Great, Great Grammar!

6.5 Relative Clauses: Identifying vs. Non-Identifying (1)

If the information in a relative clause is **necessary**, you **do not put commas** around it. This is called an <u>"identifying relative clause"</u> (because the information is necessary to "identify" the subject).

However, if the information in the relative clause is **not necessary** — if it is just extra information about the subject — then you **put commas** around the relative clause. This is called a <u>"non-identifying relative clause"</u> (because the information is not necessary to identify the subject).

*With non-identifying relative clauses, you cannot use "that" – you must use "which" instead.

Examples:
That dog, which only has three legs, is my dog.
("which only has three legs" is not necessary to identify this dog, so you put commas around it)
> *You might say this sentence if you are looking at one specific dog.*

The dog that/which only has three legs is my dog.
("that only has three legs" is necessary to identify this dog)
> *You might say this sentence if you are looking at several dogs, and you use the clause "that only has three legs" to identify one specific dog.*

Billy, who drives a red pickup, was caught speeding last night.
("who drives a red pickup" is not necessary to identify Billy – it is extra information, so you put commas around it)

My phone, which I've had for three years, is in my coat.
("which I've had for three years" is not necessary to identify the phone, so you put commas around it)

That phone that is on the table is mine.
("that is on the table" is necessary to identify this phone)
> *You might say this sentence if there are several phones in the room, and you are saying which phone is yours (the one "that is on the table").*