

PROTECT CAR WITH TRANSMISSION CHECK

Three people out of four pump their own gas. That's the good news for dollar-conscious motorists. The bad news is that most people are negligent about checking their cars, according to Car Care Council.

Among the most neglected under-the-hood checks is the automatic transmission fluid. It should be looked at every month or two, and even more often when the car is subjected to "severe service" driving, which is defined in car owners' manuals.

The procedure for checking the automatic transmission is simple, says the Council. Be sure the engine and transmission are at normal operating temperature. Generally this would be after about 15 or 20 minutes of driving.

Park the car on level ground and apply the parking brake, and/or block the wheels. Move the shift lever through all positions and back to Park or Neutral, depending upon the make of the car (again, refer to the owner's manual).

Then with the engine idling, remove the dip stick, wipe it off, and reinsert it all the way. Remove it again and note the fluid level with relationship to the "ADD" or "FULL" marks.

Auto log book can pay big dividends

Logging, defined as the act of entering information in a log book, is done by pilots, fleet operators, the military and virtually anyone to whom vehicle performance and dependability are essential.

Maintaining a log book is a good idea for private owners too, says Car Care Council, which suggests that setting up and maintaining an auto "diary" is a simple procedure.

It's a matter of keeping a pencil and note pad handy to record anything of importance about the maintenance and operation of the car or truck.

Essentially there are six types of entries, according to the Council:

1. Gasoline fill-ups and mileage;
2. Addition of various fluids such as engine oil, coolant, power steering fluid and at what mileage;
3. Maintenance services performed: What, when, by whom and how much it cost;

4. Services performed other than routine maintenance, i.e. body repairs or paint, accessories installed, etc.;
5. Insurance and/or registration information;
6. Basic part numbers and/or specifications which may not be readily found in the owner's manual (belts, hoses, headlamps, spark plugs, filters, etc.).

Most businessmen know the importance of maintaining good records. For them and for others there are these additional considerations, says the Council:

Keeping a running record of gas purchases vs. distance driven will show a decrease in gas mileage, warning of a malfunction or need for tune-up.

A log book will make you aware of abnormal oil or fluid consumption, which could be the tip-off to a leak or other potential problem. It also serves as a re-

minder that the vehicle is overdue for an oil and filter change, transmission service or other important maintenance.

When it's time to sell or trade, this kind of documentation can make a substantial difference in the vehicle's saleability. A used car buyer likes to know what maintenance has been done and when.

In case of mechanical trouble, especially with an older vehicle, it may be useful to report to a mechanic exactly what work has been done.

If yours is an import car, you may want to jot down not only the original numbers for basic parts but also the conversion numbers from among the readily available domestic brands. This can be a big time saver when a crisis occurs far from a major source of auto parts.

Acquiring the logging habit can pay big dividends.

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Cooling system care: Good trip insurance

A dream vacation trip can become a nightmare when mechanical trouble intrudes. Overheating, one of the most common causes of breakdown on the highway, seldom occurs when basic preventive measures are taken.

In a national survey, automobile mechanics cited drive belts and hoses as being among the most neglected parts of their customer's cars. Because these account for the majority of overheating problems, they should be replaced routinely after three to four years of use.

Another survey found that nearly half of all respondents had never replaced the drive belts on their cars. Among those who had, the majority did so only when the belts had broken or were near the point of failure.

Embarking on a summer trip without a

thorough inspection of these and other components of the cooling system may be courting trouble, says Car Care Council.

Automobile engines generate a tremendous amount of heat, enough to warm a six-room house in zero weather; it's also enough to cause a "melt-down" of the engine if the cooling system becomes inoperative.

In newer, more fuel efficient cars, with their emission controls, smaller radiators, air conditioning and crowded engine compartments, under-the-hood temperatures may reach 280 degrees F. This is tough duty for rubber parts.

Car Care Council lists five warning signs of cooling system trouble:

- 1) Anti-freeze/coolant needs "topping off" more frequently (NOTE: When adding anti-freeze/coolant, the proportions

should be 50 percent to 70 percent anti-freeze/coolant and 50 percent to 30 percent water. Do not use permanent anti-freeze as it comes from the container.)

- 2) There are signs of seepage at hose connections or on the radiator;
- 3) A belt screeches as the engine is accelerated in neutral, indicating a loose belt;
- 4) The engine "diesels" (continues to run for a few seconds after the ignition has been turned off);
- 5) The engine knocks or "pings" under load.

If you've noticed any of these symptoms, have the car checked before starting out on a trip.

The last two symptoms also may signify an improper grade of fuel or need for a tune-up.

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