

CAR CARE SPRING & SUMMER

Why it's important to wash your car

The first things to come to mind when many people ponder vehicle maintenance are oil changes and routine tune-ups. Though each of those things are vital components of automotive maintenance, it's important that drivers recognize the value of a thorough car wash as well.

Drivers may see a car wash as a way to make their car look good, and that's not untrue. An effective car wash can give a car a look that mirrors how the vehicle appeared the moment it was driven off the lot. But an effective wash is more than just cosmetic. According to Consumer Reports, a thorough car wash removes grit and residue, thus protecting the car's paint job and reducing the likelihood of corrosion. Though late model vehicles aren't as susceptible to rust, fading and peeling as cars made decades ago, they still need a thorough and routine wash to remove dirt, grime and bird droppings that, over time, can adversely affect the paint job and, if left unchecked, eat away at the metal.

Another benefit to routine car washes is they can prevent damage related to seasonal issues. For example, individuals who live in regions where winter snowfall is common may routinely drive on roads that have been salted. Deicing the roads makes driving safer, but salt can accumulate on the undercarriage of the vehicle and contribute to corrosion. Winter may not be a time many drivers visit the car wash, but it's important to do so after snow has melted and salt on the roadways has been washed away by rain. Most car washes now offer high-pressure undercarriage treatments that can wash off salt and prevent corrosion and the formation of rust.

But it's not just the exterior of the car that can benefit from routine washing. When taking their cars to get washed, many motorists pay a little extra to have their vehicle interiors cleaned. Sometimes referred to as "interior detailing," cleaning the cabin of the car helps to maintain the interior so it looks new longer. Routine interior cleaning also can remove dust and other particles that can serve as irritants if allowed to build up over time.

Resale and trade-in value is another factor to consider. The automotive experts at Edmunds note that the average transaction price for a used vehicle in the second quarter of 2021 was \$25,410, which marks a 21 percent increase over the year prior. Much has been made of the microchip issues that have compromised auto manufacturers' ability to produce new automobiles, and that led many motorists to the preowned vehicle market. Dealerships also offered incentives to drivers willing to trade in their late model cars. By taking care of a vehicle's interior, drivers are putting themselves in position to capitalize on the increased reliance on the preowned market. Prospective buyers, whether they're private citizens or dealerships, will see more value in a vehicle with a well-maintained interior than one with a cabin that's seen much better days.

Car washes may be seen as a purely cosmetic form of vehicle maintenance. But the benefits of routine and thorough car washes extend far beyond aesthetic appeal.



Avoid drowsy driving incidents

Driving offers a sense of freedom that is hard to replicate. Is it any wonder young drivers are so eager to get their licenses while older drivers aim to hold on to them as long as they can?

Certain hazards come with getting behind the wheel, though most are largely preventable — including drowsy driving. As more people take to the roadways this spring and summer, it is important to remember that drowsy driving is a major problem.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that as many as 6,000 fatal crashes each year may be attributed to drowsy drivers. The National Sleep Foundation found about half of adult drivers in the United States admit to consistently getting behind the wheel while feeling drowsy. In addition, more than 40 percent of survey respondents say they have fallen asleep behind the wheel at least once.

The impact of drowsiness on driving is just as dangerous as driving while intoxicated, distracted or under the influence of both legal and illegal drugs.

- Reaction times are greatly reduced and worsen the drowsier the driver becomes.

- Awareness of hazards and the ability to sustain attention are diminished.

- Driving after being awake more than 20 hours without sleep is the equivalent of driving with a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.08 percent.

- The National Safety Council warns that fatigued drivers are three more times more likely to be in a car crash than drivers who are not fatigued.

- Insufficient sleep is tied to poor decision-making, which can lead to risk-taking behind the wheel.

Some drivers may not recognize they are driving while drowsy. Drivers with certain sleep disorders, such as obstructive sleep apnea, may not recognize that their interrupted, less restorative sleep can adversely affect their safe-

ty behind the wheel. Addressing sleep disorders can help drivers be more safe. Other people may be sleep deprived from working shift hours or taking care of young children. Asking for help to catch up on sleep can alleviate drowsiness when behind the wheel.

Individuals can take additional steps to make them less susceptible to drowsy driving.

- Avoid driving between midnight and 6 a.m. or in the mid-afternoon when sleepiness peaks, according to the Sleep Foundation.

- Ask to change medications if they cause drowsiness. Check to see if supplements list drowsiness as reactions and avoid those that do.

- Take breaks when driving long distances. Travel with a driving partner who can share the responsibility of driving.

Drowsy driving is a problem that can be prevented. But drivers must first recognize the threat that drowsy driving can pose.

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How to maintain an older vehicle

New cars have been costly for quite some time, but those costs have spiked considerably since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. That unprecedented rise has led many motorists to wonder how they can get more mileage out of their existing vehicles.

According to data from Kelley Blue Book and Cox Automotive, the average cost of a new car in September 2021 was just over \$45,000. That marked a \$3,000 increase from June 2021 and a \$5,000 increase from the end of 2020.

Drivers who can't afford to keep up with the rising cost of new vehicles can take these steps to keep their existing cars running smoothly for years to come.

- Take care of the timing belt. Engines may get all the glory, but they cannot run smoothly without a fully functional timing belt. Engines need various components to do their job, and those components must do so at the right time for the engine to run smoothly. Fully functional timing

belts help to synchronize movements, but belts must be replaced every so often. Owner's manuals may note when to replace the timing belt, but they generally must be replaced every 60,000 to 105,000 miles. That's infrequent, but drivers can ask their mechanics to keep an eye on their timing belts. One issue many drivers encountered in the early months of the pandemic when people were driving less frequently was timing belts that were failing long before they reached the projected mile markers. That's because infrequent driving can hasten the demise of the timing belt. This is something for aging drivers who no longer drive a lot to keep in mind.

- Take care of the brakes and associated components. The experts at Popular Mechanics urge drivers of older vehicles to replace their brake fluid every two years. Popular Mechanics also advises drivers whose cars are more than seven years old to replace the

rubber brake lines when major brake work is required.

- Pay attention to oil levels. The older engines get, the more oil they're going to burn. So drivers of older vehicles should check their oil levels more often than they would if their vehicles were brand new. This also is a great way to discover leaks before they lead to potentially significant issues.

- Don't skip maintenance appointments. Even if you're still driving less due to the pandemic, it's best not to skip recommended maintenance intervals. That's true for drivers of all cars, but especially those whose vehicles are aging. Routine tune-ups and oil changes, which may need to become more frequent the older the vehicle gets, can keep cars running smoothly and protect the engine over the long haul.

The rising cost of new cars is compelling millions of drivers to keep their cars longer than they might have anticipated. Some simple maintenance measures can help those cars run strong for years to come.





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