

Car Maintenance Tips

1. Take a look at your tires. A tire that is low will get hot and blow out. Tire pressure should be 30-35 PSI when the tire is COLD/before driving. Tires that have steel exposed or are worn so that there is less than 3/32 of an inch of tread are dangerous. Many junk yards and tire stores have good used tires available at low prices.

2. Learn how to check fluid levels. Have a friend show you how if you do not know.

a. Check engine oil every 500 miles or every other tank of gas - more often if it uses oil. Check the oil when the engine is hot. After you have driven someplace, turn the car off and park on level ground. Wait about 5 minutes and then check the oil. Running a motor low on oil will completely ruin the motor. Change your oil every 3000-4000 miles.

b. Check the automatic transmission fluid (when engine is hot see directions on stick) monthly, more often if you see red oil spots on the ground where you park your car. When a transmission is low on fluid it will slip when it shifts and soon burn out! If you add transmission fluid make sure you add the correct type. There are several types.

c. Check the radiator fluid level only when the engine is COLD and make sure your anti-freeze is good for at least -30 degrees F before cold weather. A tester can be purchased for about \$2.00.

d. Check the power steering fluid monthly. When the power steering fluid is low you will hear a growling noise as the steering wheel is turned.

e. Check the battery fluids twice a year, unless it is a maintenance free battery.

3. Pay attention to the "free play" in the steering wheel. "Free play" is the distance the steering wheel is turned before the front tires start to turn. Excessive "free play", more than two or three inches of steering wheel travel, could mean worn tie rods that could fall off! This is very dangerous and should be checked immediately. Any shop that does tire and front-end repair will usually give free estimates. It is wise to get several estimates. Some shops unnecessarily replace parts.

4. Exhaust noise means exhaust leaks. Carbon monoxide gas is dangerous, especially when driving or parking with the windows closed. Older cars may have rusted floors which allow exhaust gas to get into the car. Even small leaks can be dangerous!

5. Grinding noise, when the brakes are applied, means that there is no friction material left (pads) on the brakes. That means metal is rubbing on metal. This causes much damage and will very soon result in no brake at all. The repair then

will become extensive and expensive. If your car makes a high pitched squeal at low speeds that stops when the brake pedal is pushed, you will need front brakes soon. There is a metal tab on the front brake pads which makes that noise to warn you that the brakes are worn out. Have them fixed right away! If you wait it will only cost you a lot more!

The brake pedal should never go over half-way to the floor when pushed for the first time! If it does it could mean worn brakes or a bad hydraulic system. Never put any fluid in the brake system other than brake fluid. Any other fluid will ruin the brake system. If the brake fluid reservoir is clear you can visually check it each month. If the brake fluid is in a nonvisible reservoir check it annually.

6. If your signals flash in one direction but not in the other just check your lights. You will find that there will be a bulb burnt out on the side that does not flash. If your lights do not flash in either direction you may have a bad signal flasher. Your owner's manual should tell you where the flasher is. It usually plugs in by the fuses and you or a friend can easily replace it, if necessary.

7. A screeching noise from the motor area, after you start the car, means one or more belts are loose. Have them tightened or the belt will wear out and break. Slipping belts can cause a dead battery, hard steering, or overheating.

8. When a red light comes on that refers to oil pressure or overheating, stop the car **AS SOON AS SAFELY POSSIBLY**. Driving even a mile could completely ruin the motor. A yellow light that says "check engine" or "service engine soon" can be driven to your destination or repair shop. It indicates a computer control problem and will not result in immediate engine damage, but could be wasting gas.

9. It is a good idea to use only windshield washer fluid in the washer. It cleans better than water and will not freeze in winter. Make sure you pour it in the washer reservoir and NOT the radiator reservoir.

10. Watch the price of gas at various stations. It may vary 5 - 15 cents per gallon within a few miles. Also, use coupons when available. Doing so may save \$50-\$100 per year.

11. Check the hoses monthly by visually looking at them for deterioration or to see if they have soft spots or are bulging.

12. Change the air filter and fuel filter annually. Have someone check the differential grease annually.

Consider volunteering at Car Care Saturday to learn more car maintenance.
651-773-3083 8 a.m. on 2nd Saturday of each month at Lake Elmo Repair.