



# Getting Your Vehicle Ready for Summer

Go for Zero Breakdowns

Summer's heat, dust and stop-and-go traffic will take their toll on your car or truck. Add the effects of last winter, and you could be poised for a breakdown. You can lessen the odds of mechanical failure through periodic maintenance. Your vehicle will last longer, have a higher resale value, and you can survive summer trips unscathed—physically and financially.

Some of the following tips are easy to do; others require an auto mechanic.

- **Air Conditioning.** A marginally operating system will fail in hot weather. Have the system examined by a qualified technician.

- **Cooling System.** The greatest cause of summer breakdowns is overheating. Completely flush the cooling system and refill it every two years. Periodically check the level, condition and concentration of the coolant. (Mechanics usually recommend a 50/50 mix of anti-freeze and water.) Never remove the radiator cap until the engine has thoroughly cooled.

- **Hoses & Belts.** Look closely at every hose you can reach. Replace any that are cracked, brittle or soft. Do the same for belts.

- **Oil.** Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your manual—more often (every 3,000 miles) if you make frequent short jaunts, extended trips with lots of luggage, or tow a trailer.

- **Engine Performance.** Replace other filters (air, fuel, PCV, etc.) as your manual recommends—more often in dusty conditions. Correct drive problems (hard starts, rough idling, stalling, diminished power) at a reputable shop.

- **Windshield Wipers.** A dirty windshield causes eye fatigue and can be a hazard. Replace worn blades and keep your windshield-solvent tank filled.

- **Lights.** Inspect all lights and bulbs. Replace burned-out bulbs, and periodically clean dirt and insects from all lenses. To prevent scratching the lens, use a soft, dry rag.

- **Tires.** Have your tires rotated about every 5,000 miles. Check tire pressure once a month. Do it while the tires are “cool,” not right after pulling into a gas station or your driveway. Don't forget your spare, and be sure the jack is in good condition. Examine tires for tread life, uneven wearing and cupping. Check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. If you have uneven tread wear or your car pulls to one side, you need an alignment.

- **Brakes.** Follow the recommendation in your owner's manual on when to get brakes inspected. Have it done sooner if you notice pulsations, grabbing, noises, or longer stopping distances.

- **Battery.** Batteries can fail any time of year. The only accurate way to detect a weak battery is with professional equipment. Routine care: Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all connections. If battery caps are removable, check the fluid level monthly. Avoid contact with corrosive deposits and battery acid. Wear eye protection and rubber gloves.

- **Emergencies.** Carry some basic tools. Also include a first-aid kit, flares and a flashlight. Consider buying a cellular phone, but please pull off the road before using it. ■