

For "severe service" drivers, regular auto maintenance is key to good performance

If you're one of those rare people who have taken the trouble to look up periodic service recommendations in your car owner's manual, you may have seen double and triple asterisks referring to "severe service" operation.

The term does not necessarily denote someone who daily climbs Pike's Peak or asks his subcompact car to perform Herculean tasks.

In fact, says Car Care Council, the time-worn idea that the best buy in a used car is the one that has been driven by the little old lady who ran only three miles to and from the grocery store is a thing of the past.

She may qualify as a severe service driver and not even know it. Before buying her car, take a close look at her maintenance records!

Many of the driving habits that we think of as "typical" can be very hard on a car, especially in certain combinations. Example: Short trips (10 miles or less) and stop-and-go driving such as might be encountered in city traffic or on a delivery route combined with unusually hot or cold weather are hard on a car.

Towing a trailer or otherwise hauling heavy loads on a regular basis is considered severe service, too, especially in hilly terrain.

While this kind of driving is the exception rather than the rule, says Car Care Council, people who do fall into these categories should be careful to observe owner's manual maintenance recommendations when they apply.

Especially important is constant checking of vital fluids such as engine oil, transmission fluid, anti-freeze/coolant, brake fluid and power steering fluid.

Failure to check and change fluids and filters on schedule can cause rapid engine and/or transmission wear, and premature failure of these major components.

The Council emphasizes the importance of recognizing evidence of possible automatic transmission damage due to the intense heat and stress that can result from something as commonplace as extended periods of trying to rock a car out of a snow drift.

When the transmission fluid has turned dirty brown and smells burned, do not delay changing fluid and filter. It could help avoid a major overhaul expense.

For further information on checking fluids and filters, send for Car Care Council's brochure, "Keep An Eye On Your Filters." All it takes is a quarter and a stamped, self-addressed #10 envelope to Filters, Car Care Council, 600 Renaissance Center, Detroit, MI 48243.

