

# Ten tips for getting ready for summer

When it comes to car care, fair weather seems to lull some motorists into a false sense of security. Many vacationers traveling by car or light truck this summer will learn too late that hot weather makes its own special demands.

1. **Getting started.** Whether or not you are a do-it-yourselfer, get involved in the car care process. Start by reading your owner's manual. It contains a wealth of information about your vehicle and its components. The manufacturer's recommended service schedules are listed and should be followed.

2. **General cleaning.** A dirty, streaked windshield causes eye strain and can be unsafe. Replace worn blades—winter's tough on them—and make certain you have plenty of washer fluid to fight the dust and insects of summer. Don't forget to clean the inside of the windshield too.

A dirty, cluttered interior can cause unnecessary stress, so a thorough cleaning is in order, especially if you plan to travel with children and lots of luggage.

Keep your exterior in top shape by using a gentle detergent formulated for washing vehicles and a good grade of wax or polish. To prevent scratching, never clean today's headlights and taillights with dry rags.

3. **Cooling system.** The number-one 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. Never remove the radiator cap until the engine has cooled down. A 50/50 mix of anti-freeze and water is usually recommended. The tightness and condition of drive belts, clamps, and hoses should be checked by a pro.

4. **Air conditioning.** How long has it been since your air conditioner was serviced? A marginally operating air conditioning system is likely to fail in hot weather. Have your system examined at a good repair shop.

5. **Engine performance.** Engine drivability problems such as rough idling, hard starts, stalling, and diminished power should be corrected. The air, fuel, and PCV filters should be replaced according to the manufacturer's recommendations, more often in dusty conditions.

6. **Engine oil.** The old-fashioned oil change is one of the most vital maintenance tasks, yet paradoxically, it is also one of the most neglected. The oil and filter should be changed as specified in your owner's manual—more often (every 3,000 miles), if you plan long driving with luggage or a trailer in tow, or if you make many short, stop-and-go trips.

7. **Tires.** Tires, too, are often neglected, robbing owners of thousands of miles of useable tread life and posing a potential safety hazard. Tires should be rotated about every 5,000 miles. The air pressure should be checked once a month; let the tires "cool down" first. Check the sidewalls for nicks and cuts. Examine tires for tread life, uneven wearing and cupping.

An alignment is warranted if your vehicle "pulls" while you are driving on a straight road or if there's uneven tread wear. Cupping (treads look as though they've been cupped out of the tire) indicates a balance problem. Remember to check your spare tire and make certain your jack is in good working condition.

8. **Brakes.** Regular maintenance will extend the life of your brakes and will prevent more costly repairs due to neglect. Brakes should be inspected as recommended by your manual, or sooner if you notice pulsations, grabbing, noises, or longer stopping distances.

9. **Battery.** Most people associate battery failure with cold weather. But batteries can fail in hot weather too. The only accurate way to detect a weak battery is with the professional equipment available at good repair shops, but most people can perform routine care. Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all

connections. Wear eye protection and rubber gloves to avoid contact with the corrosive deposits and acid.

10. **Finding good auto service.** An integral part of the car care process includes finding good repair and service. An increasingly popular way to judge the technical know-how of individual technicians is to look for certification.

There are also ways to judge repair

shops. Ask friends and associates for their recommendations—word of mouth is a reliable indicator. Contact your local consumer organization regarding reputation, complaints, etc. Do you see vehicles of comparable value to your own on the lot?

Once inside, look for reasonably clean and orderly conditions, training certificates indicating exposure to new technology, customer service awards, and the

posting of policies, prices, guarantees, etc. Be prepared to describe any unusual noises, vibrations, odors, changes in performance, etc. The staff should be courteous and willing to listen to you and to answer your questions.

Remember, regular maintenance can give you peace of mind, catch minor problems before they become more serious, extend the life of your vehicle, and could increase its resale value.

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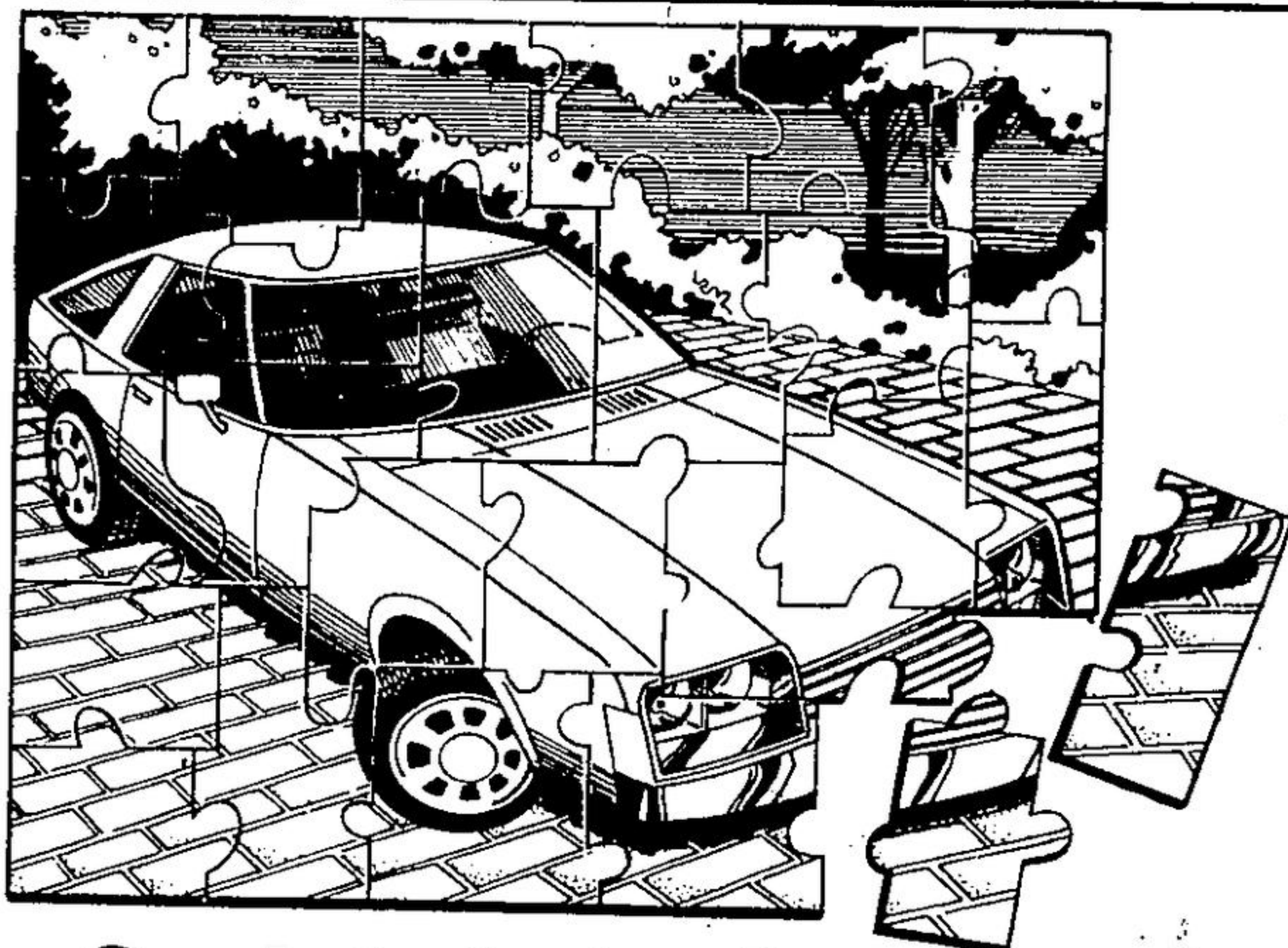
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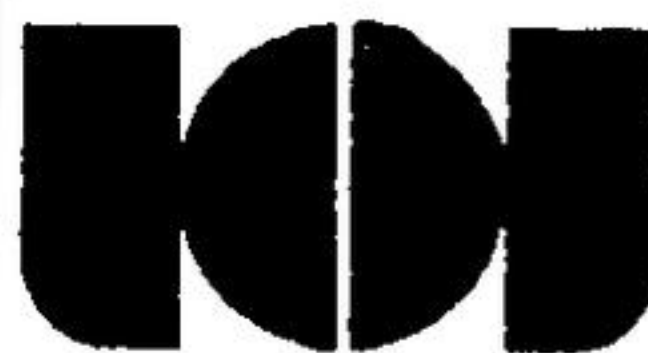
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