

Car Winterization

Tips on preparing your car for the winter season ahead

Record-breaking winter temperatures can leave you with enough car repairs to break your bank account. That's why it's no time to let simple, preventive car maintenance procedures fly south with the birds. Consider these tips for a smooth ride this winter:

Shocks and Struts — Alternate freezing and thawing can produce hazardous driving conditions — such as potholes. Even the most precise drivers can barely escape a whole winter without a single damaged tire or broken spring, but sometimes the jolt from the one you

couldn't dodge can be very expensive. The loss of a muffler and sometimes the pipes that go with it can be prevented by regularly inspecting the undercarriage. If you survive a pothole, let an expert do an alignment check to assess any damage that may have occurred.

Tires — When outside temperatures begin to drop, tires should be checked at least once a month, since cold weather reduces your tire's inflation pressure. Driving underinflated tires causes tire tread to wear faster and unevenly, and it can reduce ride

performance, affect vehicle handling and decrease your vehicle's fuel efficiency.

Uneven wear may signal improper inflation pressure, misalignment, tire and wheel imbalance or suspension problems.

Brakes — Don't gamble with your brakes; they could save your life. Your braking system, probably the most critical safety system on your car, should be checked periodically this winter. It'll be like buying yourself some peace of mind!

Engine — A severe winter could

mean millions of cars failing to start. Excessive exhaust emissions and a polluted atmosphere can dull a picturesque snowfall, and misfiring, knocking and pinging is never pretty. Before a "no-start" ruins your day, start out this fall with a well-tuned car.

Oil — Change your engine oil and filter every 3,000 miles (or as specified in your owner's manual) if you do lots of stop-and-go driving, carry heavy loads or drive long distances this fall and winter.

Belts and Hoses — When one needs replacing, you're likely to find

more in marginal condition. Hoses circulate as much as 7,500 gallons of coolant per hour at up to 18 pounds of pressure — and warrant periodic attention. Failure to maintain your cooling system by flushing and refilling every 24 months with fresh antifreeze can cause freeze-up, overheating and rust and corrosion buildup.

Batteries — Batteries lose their charge over time, especially in cold weather, and cable connections can corrode. A certified technician can test the strength of your battery's charge.

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