



Episode 1,397: Eric Peters, Libertarian Car Expert, Punished by Google for Wrongthink

Guest: Eric Peters

WOODS: Let's start with the piece you wrote over at EPAutos.com about the white space people may find in some of your posts. What belongs in that white space that's not there, and why isn't it there?

PETERS: Well, previously, I like a lot of online publishers had advertising with Google, but apparently I am dangerous and derogatory. I got a notice from them, and it's a very Kafkaesque, bureaucratic notice, nonspecific notice of violation that material on my website is "dangerous and derogatory." I have no idea exactly what it is that is dangerous and derogatory about my articles, and there is no way to find out. But the long and short is that they summarily pulled the advertising from the website based on that, and I have essentially no option to do anything other than pull the pages that they claim are dangerous and derogatory.

WOODS: So they do at least tell you which posts are the offending ones.

PETERS: No, not which posts; which page, which encompasses all of the material on the page. Now, they did indicate that the lead article on certain pages was some sort of problem, but I can't fathom what the issue is. One was an article called "The Turbo Tax," and it was simply an article that explained why so many new cars, including very big cars, come with very small engines that are very heavily turbocharged. And of course, that has to do with the car companies trying to figure out a way to maintain power and performance while also complying with all of the federal government's fuel economy mandates. It was a simple, matter-of-fact explanation. There was nothing in it that was hysterical or factually incorrect, but somehow explaining that to people is dangerous and derogatory.

WOODS: All right, so there was that. Wasn't there – were there two different ones that – how many were there in total?

PETERS: Yeah, actually, there were four total. The other one that I referenced in the piece, I think it had to do with the Obamacare mandate, myself being a refusenik and not paying the insurance mafia, and then not paying the government for not paying the insurance mafia. So I wrote an article about that, and I guess that's a little bit more political, but nonetheless, it used to be America where we used to have a First Amendment and we used to be able to express ourselves about topics like that.

WOODS: Well, it seems to me that Obamacare is a fairly mild topic about which to have a dissenting opinion. I mean, I could think of many, many topics you might cover that could

conceivably get you into trouble – not that they should. I mean, you should be able to say what you want. But of all things, I mean, talk about a milquetoast topic.

PETERS: Yeah.

WOODS: Now, of course, I'm sure the Eric Peters take on it is pretty hot, but all the same, Obamacare? Really?

PETERS: Yeah, well, the startling thing is that I'm a libertarian, and yet, I'm essentially being lumped in with neo-Nazis. What they've tried to do – and when I use the term "they," I refer generally to the left, which is controlling this – they're trying to pathologize any kind of disagreement with their agenda as tantamount to hate speech. If you don't agree with Obamacare, if you don't agree with the federal government decreeing fuel economy mandates, then you're a Nazi. That's essentially it. That's the executive summary of what's going on.

WOODS: All right, now I want to throw some listener questions at you. I asked the folks in my supporting listeners group, which people can join through SupportingListeners.com, what they would want to ask you, our libertarian car authority, and I got questions all over the map. One of them is the kind of topic that actually I could talk about every episode, actually, and that's the Green New Deal.

PETERS: Oh, gosh, okay.

WOODS: As a car guy in particular, what is your reaction to the Green New Deal? I mean, what would Eric Peters do in a world without cars?

PETERS: Well, where to even begin? The whole thing is premised on the new religion, the climate change religion. We're to be pushed out of the cars that we've been driving for nearly 100 years now into electric cars, which will limit our mobility and also limit our options because of their expense. These things are phenomenally costly, so leaving aside any considerations about whether they're green or not, this is going to be financially devastating to most people simply because of the costs involved. And then there's also the intangible, or the *intangibles*, of having your mobility limited. You can't drive as far, and you're tied down to a recharge station for a minimum of 30 to 45 minutes. That's if it's a so-called fast charger, a high-voltage charger. If you haven't got access to one of those, then you'll have to wait literally overnight, 6 to 8 or 12 hours, to get back on the road again. In my opinion, we're going backward, not forward.

WOODS: I've got a number of episodes where we've looked at the Green New Deal, so I'm actually going to link to those Green New Deal episodes on our show notes page. That's TomWoods.com/1397 – and, of course, to previous Eric Peters episodes, naturally. I've got a number of questions relating just to libertarianism and cars, which of course, is the sweet spot in all this. And somebody wants to know, are there countries where automobiles are regulated, let's say, more lightly, and what kind of trends do we see there? Do we see that cars are less expensive there?

PETERS: Well, yeah, actually, in parts of Asia and parts of what's styled the third and second world, you can get cars that are remarkably affordable, well under \$10,000 and that are

remarkably modern. I'm not talking about Yugos, cars that have a speedometer and a fuel gauge and are rickety little things that can barely be counted on to get you from A to B. These are cars that most Americans would recognize as very familiar; they're just a lot less expensive. They tend to have air conditioning, power windows; they have most of the amenities people expect. What they don't do is meet the current federal crashworthiness standards, and that's why they're not imported to this country. And they also emit fractionally – and that's an important consideration – fractionally more emissions, and so they don't meet current federal emissions guidelines, and that's why Americans don't have access to cars like that.

WOODS: I've got somebody asking the following: "Curious to know his thoughts on whether the 25-year rule for importing cars will ever be altered or repealed. Canada has a 15-year rule, and Australia just relaxed their import requirements." First of all, what is this rule?

PETERS: Well, it deals with the issue, again, of compliance of vehicles that are available in other markets, not the United States, that don't meet federal DOT crashworthiness standards, which really are just crash test standards – the cars are not unsafe; they just don't meet the various bureaucratic requirements – and the emission standards. So it's not legal to import these vehicles for a certain number of years. Then they get, I guess, grandfathered in, because it's assumed that it's just a handful of them and it's probably of no consequence to anybody. However, things have gotten so political, that even allowing a handful of these vehicles in – which have absolutely no impact on anything as far as air quality, etc., and so on – the hystericization, as I like to say it, of the way things are, I think will probably prevent the law from being changed in a more favorable way. That's just my opinion on that.

WOODS: "What, if any, role does the government play in increasing the price of parts" – and the questioner puts in parentheses – "(particularly AC compressors) if possible?"

PETERS: Well, AC, that's a really good question. And the main driver of cost upward is the change every several years now of the refrigerant that's allowed in an automotive AC system. For a long, long time, from the dawn of automotive refrigeration until I think about 1995 or '96 or so, most car refrigeration systems used what's called Freon or R12. Then that got outlawed based on environmental considerations that were rather dubious and replaced with another refrigerant. Well, since that time, I think there have been two subsequent changes, and so each time it changes, the system changes, and the refrigerant gets more expensive, and the technician that does the work – I've got a buddy who runs a shop, they have to buy new equipment, because you're not allowed to mix. You can't have cross contamination of these refrigerants. And so that drives the cost up, and that's one of the reasons why AC systems have become so much more expensive.

WOODS: I get somebody asking: "Can you disable the auto shutoff feature that all new cars are including?" And I assume he means this feature whereby, if you're stopped at a light, and the car shuts down while you're there? Yeah, now, I have that feature, and I do have a button where I can disable it. The button is right there. And I was using it at first, because I thought that was a neat feature, and I remember asking the dealer: well, is this going to put a lot of strain on the starter, starting it up over and over and over? And he said, well, you have like a super deluxe, amazing starter. And I thought, you know, could it really be that amazing? And then when I read something you wrote about it, and basically saying that the mileage savings is so trivial, there's no point in using it.

PETERS: Yeah, well, it's a fractional difference in miles per gallon. You can calculate it for yourself if you've got a vehicle that's equipped with this system. The only reason that it's become widespread in new cars is, again, having to do with the need to comply with the CAFE mandate, the corporate average fuel economy requirement, which is calculated based on the entire production run of a vehicle. So a fractional gain on an individual basis becomes a big deal when you're talking about, let's say, 50,000 cars produced every year. Now, the real issue from the standpoint of the owner isn't so much the starter; it's the battery. The battery in your car is a 12 volt battery, and it was designed to start the car a couple of times a day, you know, once, twice, three, four times. It was not designed to start the car 15, 30 times a day. If you're driving to work in heavy traffic, and you stop and you go and you stop and you go, and the engine's going on and going off, that battery is not going to have as long of a life. It's probably going to lose at least a year or two of its normal life, and a battery costs about 100 bucks. And if you do the math, the fractional gas savings is completely offset by the fact that you've got to buy a new battery more often.

WOODS: And indeed, that's why I wound up just shutting the thing off when I saw that, just on balance, it wasn't doing me any good. I was just at first impressed by the novelty of it.

PETERS: Yeah.

WOODS: How about this, you know, you poor rubes with your cars idling?

PETERS: Well, something else to consider, too, is that in most cars, when the engine shuts off, so do a lot of your accessories, including your air conditioner. So if it's a hot day and your engine is shut off, well, you're essentially causing the car to heat up, and that winds up probably costing you more energy to cool the car back down.

WOODS: Right, right, right. So all right, let's talk about a controversial question –

PETERS: Oh, my favorite thing.

WOODS: – just to get your view, because, again, this is where libertarianism and cars overlap. People want to know about drunk driving. What would – now, obviously, in a way this has to do with who the owner of the road is, that kind of thing.

PETERS: Right.

WOODS: Because then they would set these sorts things. But all the same, can you still comment on that?

PETERS: Well, sure. Right now, what we've got is – first of all, we have presumptive criminality. The courts legitimated this back in the '80s, these sobriety checkpoints, where everybody has to do the opposite of what used to be the case in a free country, which is to demonstrate that you're not a drunk, rather than the other way around. It used to be that the cops would only interfere with you, pull you over, check you out, if you had given some individual reasons to suspect you specifically of being impaired. Now you're just driving along and you've done nothing to indicate that you might be a drunk or otherwise impaired, and you are compelled to produce your papers, just like in East Germany, and you have to have your vehicle inspected, essentially, by the cop, and to prove to the satisfaction of this guy that

you're not a drunk. And I think that that's outrageous. I think that that is a fundamental affront to the way a free society ought to operate. That's the first thing.

And the second objection that I have is that we're all individuals, and the amount of impairment that an individual might experience after a drink or no drinks varies considerably. I know people who are terrible drivers completely sober, whereas I know people who are expert, professional drivers who'd I have no qualms about getting into a car with after they've had even two or three beers. You know, I think that the objective standard is loss of control. If you do something to indicate that you're not in control of your vehicle, whether it's the result of alcohol, whether it's the result of senility, whether it's the result of not paying attention, it's the impairment that should matter. And that should be determined by objective criteria, in my opinion.

WOODS: All right, now here's one that's just plain old car, and that is: all-wheel drive versus front-wheel drive, particularly in states where you're not ever going to get snow.

PETERS: Yep.

WOODS: Is there one that should be preferred to the other? Does it matter?

PETERS: Oh, absolutely. All-wheel Drive – and I understand why they've done this. There's money to be made in selling people all-wheel drive. It's been oversold. It's a nice feature to have, particularly if you live in an area such as the area where I live, where we do get heavy snow, and there are a lot of back roads that tend not to get plowed too quickly after it snows. Then having that all-wheel drive with the additional ground clearance that often comes with it is a good thing. However, most people would be really surprised how capable a front-wheel-drive car can be even in snow, if it's got the right tires. The tires are arguably just as important as whether the vehicle has all-wheel drive. If you've got good winter tires on your vehicle, front-wheel drive or all-wheel drive, it makes all the difference.

WOODS: Ah, okay, okay. All right, well, that's good to know. Now, what about the thing that people go through in a lot of states, where they have to get their car inspected every year and you get an inspection sticker on your car? Apparently there are some states where they have been considering doing away with that, or at least I heard that Texas, for example. Where do you come down on that, and what are the – even apart from libertarianism, what are the pros and cons of that?

PETERS: Well, there's several. One of the many pros, in my opinion, is that it absolves the owner to a great degree of paying attention to the condition of their vehicle. Why worry about whether your tires are bald? Oh, the government's going to inspect my car and tell me whether my tires are bald or my brakes are bad. It shifts the liability and the responsibility of that away from the owner and onto the government. The other thing is – and I've got a buddy who does state inspections. As a matter of law, a guy comes in there, and the car is on the cusp of failure because its tires are nearly bald, but they still meet the standard on that particular day – and the same goes for brake pads and various other things – he has to put the sticker on the car and pass it, even though he knows that next week that car is not going to be safe to drive. Yet the person has a sticker, which is good for a year.

WOODS: Now how about a little advice for somebody who's in the market, let's say, and who's got the following desires for a car? He says, "Here are the things I care about, in order." So, "First one, cool technology," is number one. So he says, "CarPlay, blind spot monitoring, lane assist, adaptive cruise, etc. Secondly, creature comforts heated leather, sunroof, etc. Thirdly, gas mileage. And fourthly, getting up to speed quickly when I'm getting on the freeway." He says, "What are some very affordable options? I leased a 2016 Malibu, and it was a great start. Bought a 2017 Passat to get out of the lease, and it's leaving a bit to be desired because the technology is buggy. Where else should I be looking?"

PETERS: Well, the really good news is that there has been a great democratization of that technology and of power and everything else that the questioner talks about. Almost all new cars now – you know, I test drive them every week – come standard with some form of Bluetooth integration, so they'll have Android Auto or Apple CarPlay. Almost all of them now have most of the tech features that the questioner asks about. And the main differentiator at this point, really, does have to do with adequate power versus an abundance of power. And it really comes down to a subjective thing: how quickly do you want to go? There are very few new cars that take less, or take more, I should say, than 9 seconds to get to 60, and that's pretty quick in historic standards. And most cars, even economy cars, will do it in around 8 seconds, and it's common for cars to get to 60 in about 6 or 7 seconds.

WOODS: Now, I guess a lot of times we're talking at a particular time of the year where the new models are coming out.

PETERS: Yeah.

WOODS: Here we are speaking in May, so I guess that's – I actually don't even know when the next model year cars start rolling out.

PETERS: Well, it's completely staggered now. It's not like it used to be when it was typically in fall, and most of the manufacturers would bring out their cars around that time. I've already had several 2020 models. Some car companies will literally bring them out a couple of weeks after the new year.

WOODS: Wow.

PETERS: Yeah.

WOODS: Well, are there any that you're, let's say, looking forward to? Because the impression I kind of get is that you're a bit demoralized, given the requirements that government is placing on car companies and all that.

PETERS: Well, I am to a degree, but I'm also at the same time, really, really cheerful about a lot of other things. Never before have we had the range of choices that we've got, and you can get into cars that do phenomenal things. For example, the Dodge Hellcat, which I think you and I have talked about before, is a high-performance car. You can get it in the coupe, the Dodge Challenger, and you can also get it in the four-door which is the Dodge Charger. 707 horsepower, which is nearly as much as the Nextel Cup stock car, with the docility of the Camry and phenomenally good gas mileage. Well, for 2020, they're actually doubling down on that and pushing up the horsepower to nearly 800, if you can imagine that. And this is a car

that's reasonably accessible. This is something that goes for about 64,000 bucks. And it is a car that's almost unbelievably quick. It can actually raise the front wheel off the ground when it runs down the quarter mile, which it will do in about nine to ten seconds, if you can believe that.

WOODS: Wow.

PETERS: Yeah.

WOODS: All right, well, somebody asked about a specific car, whether you're looking forward to it. Somebody says: "Is Eric looking forward to the C8 mid-engine Corvette?"

PETERS: I am not, and I'll tell you why. And I'm a fan of Corvettes. And the reason I'm not looking forward to – and this is just my own quirky, weirdo opinion. It's not a Corvette anymore. It is a European supercar with a Chevy badge on it. They've re-engineered it to be mid-engine, and I understand that that's better for handling and performance. But to me, it's lost what made a Corvette uniquely an American car, an American alternative to a Ferrari or a Lamborghini. I think they're trying too hard to be the American version of Ferrari. I think Corvette should always be Corvette.

WOODS: Ah, okay. That's an interesting answer. That's interesting answer. Now, somebody's asking – and then somebody asked and then got a response, so I'd be curious about your response. He says, "Where can I learn basic car maintenance on the more modern cars that are largely electronically monitored?" And another person replies, "I haven't noticed a significant change between the late '80s and 2010s, in terms of being able to maintain cars, except for a few areas like airbag controllers." What what's the right answer here?

PETERS: Well, the good news is that, despite the conventional wisdom, modern cars are actually fairly easy to service. If you have the necessary tools. You generally need, above all else, something called an OBD scan tool. OBD is an acronym that stands for onboard diagnostics, which is what all cars have had since the mid 1990s. And there's a universal port usually underneath the steering wheel somewhere in all cars, irrespective of make or model, and you plug your scan tool into that. And it will give you diagnostic information. It will in effect tell you what's wrong with the car. And then you could just fix whatever the thing tells you is wrong. So that's an advantage that we never had when I was a kid in high school and working on cars. We had to figure it out on our own, using our brain. Now the computer brain does it for you. The main difficulty that I find with working on modern cars is packaging. You know, these cars are assembled to leave no space to spare. So you pop the hood on a modern car, and you wonder how you're going to get your fingers in there. Just accessing some of the parts is probably the most difficult thing about working on a modern car.

WOODS: Okay, see, whereas for me, I wouldn't consider trying. [laughing] The thought would never occur to me. Division of labor would be what I would think of. All right, how about pickup trucks? Somebody wants a pickup truck, and he wants to know what's a good deal for the money.

PETERS: Well, I'm going to suggest something that some people will probably denounce me for, but I really like the Honda Ridgeline, which technically isn't a truck in the sense that it's built on the same platform as the Honda Passport, which is a big crossover SUV, but it's not

fundamentally a truck in the sense that it's not built on a steel frame with the body, then bolted to the frame with an axle in the back and the engine up front like the traditional truck. However, it is an enormously versatile and space-efficient package. It's got a really useful bed, not just in terms of the bed size, but underneath the bed, there's actually hidden storage cubby that you can use to put stuff that you want out of sight 'and also out of the weather. And it's a very, very pleasant truck to drive without being so overwhelming. A lot of the big trucks have become overwhelming. I'm a big guy, I'm 6'3" and 200 pounds, and when I drive the current half-tons, the 1500 trucks, models like the Chevy Silverado and the Ford F-150, they're so high and they're so big, I feel like I'm ten years old again. It's just too much. But that's, again, just my opinion.

WOODS: All right, Eric, a few more of these before I let you go. Here's one: "If a person has a highly valuable car, think like a collector car or a Lamborghini, is it reasonable for that person to expect a full insurance payout if somebody hits and totals that car?"

PETERS: Well, if you have specialty insurance that's designed for that type of vehicle, then the answer is absolutely yes. I have a policy of just that kind on my collector car. I have an old muscle car, and it has what's called an agreed value policy. And what that means is that the insurance company agrees that the vehicle is worth X amount of dollars, and in the event of a loss, a total loss, that is the amount that they'll pay. You don't have to haggle with them over it. It's not based on a generic average retail value. It's based on the value of your specific vehicle. And a lot of times you'll have to substantiate that with records, and they may even send an appraiser to look at the vehicle. But the good news is, you've got that security of knowing that if the car is destroyed, they're going to pay you a sum that's equivalent to what its actual value is.

WOODS: Right, okay, that's a good answer. I mean, it really is up to the insurance company to monitor their own practices and have actuarial estimates that are going to yield you a monthly payment that makes it feasible for them to do this. So they'll make it work.

PETERS: If you have a vehicle of that type, it is important that you that you seek out some of this specialty coverage, rather than go with just a generic policy that it's designed for any ordinary transportation car.

WOODS: Let's see, a couple more. How about this one? "Are cars (especially being BMW) made for fixed life and not user maintenance? If so, are such cars better to lease than buy or avoid completely?" First of all, can you explain the question?

PETERS: Yeah, he makes reference to BMWs, but the answer is applicable to pretty much all high-end luxury cars, which, to justify their price, they have a lot of very elaborate technology, especially electronic technology. And yes, it is better to lease them, because what happens is, as they age and as they depreciate, you get to this horrible nexus, where if something does go wrong with some of the electronic components or some of these sophisticated – for example, an adaptive or automated suspension system – and that fails, and you're looking at a massive repair bill for that, that might not be worth paying for relative to the value of the car. That's a common issue with high-end cars. And that's why I think the figure is something like, I don't know, 50 to 60% of all luxury car transactions are lease transactions, for just that reason.

WOODS: And then finally this one: "What does he think about the new e-POWER Nissan cars? Not sure if these are being sold in the US, though." I don't know anything about these cars, obviously.

PETERS: Yeah, the reference is to electric. Whenever you hear "e," that's the reference. And every major manufacturer, just about, is on the verge of bringing electric vehicles to the market, because they have to, because they've been de facto mandated by all of these zero-emissions requirements, particularly in California and some other states. The problem, of course, is the same. It's a general criticism of electric cars. They're expensive relative to equivalent IC-powered cars, and you have to think about your range, and then you have to think about your recharge time. And for me, the recharge time is actually the bigger problem. If you could go, say, 100 miles or 150 miles and be back on the road in five minutes like you can with an ordinary car, that would be a minor inconvenience, but it wouldn't be a big hassle. But if you have to stop and wait for a minimum of 30 to 45 minutes or even several hours, to me, that's a real problem, and I would have a hard time justifying the purchase of an electric car for that reason alone.

WOODS: All right, well, I think we're going to call it quits just because that's a lot of questions for one man, and you plowed right through.

PETERS: Happy to do it.

WOODS: Oh, no, I know. And I know for you, it's fun to talk about this stuff. EPAutos.com is where everybody should go. I support that site every month, and you folks should do that too, especially given that you can get smacked down with your ads if you say the wrong thing. I mean, that's all the more reason you've got to support your content creators. So EPAutos.com. It's EricPetersAutos.com, but EPAutos.co will get you there even faster. And Eric, thanks so much again for your time.

PETERS: Oh, sure. Thank you, Tom. I always enjoy it.