



Fall Car Care

Common Car Care Issues

Routine service and maintenance is as vital to your car as the warranty everybody keeps calling you about.

Regardless, no good thing – a fine-tuned machine in this case – lasts forever. Issues will eventually arise. They are as common as death and taxes. However, there is a way to reduce the chances of breakdown and expensive repairs by keeping an eye out for this common car problems that tend to appear, according to YourMechanic.com.

THE WARNING LIGHT

The warning light is a common issue for U.S. motor vehicles. These lights appear in the dashboard when a sensor in the vehicle's computer, or engine control unit, detects a problem. It's best to leave the diagnosing to the professionals. In other words, go see a mechanic.

A SPUTTERING ENGINE

Nothing will ruin a day faster than a sputtering engine, which works best when a complex system of fuel and ignition components are in harmony.

Always comply to recommended maintenance and timed replacement of fuel and ignition system components as recommended by the manufacturer.

POOR FUEL ECONOMY

This is often caused when fuel system components, such as fuel filters, air filters, mass air flow sensors and O2 sensors get dirty or wear out. A breakdown in this vehicular ecosystem will cause the engine to consume more fuel than usual. Being proactive in routine servicing is the solution.

A DEAD BATTERY

We've all been there. Jump

in the car, try to fire up the ignition and nothing happens. The car experts advise us to replace your car battery every 50,000 miles or three years, even if it's not showing signs of slowdown. See also, damaged alternator and battery temperature sensor.

THE STARTER

The starter motor is what cranks your engine over, which begins the starting process. When this fails, it's usu-

ally because the electrical solenoid has been damaged, the starter motor breaks, or another electrical fault occurs.

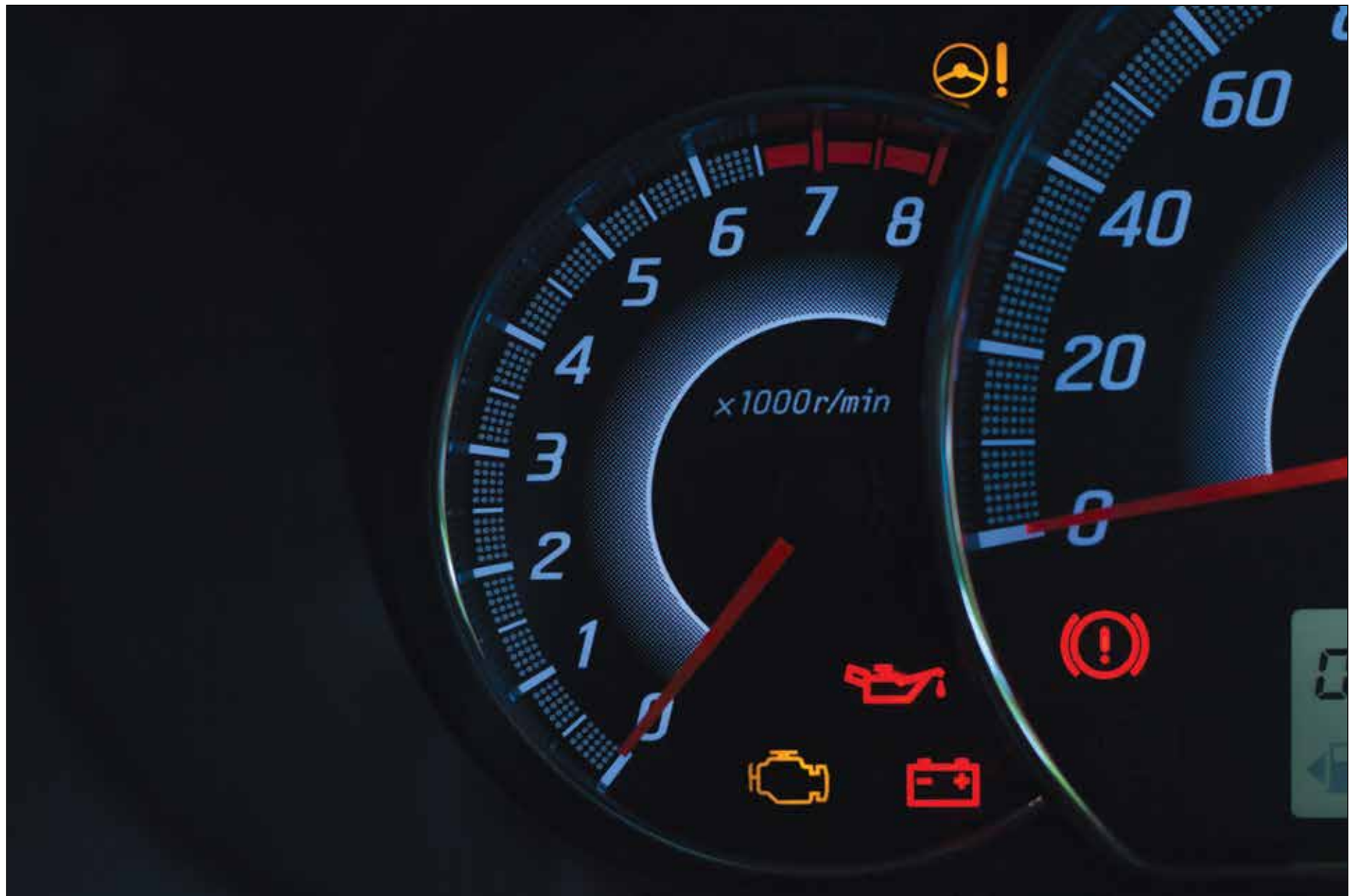
SHAKING STEERING WHEEL

Many things could be at play here. If it happens just as you're beginning to drive after starting the car, wheel bearings or damaged suspension components are likely the issue.

If it happens at higher speeds, it's typically a tire/wheel balance issue. For amateurs, go to your mechanic to make a diagnosis.

Overheating

It might surprise you to learn that overheating is a rarity. Proper maintenance the radiator, including flushing services, and switching out the water pump before it goes south are effective ways to reduce the potential for overheating issues.



Best Car Waxes and Sealants

Car waxes and paint sealants are both effective ways to protect the investment you have made in your car.

Both protect the paint layer from UV rays and intense heat of the sun, moisture, oxidation, contaminants and mechanical erosion. Car waxes are derived from natural ingredients. Paint sealants are entirely synthetic polymer-based and provide lasting protection to the color of your car. Car and Driver rank its best, from five to one.

‘GRAND FINALE’

Zaino’s Grand Finale, a spray sealant, boasts “a high gloss, deep ‘wet’ finish, thanks to its synthetic polymer formula.” Car and Driver continues: “The shine looks great and after a few weeks, the coat still seemed very much intact and continues to bead water. The only downside is it was a bit hard to apply it evenly, so they recommend diluting the solution if you have difficulty applying evenly.” Zaino is strictly web-based. Go online to buy some.

‘LIQUID WAX’

Liquid Wax by CarGuys advertises getting a wax shine with added synthetic protection from its polymer formula. Car and Driver reports “really solid results” in their testing. After a few weeks, the publication said,



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the coat still “seemed very hydrophobic.”

‘MIRROR GLAZE SYNTHETIC SEALANT 2.0’

Manufactured by Meguiar’s, this formula is similar to other Polymer-based formulas known for hydrophobic capabilities. The downside is it’s not

a spray-on formula and must be essentially applied and fully buffed like traditional car wax. It can be messy.

‘REVIVE’

By manufacturer Hydrosilex, the spray-on silica-based Sio2 formula is designed to be a temporary ceramic coating. “Amazing hydrophobic quali-

ties,” reported Car and Driver.

THE LAST COAT

“The best wax replacement since, well, ever,” according to Car and Driver. Users will be “blown you away” by its effectiveness, durability, and “especially ease of use.” “It gave a very hard and mirror-like shine that was extremely durable and

held up from the elements, washing, and much more.”

The Last Coat was founded by a professional detailer with more than 20,000 hours of real-world detailing experience. And it is 100% made in America, San Diego, California, to be exact. At one point, The Last Coat boasted more than 7,000 five-star reviews.

Changing your Brake Pads

Changing your brake pads can be a do-it-yourself job if you have some basic car knowledge.

Here's a short primer, which coupled with a "how-to" video from YouTube, will give you what you need to know about changing your brakes.

HOW TO KNOW WHEN TO

CHANGE

The car will let you know through a shrill, high-pitched squeal every time you tap the brake pedal. Don't ignore this warning. If you do, the work to repair only gets more complicated. Metal-on-metal is a bad thing. Other symptoms, according to Bridgestone Tires, could include vibration when holding down the brake pedal or needing to press down the pedal further than normal to get to full stopping power.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROTORS?

Should they stay or should they go, that is always part of the question? "Resurfacing" the rotors isn't generally an option for the do-it-yourselfer. Instead, you can purchase at your local auto parts store, from \$32 or so and up, depending on your make and model.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

More often than not, when brake issues arise, it's the



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front brakes that are most urgently in need of changing because they handle most of the work in stopping your car. Clark.com recommended these things when changing the brake pads on a mid-aughts Honda Accord. They also recommended a YouTube how-to to learn all the steps.

- Floor jack and jack stands
- Tire iron (to remove wheels)

- 3/8-inch socket set
- C-clamp
- Rubber mallet (optional)
- Hammer (optional)
- Phillips and flathead screwdrivers

Bloggers at Clark.com recommended setting aside three to four hours, at least. The professionals need far less time, but this much time

will allow you to get acclimated to each part of the task.

A GREAT PERK TO DOING IT YOURSELF

In addition to the satisfaction of learning and completing a mechanical task, there is one other possible — and totally awesome — benefit to doing it yourself.

Free brake pads for life! It's possible.

Yes, you read that right. Some auto parts stores include a lifetime warranty on their brake pads. Once they are worn, bring them back to the store for a replacement. More often than not, the brake pads come with a limited lifetime warranty. That is, if a part fails during a warranty period, which is shown on your receipt, the auto parts store will guarantee another.

Ranking the Best Tires

Tires are mistakenly often an afterthought on a car. In reality, tires are among the most important elements of a car and its performance.

The tires support the vehicle load, transmit traction and braking forces to the surface of the road and they absorb road shocks. That's not to name their role in fuel efficiency that these unsung heroes do. Automoblog rated tires for 2021, judging Michelin and Goodyear the best tire brands with overall scores of 4.5 in their rating system, followed by Cooper, Bridgestone and Pirelli, each with 4.0. All five earned superlatives.

BEST TIRE OVERALL

That would be Michelin, according to Automoblog, which noted an above average mileage warranty of the Michelin Defender, which is covered for 80,000 miles. Michelin also offers original equipment tires and replacement tires. Both can include a limited warranty for up to six years on any manufacturer defects.

BEST DURABILITY

And the winner is ... Goodyear, which boasts a rigorous in-house and independent testing before sending its tires out to the marketplace.



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Automoblog noted one study by Test World that found Goodyear tires outperformed other brands in almost every category and condition, including braking, acceleration, handling, ice, snow, rain and dry roads.

MOST AFFORDABLE

Relative newcomer – 1914, that is – Cooper tires were considerably cheaper than

most other brands without – and this is key, of course – without compromising quality. In its survey, Automoblog found one Cooper tire ranging in price from \$85 to \$135, depending, of course, on vehicle and tire size.

BEST RUN FLATS

If you don't have a spare tire – looking at you, sports car guy – or perhaps you're picky

about where you buy replacement tires, Bridgestone is your tire for run flats. Run flats are those tires “can support the weight of a vehicle for a short time, providing the driver with about 100 miles of range to find a repair shop,” according to Edmunds.com.

BEST FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

Italian manufacturer Pirelli

brings an international presence to this list.

Pirellis have long enjoyed a reputation as a high-performance tire for luxury and exotic cars, such as Maserati, Lamborghini, BMW and Porsche.

It's the specific thread patterns and build that make for excellent grip on the road for cars that are doing more than a Sunday drive.

The Economics of Tires

You might not be surprised to find that price is a preeminent factor for consumers shopping for tires.

A study conducted by Consumer Reports surveyed buyers over the last 12 months and asked them about their overall satisfaction with 23 tire retail chains. Price was a motivating factor in a third of all purchases, as were tread life and brand trust.

OLD-FASHIONED BARGAINING

The survey found that some tire shoppers had no reservations about haggling with retailers for a better price. Fourteen percent tried it and, among those, 70% were successful getting a deal. The median savings was \$96 per set of four tires.

Overall, consumers in the study paid about \$196 per tire, up from \$148 in a 2018 survey. The cost of installation rose also, from \$22 to \$24 per tire. Car dealerships charged the most for tire installation at \$36. Sam's Club charged the least, \$14.

MICHELIN MEN

Michelin stood out in the Consumer Reports survey, by far the most purchased tire brand among Consumer Report members. Michelin tires often are more expensive, but the added cost can often be justified when comparing track performance and projected treadwear.

MEDIAN PRICE PER TIRE

Nokian, \$215
Pirelli, \$206
Michelin, \$185
Continental, \$178
Bridgestone, \$174

BFGoodrich, \$174
Toyo, \$173
Yokohama, \$157
Goodyear, \$151
Hankook, \$148
Firestone, \$145
Cooper, \$142

PERKS AND WARRANTY

In addition to cutting the purchase price, 81% of consumers received a free perk or service with the cost of pur-

chasing or installing tires. Half received free tire balancing and almost as many received a free tire rotation. Others in the survey brought up tire mounting, tire disposal and road-hazard warranty.

The road-hazard warranty, that protection that provides prorated replacement for tires damaged before their traditional tread life has expired, is another common inducement. The survey showed 27% received on free of charge, while only one in five pur-

chased a warranty with the tires. The percentage who got a free warranty varied by retailer.

"You may be able to get the coverage you want bundled in with the tires," said Gene Petersen, who manages the Consumer Reports tire-testing program. "In some cases, such as when you get a great deal on tires themselves, but they don't include a road-hazard warranty, it may be worth paying extra for that protection."



Mechanic Tales

Mechanics and automobile technicians are valuable members of the community.

Without them, getting to work, the store, church or wherever would be a job when the car breaks down. They're valuable because they possess a skill that many of us don't have. Some customers know a little more than others, however. Some of the best stories from mechanics, from Popular Mechanics and Motor-Junkie.com.

IT'S THE ALTERNATOR, HE THINKS

From a mechanic in Grand Prairie, Texas, is this story about a customer who came into the shop swearing his alternator was bad. The parts store told him so.

"I popped the hood and solved the problem in about 10 seconds. Both battery terminals were loose, and the B-plus cable was zip-tied in place. I replaced the missing bolt and tightened both ends down. The car fired right up."

EXHAUSTED EXHAUST SYSTEM

Exhaust systems play an integral role in the operation of a car, filtering out some nasty stuff. A mechanic in Florida took a test drive on customer's car, verifying that the car was down on power and making a rattling noise, a



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common symptom of a failing catalytic converter. The mechanic took a closer look.

"As I did, something fell out of the pipe: a rock-hard log of built-up carbon that had formed around a broken filter element. It was kind of like a pearl, except completely black and not worth a penny."

MOTOR? WHAT MOTOR?

This story was gleaned from an article on Jalopnik. A lady complained to a mechanic that her Prius wasn't driving

well and her dashboard was lit up with sensor lights. The mechanics at the dealership found the problem immediately.

When was the last time she had changed the oil, they asked?

"Never," she said. "The Prius doesn't have a motor, so why would I do that?"

MY CAR IS MAKING A NOISE

It's amazing what you can find on Reddit. A customer

said there was a "heavy clunking when stopping and the same clunk when moving from a stop."

There was a bowling ball in the trunk.

COMMON SENSE NOT AS COMMON AS IT SOUNDS

A lady complained to her mechanic who had just changed out her clutch. By the time he returned to the shop after dropping off her car, she had already called to say she couldn't get the car into gear.

The dutiful mechanic drove right back out there to examine the car. He got it running again without any problem. When he returned to work, she had once again called to raise hades.

"This time, not just a little angry, but screaming all kinds of curse [words] at us," the mechanic said.

So back to her house the mechanic went to find that she needed to push the seat up to press the clutch down all the way.

Smart Lighting

One upcoming trend in automobile technology is smart lighting, whether inside or outside the vehicle.

If you're looking to make an update to your car this fall, consider a lighting project. Here's a primer on this trend, products already on the market and what could be coming to the market soon.

INTERIOR LIGHTING

Much the same as our homes are benefiting from smart lighting technology, new products on the market are allowing us to set the mood with lighting inside our cars.

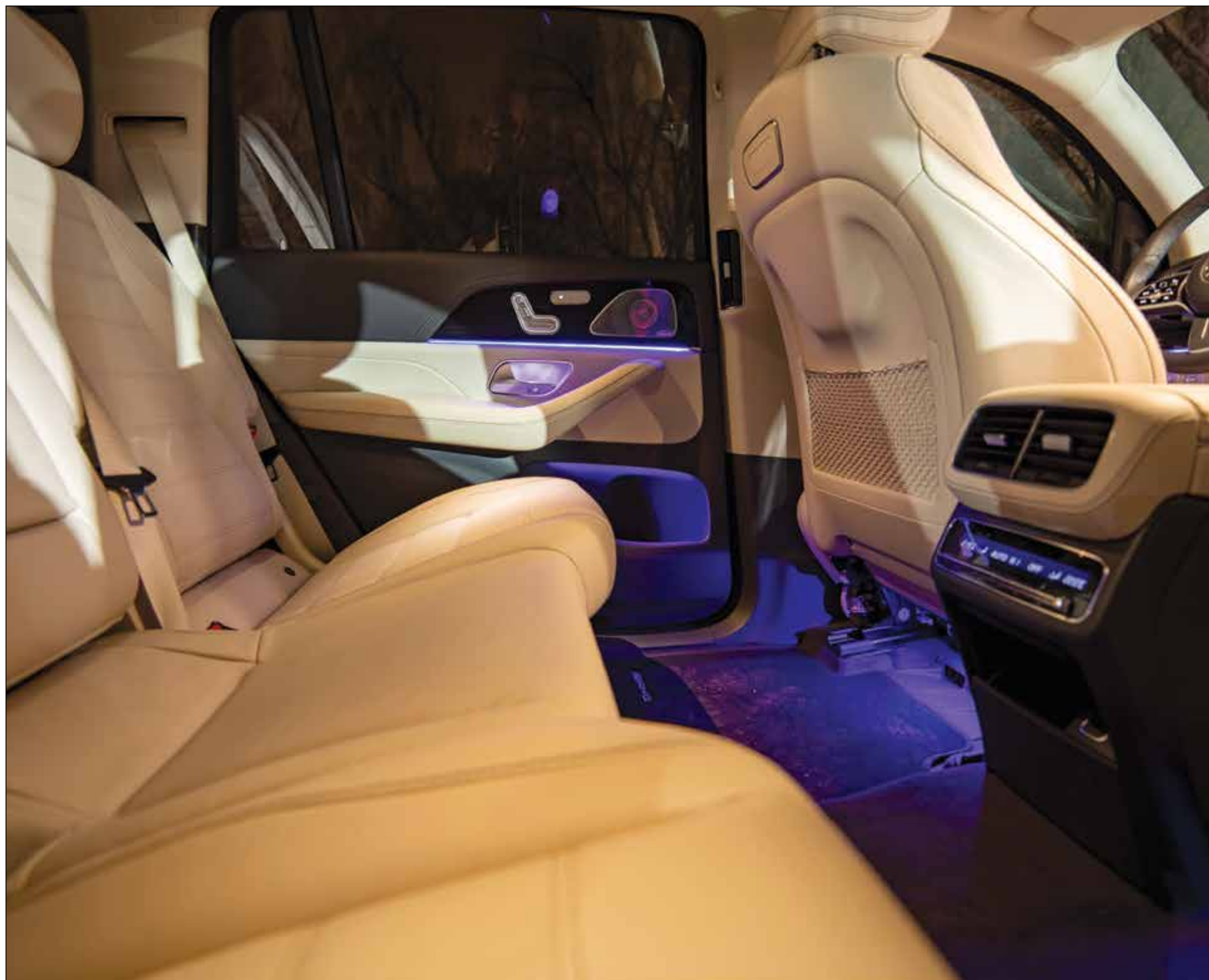
Some manufacturers are including customizable lighting inside the doors and dashboards of vehicles.

There also are many after-market models already on the market that link to your smartphone via Bluetooth. Install them inside the foot wells, along the door thresholds or even in the trunk. Change colors on a whim, or set the lights to flash to the beat of your music.

Although some models are intended to be hard wired into your vehicle's power system, others are plug and play, meaning you can install them yourself in minutes.

EXTERIOR LIGHTING

Exterior LED lighting has



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been around for years, but a new development over the past several years has been Bluetooth connectivity to allow smartphone control.

Now it seems that smart exterior lighting may be available in your next new car purchase, as well.

chase, as well.

Marelli Automotive Lighting and Samvardhana Motherson Automotive Systems Group are partnering on luxury smart lighting for vehicle exteriors. "The collaboration will be aimed at OEMs globally

and will focus on smart illuminated front grills and bumpers, as well as on illuminated rear ends, illuminated fenders and illuminated rocker panels," the companies said in a news release.

Until those products hit the

market, you can buy an after-market kit for \$40 to \$100.

Before undertaking an exterior lighting project on your vehicle, be sure to check local laws regarding exterior lighting, as some areas have restrictions.