

GETTING YOUR VEHICLE READY FOR SUMMER

Summer's heat, dust, and stop-and-go traffic will take their toll on your vehicle. Add the effects of last winter, and you could be poised for a breakdown. You can lessen the odds of mechanical failure through periodic maintenance...Your vehicle should last longer and command a higher resale price, too!

Some of the following tips are easy to do; others require a skilled auto technician.

Getting Started--The best planning guide is your owner's manual. Read it; and follow the manufacturer's recommended service schedules.

- * Air Conditioning--A Marginally operating system will fail in hot weather. Have the system examined by a qualified technician.
- * Cooling System--The greatest cause of summer breakdowns is overheating. The cooling system should be completely flushed and refilled about every 24 months. The level, condition, and concentration of the coolant should be checked periodically. (A 50/50 mix of anti-freeze and water is usually recommended.)

DIYers, Never remove the radiator cap until the engine has thoroughly cooled! The tightness and condition of drive belts, clamps, and hoses should be checked by a pro.

- * OIL--Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your manual--more often (every 3,000 miles) if you make frequent short jaunts, extended trips with lots of luggage, or tow a trailer.
- * Engine Performance--Replace other filters (air, fuel, PCV, etc.) as recommended--more often in dusty conditions. Get engine driveability problems (hard starts, rough idling, stalling, diminished power, etc.) corrected at a good shop.
- * Windshield Wipers--A dirty windshield causes eye fatigue and can pose a safety hazard. Replace worn blades and get plenty of windshield washer solvent.
- * Tires--Have your tires rotated about every 5,000 miles. Check tire pressures once a month; let the

tires "cool down" first.

Don't forget your spare, and be sure the jack is in good condition. Examine tires for tread life, uneven wearing, and cupping; check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. An alignment is warranted if there's uneven tread wear or if your vehicle pulls to one side.

- * Brakes--Brakes should be inspected as recommended in your manual, or sooner if you notice pulsations, grabbing, noises, or longer stopping distance. Minor brake problems should be corrected promptly.
- * Battery--Batteries can fail any time of year. The only accurate way to detect a weak battery is with professional equipment. Routine care: Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all connections. If battery caps are removable, check the fluid level monthly.

Avoid contact with corrosive deposits and battery acid. Wear eye protection and rubber gloves.

- * Lights--Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs; periodically clean dirt and insects from all lenses.

To prevent scratching, never use a dry rag.

- * Emergencies--Carry some basic tools--ask a technician for suggestions. Also include a first aid kit, flares, and a flashlight. Consider buying a CB radio.