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Women can save money by maintaining their vehicles' tires themselves.

Vehicles — and the maintenance that goes with them — are no longer a domain dominated by men.

Changing social conditions have put women in the automotive

spotlight. In fact, one automotive survey said females accounted for nearly half the vehicles purchased in 1993.

This is a dramatic jump from 25 years earlier, when less than one-fourth of automotive sales were to women.

With this in mind, more and more women are looking to prop-

Tire Facts

erly maintain their cars without paying the high price of a local mechanic. One of the best places to start is with the tires.

"It's very easy to leave all vehicle maintenance to the dealer or a mechanic, but that can get unnecessarily expensive and time-consuming," said Rick Brennan, Yokohama Tire Corporation's manager, consumer products.

"We recommend that people take a few seconds to study their owner's manual and learn how to perform basic services, such as refilling certain fluids and checking their tires.

"Tires are among the most simple and economic areas of do-it-yourself maintenance. About all you need is a tire gauge and a few minutes a month."

Yokohama Tire Corporation recommended combining regular tire inspections with proper driving techniques to handle the challenges of the road.

The key is to prevent problems before they occur.

The five main elements of tire maintenance are visual inspections, air pressure checks, rotation, alignment and balancing.

Begin with visual inspections. Look for irregular treadwear, cuts and unnatural tire conditions, such as punctures and other exterior damages. Remember that tires are more susceptible to cuts during wet weather, because rubber is more easily damaged when it is wet.

Also, steel cords exposed by cuts can corrode, causing additional safety hazards.

Check a tire's tread depth, as well. A worn tread pattern severely limits the tire's ability to operate effectively, particularly in adverse weather conditions and could result in a loss of traction or hydroplaning.

Tire companies install a treadwear indicator that becomes even with the tread surface when the tire is worn to the minimum legal tread depth, which is 2/32 of an inch.

Every three to four weeks, check each tire's inflation pressure with an accurate gauge. Recommended air pressures usually can be found in owner's manuals, although it's best to consult with

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