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Make sure your car is winter roadworthy

Each year a majority of the 18.6 million vehicles on Canadian roads face the winter season without being prepared. Today's vehicle quality has vastly improved over 10 years ago, and as a result most consumers have a sense that their vehicle will run forever with no or very little maintenance. Vehicle owners need to prepare their vehicles for the winter season.

Winter is the most difficult season for your vehicle and by following a few simple maintenance procedures you can decrease the chance of a breakdown.

- Motor oil is the life-blood of your engine, so start your winter maintenance with an oil change and a multi-point inspection of your vehicle. The use of a synthetic or syn-blend oil like Quaker State's Winter Oil which is specially formulated to provide easier start-up, less strain on your battery and superior performance in cold weather compared to conventional oils is recommended.

- As part of the multi-point inspection air filters and other critical fluids should be checked (such as engine coolant, transmission and brake fluid). Replace or top-up any fluids found to be below manufacturer's recommended specifications as found in your owner's manual. Check out the tightness and condition of belts, clamps and hoses. Look for signs of wear, cracking or frayed belts and replace if there is noticeable wear and tear to prevent sudden breakdowns.

- Visibility is vitally important as 96% of all driving decisions are made with vision. It is important to check wiper blades and replace worn, cracked or bent blades. Wiper blades should be replaced every six-months with new Rain-X blades. Make sure the washer reservoir is full

with quality Rain-X De-Icer fluid to fight the slush and ice. Make sure to have an ice scraper and snowbrush in your trunk.

- Inspect all lights and bulbs and replace burned out bulbs. With longer nights and lower visibility in winter, you want to make sure other drivers can see you. Also check headlight and tail light assemblies for pinholes that can allow moisture in and cause lenses to discolour and lead to premature bulb burn out.

- Install winter tires for better grip in ice and snow. Inspect all season tires on your vehicle for wear and rotate and re-balance the wheels. Check and adjust the air pressure including the spare! Uneven wear, cupping, vibrations or pulling to one side indicates problems with the tires or suspension. It's a good idea to complete a four-wheel alignment once a year.

- Carry a winter emergency kit in the trunk - this can include booster cables, shovel, flares, flashlight, Fix-a-Flat tire inflator, candles, waterproof matches, safety vest, blanket and gloves.

- Perform a battery inspection and load test to see how it survived the summer, make sure terminals are clean of any corrosion

- A routine brake inspection and service is important for safety and ensures immediate response in icy or slippery situations. Warning signs such as grinding, squealing or chatter are sure signs the brakes are in need of service.

- Put a coat of wax on the exterior of your vehicle to help protect the surface from the harsh winter elements. Remove any clutter collected over the summer inside the vehicle, vacuum the carpet, clean all windows and apply an interior protectant to the dashboard and vinyl surfaces (such as Rain X protectant).

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