Spring CAR CARE

Car Care Month

April is National Car Care Month. The Car Care Council has chosen April to spread awareness about the need for drivers to cure problems caused by winter weather and prepare for summer's high temperatures.

Severe temperatures, both hot and cold, can create havoc in your vehicle. This makes April the perfect month to take your vehicle's maintenance seriously. Learn how you can take advantage of National Care Car month programs to ensure your car or truck is in peak condition.

CAR CARE PROGRAMS

The Car Care Council sponsors events to help you understand how your vehicle operates and its maintenance needs. You can use a tool on the council's website to search for locations where these events are held. Simply go to carcare.org and enter your ZIP code into the "Find a Car Care Event Calendar." You can search a wide radius to find the event closest to you.

The Car Care Council reports that every vehicle that entered a community car care event in 2015 failed in at least one aspect of the thorough inspection process. The areas which held the highest fail rates are as follows:

- **Low fluid levels:** This includes washer fluid, engine oil and coolant.
- **Dirty air filters:** Nineteen percent of vehicle air filters were clogged and required replacement.
- **Check engine light:** An illuminated engine light can warn you of vehicle repairs that need attention.
- **Worn belts:** Thirteen percent of vehicles required a belt replacement.

SPREAD THE WORD

According to the Car Care Council, 80 percent of vehicles on the road need some sort of service. Make your community aware of National Car Care Month by reaching out to local auto shops in your area to ask if they would consider hosting an event.

Remember, if vehicles in your community are running properly, it means safer roads for you and your loved ones.

BENEFITS FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

If you are the owner of an auto-related business in your community, April can prove to be a very beneficial month. Letting your customers know about the importance of spring vehicle maintenance can boost your revenue for the month.

A few ways you can promote National Car Care Month are to hang a banner in your showroom and include flyers with your repair invoices.

Charging System

Your vehicle welcomes warmer spring weather after battling winter's tough conditions. The cold weather can wear down important components of your vehicle's charging system. This spring, take the time to test the major components of your battery and alternator.


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An alternator uses a belt-powered pulley that supplies electrical currents which keep your battery healthy and charged. A battery without a properly working alternator may start your vehicle but will run down and leave you stranded once its levels drain.

SIGNS OF A BAD BATTERY

While it may be possible for a battery to fail without any warning, chances are you will be granted warning signs before it completely fails. The American Automobile Association has listed some great warning signs to watch for this spring, including:

- Slow cranking when attempting to start the engine;
- Clicking or grinding noises from under the hood; and
- Dim headlights at idle but brighter lights once you rev your engine.

If you are experiencing any of these warning signs, be sure to get your vehicle to a qualified auto shop before you are left stranded and forced to pay a tow bill on top of the repair.

IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG ALTERNATOR

Consider your alternator as the heart of your vehicle's charging system. It generates the power your battery needs to be in its peak condition. As springs comes rolling in, it's a good idea to have your alternator tested. Most auto shops can run simple diagnostic tests to determine the strength of your alternator.

The alternator uses a voltage regulator to control the amount of energy it produces. A healthy alternator should operate on 13 to 14 volts to charge a 12-volt battery.

Some signs that may indicate a bad alternator include a battery not holding a charge, dim or flickering headlights or a warning light on your dashboard.

CHARGING SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

While you will be unable to make your battery or alternator last forever, there are a few things you can do to get the most out of each. Be sure to keep a good eye on your battery terminals. Look for corrosion or frayed or broken battery cables.

Your alternator can benefit from ensuring the belt that powers it is free of damage and is adjusted for proper tension.

Windshield Care

Your vehicle's windshield is just as important a safety device as your seat belts and air bags. A stable, clear windshield will make oncoming dangers easier to see and can give you extra time to avoid them.


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Your windshield protects you from weather and road debris and can play a big role in protection during an accident. A windshield can prevent you from being ejected from your vehicle and will offer support to a vehicle's roof in case of a rollover. This spring, take the time to give your windshield the attention it deserves.

FLUIDS

You can keep your windshield clear by filling your windshield-fluid reservoir with proper fluid. During the spring, you can use an any-weather fluid. Some of these fluids offer additives such as water repellent or bug cleaner. Depending on your location, these water-repellent fluids can be a huge help during a spring filled with rain.

No matter which fluid you choose, never use plain water. Water will likely grow contaminants while in the reservoir, which can clog your spray nozzles.

REPLACING YOUR WINDSHIELD WIPERS

The American Automobile Association recommends replacing wiper blades at least once a year. Not all blades will work for all cars. You will need to pay attention to how your wiper arms connect to the wipers. Some new vehicles require special connectors rather than the traditional J-hook connectors that older vehicles used.

The blade style determines how the blade hugs the slope of your windshield. The two most common types of wiper blade are a frame-style or beam blade. Ask your local auto shop to provide you with the exact-fit blade during your regular spring maintenance.

WINDSHIELD MAINTENANCE

This spring, take the time to inspect your windshield for cracks or dings. Damage to your windshield will not only depreciate the overall value of your vehicle but, in certain states, a significantly damaged windshield may be considered illegal.

If you do notice damage on the surface of your windshield it is wise to have a professional examine the severity of the damage. Repair facilities can normally repair a ding that is the size of a quarter or a crack up to 3 inches long. Repairing this damage immediately hinders the risk of these cracks spreading.

Exterior Cleaning

Most Americans are familiar with the term "spring cleaning" when it comes to their homes. You also should spring clean the exterior of your vehicle.


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If you live in an area that has snowy winters, your vehicle is likely exposed to different elements that are dangerous to the health and value of your exterior

The underbody of your vehicle is where you should focus most of your attention. Roads that experience winter weather are often exposed to high levels of salt used to make roads safer. Once spring arrives, take the time to give your underbody a deep cleanse and remove any salt buildup.

CLEANING YOUR UNDERBODY

While there is no certain solution that will immediately dissolve salt buildup, a high-pressure sprayer is the best tool to use. If you don't have access to a pressure washer, you can typically find these sprayers at do-it-yourself car washes in your area.

Whether you decide to tackle this project yourself or choose to hire a local detailer, releasing salt buildup on your car's underbody is a necessary part of spring cleaning.

EXAMINE FOR RUST

Once you have alleviated your vehicle of all buildups caused by winter's rough road conditions, you should examine your vehicle for any rust spots. The AAA suggests your vehicle's bumpers and wheel wells are the most susceptible to rust because of the amount of salt-infused snow that is likely to build up there.

Salt from the roads can contribute to the rusting process on your vehicle. Even a small rust spot will grow if left untreated. You can lose the integrity of your vehicle's chassis, body and even components such as exhaust systems and brake lines. A local body shop will be able to give you options to choose from if your vehicle has already started rusting.

SEALING THE UNDERBODY

Take advantage of spring's warm weather by applying a protective sealant to your vehicle's underbody. By doing this you can have peace of mind that your vehicle is protected when the cold weather rolls around again.

Before applying sealant, make sure the underbody is completely clean and free of rust. While it is possible to complete this task at home, you may benefit from having a professional seal your vehicle's underbody. They will have professional tools to get the job done right without damaging important components underneath your vehicle.

Coolant Flush

Depending on the time of year, the fluid that controls your coolant systems tends to change names. During the colder months of the years, you may hear it referred to as antifreeze. In spring, it becomes "coolant." Your vehicle's cooling system relies on coolant to run properly.


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PROTECT WITH PROPER FLUID

Today's vehicle manufacturers use different types of antifreeze for their new machines. While the choices may seem overwhelming when you're preparing to flush your system, it is crucial to use the correct fluid meant for your vehicle.

Manufacturers are creating antifreeze that will better protect the materials they are using to build their automobiles. For example, a type of antifreeze known as HOAT (Hybrid Organic Acid Technology) is known to be safe to flow through components made from aluminum but will be less effective in protecting brass or copper components.

FLUSHING THE SYSTEM

Your radiator will feature a drain valve at the bottom of the unit. Be sure you have an adequately sized bucket to catch the fluid before opening this valve. Once your vehicle has cooled down, drain your radiator, close the valve and pour water and a flushing agent directly into your radiator. You may choose a flush that contains a leak repair additive if you have noticed pools of antifreeze beneath your vehicle.

Once the fluid is completely drained and you have allowed the flush to clean up, it is time to close the valve and add the proper amount of antifreeze/water as noted in your owner's manual. If you don't have an owner's manual, you can easily find this capacity level from a local auto parts store.

CHOOSING THE CORRECT FLUID

Most vehicle manufacturers indicate exactly which fluid you need by noting it on your reservoir cap. If you are buying a used car, it may have an after-market cap or be filled with the wrong fluid. Here are a few of the most common types of fluid and their matching vehicle brands.

- **General Motors:** Dex-Cool. This orange fluid is easily recognizable. It has been used in GM vehicles since 1996.
- **Asian vehicles:** Toyota, Mazda, Honda and Nissan began using a red coolant in 1996.
- **Ford:** Trucks began using HOAT antifreeze in 2002. Ford cars began featuring it in models in 2003. Aftermarket HOAT antifreeze is typically gold in color.

Focus on Tires

Winter weather can be extremely rough on road conditions, and your tires are taking the brunt of the abuse. Be proactive this spring and correct issues that can lead to bigger problems later.


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Roads are more susceptible to developing potholes or other dangerous hazards during the colder months. Driving over these hazards puts your vehicle's tires at risk by causing misalignments or premature failure. Let an expert at your local tire shop analyze the amount of damage done and how they can correct it.

SCHEDULE AN ALIGNMENT

A vehicle that is not aligned properly can create an unsafe driving experience. It can become harder to handle because it will usually attempt to pull itself to one side of the road rather than traveling straight. A good way to tell if your vehicle is misaligned is to let go of your steering wheel while driving at highway speeds. A vehicle that pulls one way or the other needs immediate attention.

Another safety issue is severely uneven wear on your tires. An over-worked tire can put you at risk for a blowout, which can potentially create expensive damage to other components of your vehicle.

If you feel any struggle in handling your vehicle, schedule an alignment before the problems become larger.

CHECK YOUR TREAD

You want your tires to provide proper gripping action in case you are required to slam on the brakes to avoid an accident. Having enough tread will help gain the traction your vehicle needs to stop.

There's a simple way to gauge your tires' tread by using a penny. To administer this test, simply place a penny upright in the grooves between your tire's tread. If you are unable to see any of Abraham Lincoln's head, your tires are lower than 2/32 inch and should be replaced.

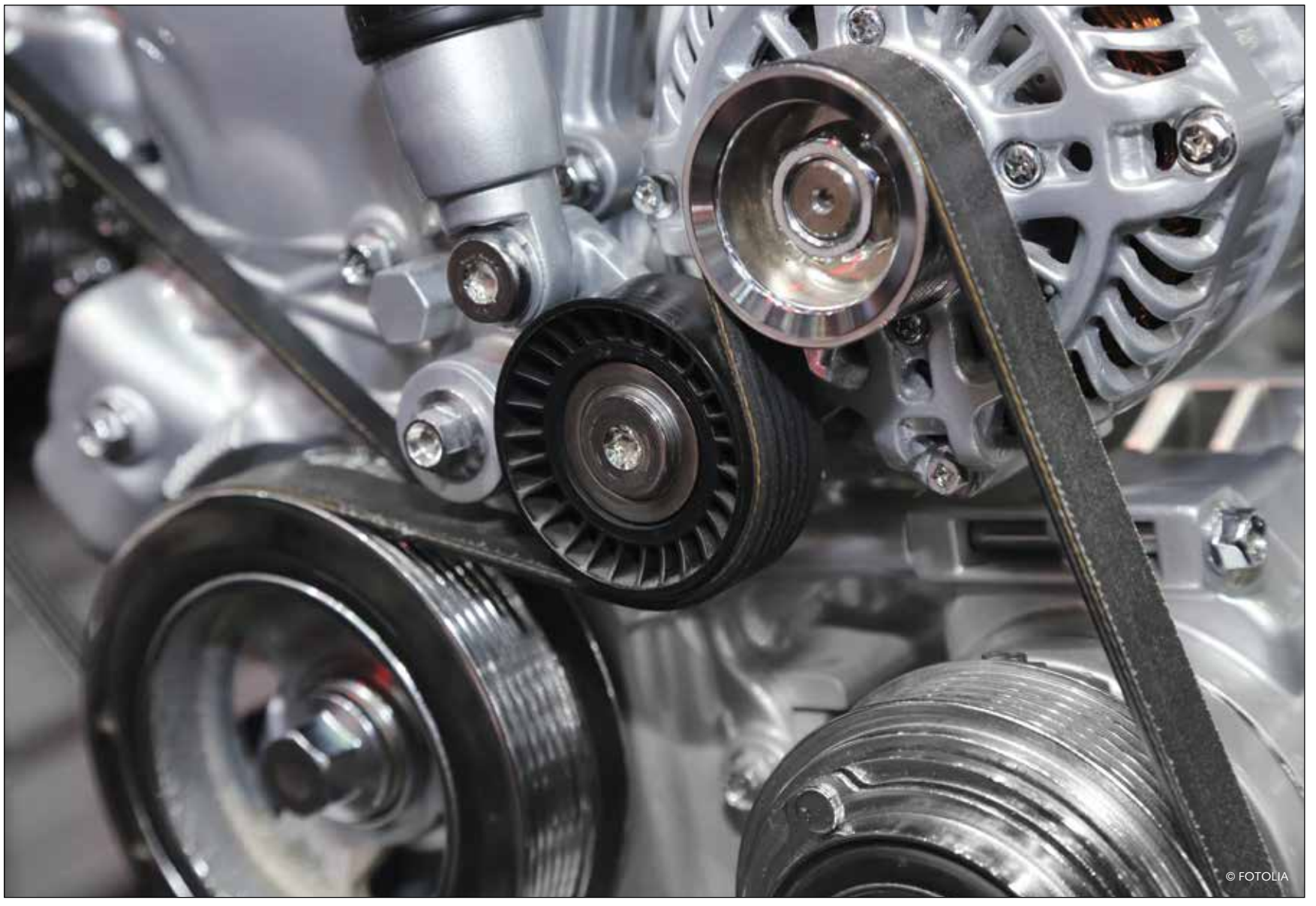
MAINTENANCE

This spring, schedule a tire rotation. A rotation allows your front and rear tires to take turns distributing the different requirements of performing steering and braking functions.

A tire balance also may be in order if you are noticing vibrations during turns. Proper balance can lengthen the life of your tires and leave you feeling secure on the road.

Belts and Hoses

Your vehicle relies on belts and hoses to maintain proper function. The hoses provide crucial fluids to be transported to an engine's components. Belts are used to keep pulley-driven components running smoothly.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These pieces are key parts of your vehicle that require a thorough inspection as spring arrives and temperatures begin rising. Drastic weather changes can cause your hoses to expand and contract, eventually leading to cracks or small holes. Belts also are prone to developing cracks during drastic weather changes.

SERPENTINE BELTS

Most modern vehicles use a serpentine belt to operate pulley-driven components. Some of these components include the alternator, water pump, air conditioner compressor and power steering pump. Proper function of these components is crucial to keeping you safe behind the wheel.

In the past, a good indicator of a failing belt was squeaking under the hood. Most of today's belts are made of ethylene propylene diene monomer rather than its predecessor, chloroprene, and are less likely to cause noises. Instead, they begin to fail by losing material, much like a tire.

Inspect your serpentine belt this spring by taking your vehicle to your local auto shop or by purchasing a belt wear gauge from a local auto parts store.

DUTIES OF HOSES AND WARNING SIGNS

You have probably lifted your hood and noticed a maze of hoses. Some of these are easy to follow, while others seem to travel throughout your engine compartment with no destination.

Each of these hoses plays a significant and important role in dispensing necessary fluids to their desired components. The AAA reports a few warning signs you shouldn't ignore this spring:

- A sweet burning smell may indicate a coolant leak;
- A smoky, burning smell could mean you have a leak in engine or transmission oil; and
- The smell of gasoline when your engine is running. (This should never be ignored. Turn the vehicle off immediately.)

BELT AND HOSE LIFE EXPECTANCY

The life expectancy of your belts and hoses can differ. This lifetime depends on the quality of material you purchase, the number of miles they experience and the proper function of the components they control.

Under perfect conditions a belt replacement is recommended every 36,000 miles, while a radiator hose can last from 50,000 to 100,000 miles. Of course, if you notice any of the aforementioned warning signs impacting your belts or hoses, they should be replaced immediately.