

Interpreting noises helps find trouble

Ominous car sounds tell you something may be wrong; understanding their cause can help you and your mechanic find and correct the problem before it becomes serious. Here are some of the more common noises, listed by Car Care Council.

- A "clunk" from under the car when you start forward or back up could be a warning that a universal joint is failing. That's serious if it breaks and the drive shaft drops while you're driving.

- If you have a front-wheel drive car, you'll also get a clunking sound if you have a looseness in a CV joint (like a universal joint that connects the front wheels to the transverse axle).

- When you apply the brakes and hear a squeal or a scraping sound, that could indicate worn brake linings or pads. If allowed to continue, it could result in damaging brake drums or rotors, making the repair more expensive.

- A thumping sound from a tire could be caused by flat spots on the tread due to improper balance or alignment. It also could be tread separation, which could result in a blowout.

- The sound of ticking in the engine usually is a valve lifter, generally heard when the engine is idling.

- A sudden screech from under the hood could be a worn or loose drive belt.

- A knocking or ping from under the hood when you accelerate could be from low grade gasoline, incorrect timing or other tune-up adjustments.

- A whining sound as you move from a standstill to normal driving speed could be coming from the transmission and could mean that you are low on transmission fluid. You probably won't hear this

sound when the car is idling or in neutral.

- A spitting sound or rumble from somewhere under the car could be an exhaust leak. This is a potentially dangerous situation, due to poisonous exhaust fumes that could seep into the car.

- If you raise the hood and hear a steady snapping sound that speeds up if the engine runs faster, it could mean a spark plug wire is loose or shorting out. The snapping sound is a spark jumping from the bad wire to the metal of the engine.

- If you turn on the ignition switch and hear a clicking sound, but the starter does nothing, your battery may need charging or replacing. It also could be loose or corroded connections. The clicking comes from the starter solenoid, which isn't getting enough voltage to engage the starter.

- A whirring sound (when the car doesn't start) could be the starter drive. Replacing this part normally will correct the problem.

CHECK BELTS AND HOSES FOR SIGNS OF WEAR

Just changing your antifreeze/coolant once a year may not be enough to avoid overheating or, worse, major engine damage. Car Care Council suggests checking your belts for adjustment and wear. Normal life expectancy is three to four years.

Heater hoses also deteriorate so, when you pop open your hood, check for leaks, cracks, rotted rubber or faulty clamps. For even greater peace of mind, get a professional flushing of the system.

Watch those tires and wheels

Even though winter's snow and slush melt away with the warmth of spring, the same does not hold true for damage to your vehicle's tires and wheels.

Engineers of The Kelly-Springfield Tire Company offer the following suggestions to help maintain your tires and wheels for the best performance.

- Take the time to inspect your tires and make certain that reinforcing belts are not exposed. Because most radial tires are steel belted, rusting can cause wire corrosion leading to separation and tire failure, if cuts or other rubber damage expose them to the elements.

- When inspecting your tires, Kelly-

Springfield's engineers recommend you check for irregular tread wear, which could be caused by misalignment due to winter road conditions or the way in which the tire was used.

The frequency of tire rotation should follow the tire manufacturer's recommendations.

- Check to ensure tires have the vehicle manufacturer's specified air pressure. Assuming there was no loss of air pressure throughout the winter, tires could be over-inflated for summer due to warmer weather.

Faster speeds for extended periods of time will cause more heat buildup in the tire. If the tire is at low pressure, it could

result in premature tire failure.

Because more states are changing to the 65-miles-per-hour speed limit, it is most critical that tires have the proper inflation.

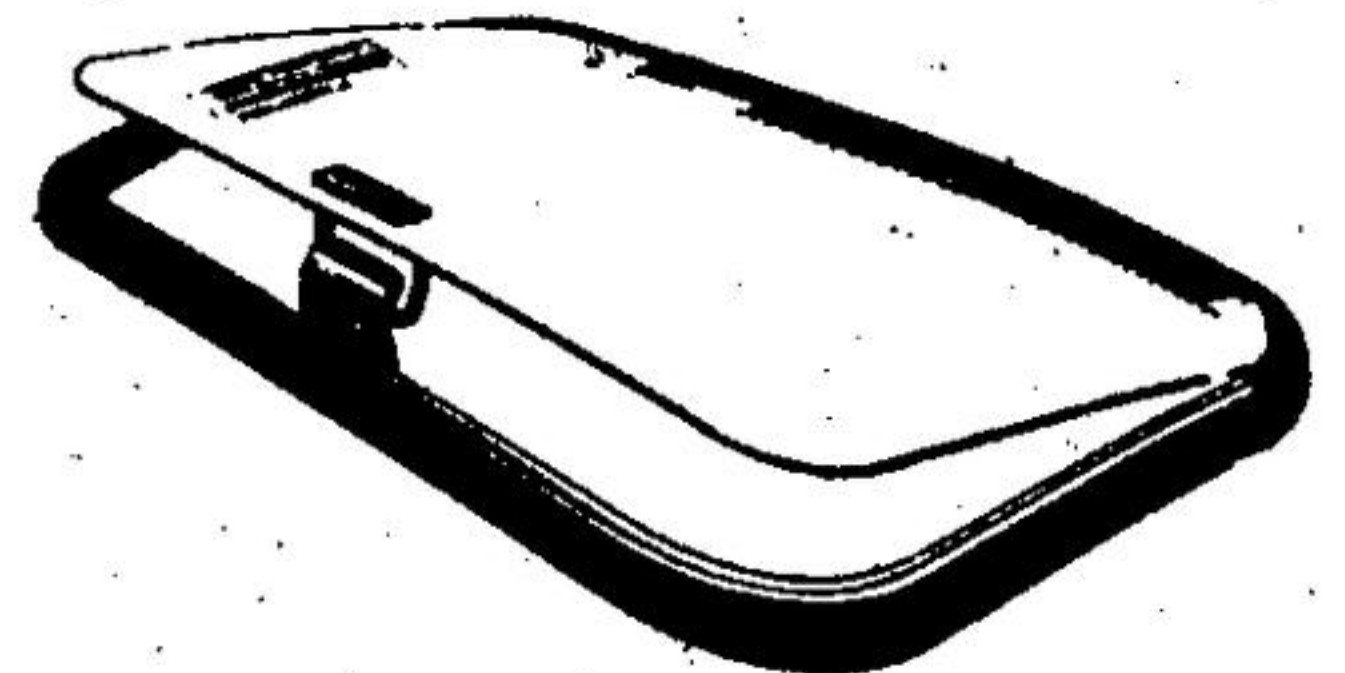
- If removing snow tires, be sure to check and clean them before storage. Tires should be stored in a cool, dry area, away from electrical motors and direct sunlight. Reduce air pressure if tires are mounted on wheels.

- When washing the salt from your vehicle, be sure to include your wheels and tires. White walls should be cleaned with a recommended cleaning agent.

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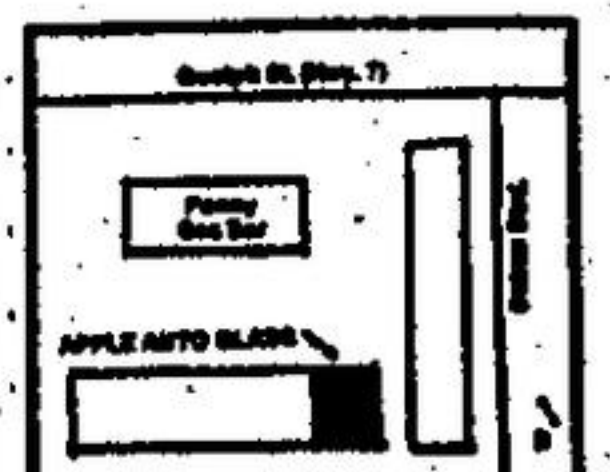
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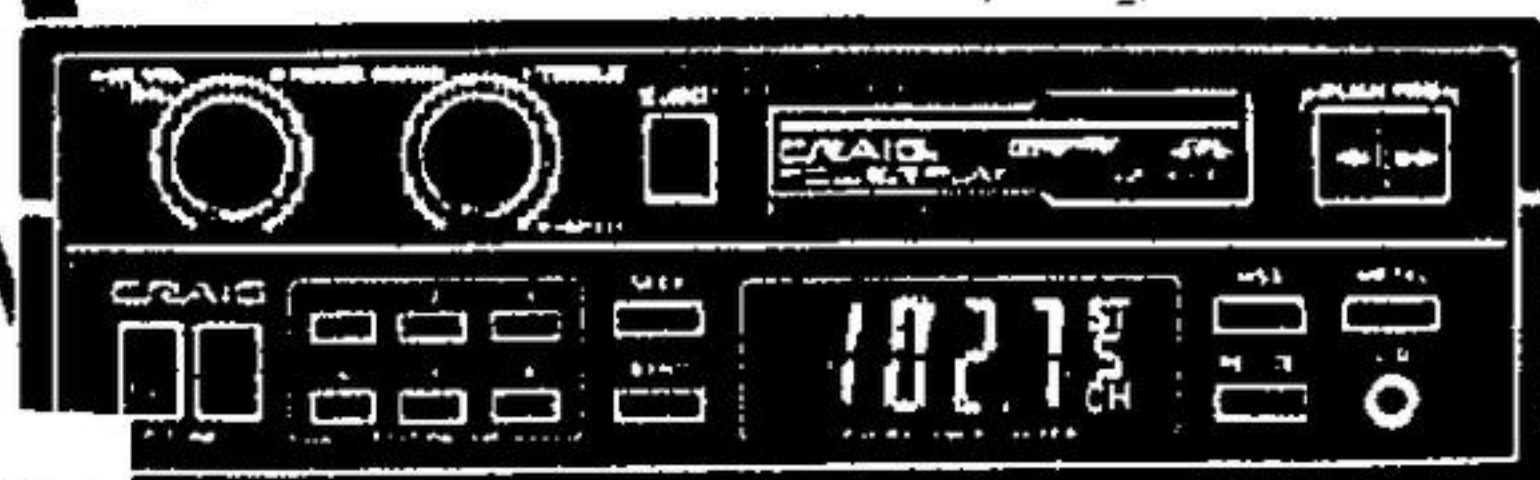


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