

# THE ? LIVES OF CARS

The shiny new car you drive home may in fact be the genetic descendent of your neighbour's old jalopy. Cars are one of the most recycled commodities in the consumer marketplace.

One car company has cleverly presented its products as 70 per cent recyclable. In fact, steel and iron make up about 65 per cent of the average car and these valuable metals are completely recyclable. Every year in America, the steel industry recycles over 14 million tons from scrap vehicles.

The scrappage process starts with drainage and removal. The average volume of operating fluids in a scrapped car is approximately 19 litres, all of which must be drained. These require disposal under local regulations. In addition, there are dangerous chemical components such as mercury switches which are found under the hood and in the light assemblies. These require careful extraction and disposal. Tires are recycled for a myriad of uses.

The next stage involves reuse. Many car parts can be dismantled and reused. In fact, new car owners are often outraged to find that their insurer has replaced damaged parts in their new car, after an accident, with parts plucked from a wreck. Reusable parts include the complete front and back assemblies, body panels such as doors and trunks, wheels, windows and windshields.

The next stage involves metal recovery. When the fluids and reusable items are removed from a vehicle, the car is crushed. After it is flattened, another machine tears the body into small hand sized pieces of metal. The process takes about 45 seconds. It creates three streams of metals, iron, steel and non-ferrous metals such as aluminum. When the metals are sent off to manufacturing companies, what remains is called auto shredder residue or fluff. The fluff is sent to landfills and includes rubber, glass, wood products, cloth, foam, dirt and electrical wiring.

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