

Take care of problems before they happen

According to auto experts, if you own a car with an advanced electronic ignition system, don't overlook the importance of a periodic tune-up, no matter how well or how long your engine has been performing. Advanced ignition systems don't always show signs of wear, even though certain parts may be going bad.

Cars with conventional ignition systems (points and condenser) used to start hard, idle rough, spew smoke and offer other telltale signs of problems when a tune-up was needed. This isn't always the case with electronic ignition cars.

Electronic ignition systems are often sophisticated enough to compensate for problems until things get to severe that major components such as caps, rotors and ignition wires start burning out. The results can be poor vehicle performance and an expensive repair bill. Problems that could have been avoided with preventive maintenance.

As a rule, conventional ignition systems should be tuned every year or 12,000 miles (whichever comes first). Advanced ignition systems should receive a tune-up check every 15,000 to 20,000 miles.

If you are a severe service driver (i.e., you subject your car to continual stop-and-go driving, a lot of short trips, or pulling heavy loads such as a boat or trailer), your car may need tuning more often.

Tune-ups involve checking the car's ignition and fuel systems and either adjusting or replacing parts. Prices and extent of tune-up work vary from shop to shop; what is considered standard at one shop may be an "extra" at another. Shop around, compare tune-up offers, and always get an itemized quote before work is performed, in order to see what you're paying for.

If you own one of the new computer-equipped cars and your "check engine" light has been coming on, you'll need a diagnostic checkup followed by a

"maintenance" tune-up as needed.

You'll pay more for this type of checkup, but it's the only way to pinpoint whether you have a computer-related or deep-rooted tune-up problem.

Above all, stick with a good tune-up source once you've found one. A shop that knows your car's history is in the best position to recommend ideal tune-up intervals and help you cut corners on costs based on previous work performed.

The following is intended to serve as a guide. For further information on tune-up intervals, check the owner's manual for your particular vehicle.

- **Air Filter:** Replace as often as necessary, but at least every 20,000 miles. Check and replace more frequently if you drive in dusty or dirty areas.

- **PCV Valve:** Replace every 12,000 miles. This handy device allows some unburned fuel and emissions fumes to be reburned in the cylinders, thereby lowering air pollution and increasing fuel economy.

- **Fuel Filter:** Replace once a year or every 20,000 miles.

- **Points and Condenser:** This applies to conventional ignition systems only. Replace as part of tune-up.

- **Spark Plug Wires and Boots:** Replace as needed and always in sets.

- **Ignition Timing:** Check and adjust every time points are replaced in conventional systems and every time plugs are replaced in electronic systems.

- **Distributor Cap:** With each tune-up, check for cracks and erosion of the terminals. With conventional ignition systems, cap and rotor always should be replaced in a set.

- **Emissions Filters:** Today's cars can have several of these devices. Replacement intervals vary widely from car to car (consult your owner's manual). Some vehicles have warning lights to remind you when these filters need changing.



Keep it clean

There's nothing like the shine of a new car's paint to make its owner proud of his or her purchase. That pride can be reflected in a clean car for years to come, provided the owner is committed to cleanliness. Dirt, air pollution and road salt are among the enemies of a paint job. Washing the vehicle about once each week is the best defense against dull paint. Be sure to use non-detergent washing solvents which won't damage the paint. Purchase special car shampoos for this purpose. A good coat of wax will provide good protection to your clean car. Get out the elbow grease and make an investment in the look of your vehicle. Proper care can make your car look like new for years after you drive it off the lot. A well cared for vehicle is much easier to sell than one which has been neglected.

Cure for cooling system trouble

It's a cold day and your car's engine overheats. A paradox? Not really, says Car Care Council. Overheating, a problem generally associated with hot weather driving, can happen in any season if the engine's cooling system needs service.

A common reason for overheating, adds Car Care Council, is a clogged radiator. Under normal conditions, the cooling system should be drained and the dirty coolant replaced every year or two as a preventive measure. This is the time to flush out the system with a good chemical cleaner.

According to Car Care Council, overheating is often caused by low coolant level. Routine maintenance should include pressure testing to locate leaks and seepage.

Other causes of overheating include incorrect ignition timing, slipping fan belt or other malfunctions in the fan mechanism, faulty thermostat, a collapsed hose or a worn pressure cap.

If the engine is running hot, however, even a heavy duty cleaner may not remove the accumulation of scale and rust in the radiator and engine block.

That's when a professional job may be required. An experienced technician can usually determine whether or not the radiator core is plugged up, without removing it from the car.

Make sure your car can breathe

With each gallon of gas your car burns, it consumes 14 gallons of air. For ideal combustion, that air should be at a temperature of between 70 degrees F. and 90 degrees F. When it's too cold, the car will run poorly, stall, get poor gas mileage and generally be sluggish in performance.

This common winter driving symptom, says Car Care Council, is often caused by a damaged or missing "head riser" tube. This is a flexible metal duct that directs heat from

the hot exhaust manifold to the air cleaner intake.

Also known as the preheater duct, it connects to a fresh air duct at the air cleaner housing. Here, a temperature controlled valve mixes hot and cold air to keep intake at the right temperature.

Sound complicated? It's nothing more than a simple hot air furnace for the benefit of the carburetor or fuel injection.

In a similar way, the fresh air duct to the carburetor is designed to provide cool air to the system in hot

weather, when under-hood temperatures may exceed 200 degrees F. If the air in the fuel/air mix is too hot, a lean mixture will result, causing power loss, excessive emissions and/or severe engine damage.

This fresh air intake tube also often is found damaged or missing, according to reports to the Council from vehicle inspection lanes. Both of these ducts should be examined periodically and replaced when necessary. They are easy do-it-yourself jobs for owners so inclined.

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