.

Mufflers used to be a common problem with cars. In their position under the car, the muffler system took a lot of abuse.

It was common to get a new muffler every couple of years. In my last few cars, I've only had to replace one part of the system in one vehicle.

I drove my last vehicle for 360,000 km before the muffler started getting loud.

As part of my job, I frequently get to drive the newest vehicles offered by automakers.

I'm always quite impressed by the new technology that is available.

My own vehicle is getting old, but it still tells me when to change the oil, when the washer fluid needs replacement, and if the tire pressure is low.

I took a brand new 2026 model out for a test drive a few weeks ago. It was a lot of fun testing the limits of this car as it automatically corrected itself if you drove out of your lane, and yelled a warning if it thought you were getting too close to the car in front of you.

The new technology in vehicles is amazing, and I'm looking forward to seeing what comes with the next vehicle I purchase.

Oh, and spoiler alert ? in the original novel Breakfast at Tiffany's, Paul was an unnamed gay man who told the story of meeting Holly to a friend, and just described her as ?A girl I used to know.'

I guess that original version wouldn't have had the same successful Hollywood ending.