



# Car Service Tips & Tricks

Everyone  
Should  
Know

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## Buying a New Car

The cost of a new car nowadays equals about what my parents paid for their first home. It's not a purchase to be taken lightly. You want to do everything possible to ensure you get a great deal.

Never rush your decision. If you are completely without transportation, rent a vehicle until you find the right car. When you rush a purchase, you usually end up on the losing end of the deal.

Thanks to the Internet, you can uncover the typical retail cost of a specific make and model. With a little digging, you can find out the wholesale cost as well. This information makes you a powerful negotiator.

You want a win-win situation with the car dealership. They need to make some profit, and you need to feel you paid a fair price. It's fair to negotiate to a price that's \$500 above dealer cost or about 20% off the sticker price. So take along your calculator when you shop.

If the only cars on the lot have expensive options you don't care for, you might want to order a car to your specifications. You might wait a bit, but will save money on options you don't need.

Check with the dealership to see if you can return the car if you don't like it. I did this once. The car I purchased ended up less comfortable than my old car, so the next morning I took it back for my check and my trade-in. Many dealerships now offer this option.

You may have heard the advice to shop the last day of the month for better deals. It's true that you might get a better deal from a salesman then.

As far as trade-ins go, do your research here, too. Knowing the value of your old car makes it easier to negotiate a better price for it. Try not to talk about a trade-in possibility until you get a purchase price.

I researched the value of my little red Corolla and found that it was \$3500. One dealership offered me \$1200 because "they'd have to repaint it". Another dealership offered me \$3500 and complimented me on taking such good care of the engine. Stick to your guns when it comes to getting the value of your trade-in, especially if you've had your car serviced regularly.

You may want to advertise your older car and sell it privately. Typically you can get a better price this way, but it may take a little time.

A service contract will likely be brought into the negotiation. The consumer information I've read discourages buying an extra contract on a new car, as it's not likely a problem will occur during the first months of use.

Whatever you do, always read the fine print of any contract before signing it. Ask a bazillion questions about what certain phrases mean if you don't understand something.

Simply because the car just rolled off the factory line doesn't mean you should buy it without asking questions. Keep on your toes during the negotiation process. There's nothing like the thrill of getting a new car AND creating a win-win situation for you and the dealer.

## Car Repair 101

The more you notice about your vehicle, the more likely you'll be able to head off repair problems. Yep- even if you're mechanically challenged. You can detect many common vehicle problems by using your eyes and nose.

“See No Evil”

Is there a little stain or a drop of fluid under your vehicle? It may mean absolutely nothing. But you do want to check the wet spots immediately - just to make sure.

What color is the fluid under your car? Yellowish green, pretty blue or neon orange colors indicate an overheated engine or an antifreeze leak caused by a bad hose, water pump or leaking radiator. Not good. I remember the yellowish green ooze from my Chevette as the tow truck took it away to its final resting place. Get to a repair shop while you still can!

A dark brown or black oily fluid means the engine is leaking oil. A bad seal or gasket could cause the leak. This is how my first car met its demise.

A red oily looking spot indicates a transmission or power-steering fluid leak. Also, not good.

A puddle of clear water usually isn't a cause for concern. It may be normal condensation from your vehicle's air conditioner. Whew!

“Smell no Evil”

Take a whiff, and you may detect your vehicle's problem.

Do you smell burned toast? This odor often signals an electrical short and burning insulation. Have someone come look at your car. Don't drive it anywhere until the problem is diagnosed.

How about the smell of rotten eggs? This usually indicates a problem in the catalytic converter. Get to a repair shop! Pheee-yew!

A thick sharp odor usually means burning oil. Look for the sign of a leak. This problem needs to be addressed immediately if having transportation is important to you. You may also notice a bluish smoke coming from your vehicle. Ask me how I know. Ahh... memories.

The smell of gas after a failed start may mean the engine is flooded. Wait a few minutes and try again. If the odor continues, there may be a leak in the fuel system - a potentially dangerous problem that needs immediate attention.

A chemical odor may mean overheated brakes or clutch. Check the parking brake. Stop and let the brakes cool after repeated hard braking. Light smoke coming from a wheel indicates a stuck brake. Call a tow truck.

Do you notice a sweet odor? This may indicate a coolant leak. Watch your temperature gauge and warning light and drive to a repair shop. Now, if you see steam from under the hood, stop and pull over. If you keep driving an overheated vehicle, your engine will be seriously damaged. Call a tow truck.

The basic rule of smell is that if you do notice an unusual odor - get to a mechanic or get one to come to you. Pretty simple!

A little extra attention to what's coming out of your car or truck could save you the cost of a new vehicle payment! Keep those eyes and that nose on the job!

## Getting A Great Deal On A New Car

Ah, the excitement of a brand new car! Driving to every friend's house you ever had to show it off. Spit shining it ever chance you get.

The only bad part about the deal is, well... the deal.

Fortunately, there's a way get a great price on a new car and this insider info will save you both time and money.

How many hours have you wasted talking about a new car deal, only to find out that the dealer had other contract clauses in mind that exploded the cost? I have wasted entire days in the car buying process.

What does "factory invoice price" really mean? The price that you see on the car is the "manufacturer's suggested retail price". You don't want to pay this over-inflated price. Supposedly, the "factory invoice price" is what the dealer paid the manufacturer for the car. The dealer will have an invoice with this price on it.

When you hear a dealer say that he'll sell to you "below invoice", you wonder how on earth he could make any money. You may think that you're getting the bargain of the century.

Well, not so fast. See, the factory invoice price probably isn't what the dealer had to pay for the car.

Dealers get all sorts of incentives on top of this base price. Carryover allowances and other special discounts added in make the actual cost of the vehicle less than the price on the invoice. This can add up to the tune of \$500-\$2000 dollars.



So you could buy a car at \$100 below the factory invoice and still be fattening the salesman's wallet more than enough.

Ask if the car manufacturer offers a factory-to-customer rebate. You have to get this straight from the manufacturer, but every little bit helps!

The more you know about factory-to-dealer incentive payments, "holdbacks," and other allowances the dealer will receive, the better off you'll be. Do your research so you'll know the best prices cars like yours have recently been selling for.

Now, you don't want to get a great price on a car, and then lose out by paying too much for financing, for an extended service contract, and for unnecessary add-ons.

Also, check to see what the market value is of your current car if you're considering a trade in. Don't talk about a trade in until you have agreed on a price.

Before going car shopping, check the annual percentage rate currently offered by banks in your area. Sometimes credit unions offer good rates.

Many new cars are very reliable and often carry long manufacturer warranties. An extended service contract may be a waste of your money. If you do want one, make sure you check over it with a fine-toothed comb to see what it covers and what it doesn't. Nothing like being surprised by a repair bill.

If your car already has rust-proofing, paint sealant, or fabric protection, make sure you don't end up paying more than \$50 for it. Any more than that will be pure profit and mark up.

A good deal on your new car can be negated if you get a lousy price on your trade-in. Go ahead and take your car to a few dealerships beforehand and ask what they'd pay you for it straight out. Explain that you're selling your car and getting offers from different dealers.

If the dealership where you're buying offers you a ridiculously lower price, you may as well sell your car outright to one of the dealers you checked with.

You do want to get the true wholesale value for your trade-in. A dealer who offers some extraordinary trade-in allowance is likely making it up on the new car price.

It takes a little extra time to ensure a great deal on your new car, but your savings can be substantial. You just might find the whole process fun!

## Getting the Best Automotive Service

Just as clear communication between you and your doctor can equal better care for your body, communicating carefully with your mechanic means the best care for your body of your car!

When you think about it, you know your car better than anyone else. You drive it every day and know how it feels and sounds when everything is right. So don't ignore its warning signals. If something doesn't feel quite right, get your car checked out.

The following tips should help you along the way:

### “Preventative Medicine”

Follow the recommended service schedules.

Keep a log of all repairs and service.

Check your car for:

- unusual sounds
- odors
- drips
- leaks
- smoke
- warning lights
- changes in acceleration
- changes in engine performance
- changes in gas mileage

- changes in fluid levels
- worn tires, belts, hoses.
- difficulty in handling, braking, steering
- unusual vibrations

When there is a problem...

- Write the information/symptoms down to give to your repairman.
- When did the problem first start?
- Exactly when does the problem occur?
- Is it constant or does it occur now and again?
- Does the problem happen when the vehicle is cold or after the engine has warmed up?
- Is the problem noticeable when you accelerate? When you brake?
- At all speeds? When shifting?

Remember to let the technician diagnose and recommend a remedy, even if you think you already know what the problem is. Plus, it's important not to demand an on-the-spot diagnosis. The technician needs to thoroughly examine the vehicle before knowing what's really going on.

Stay involved. And don't be shy about asking as many questions as you need to understand the problem. Mechanical terminology can be confusing to the layperson.

Ask for simple definitions of technical terms you're not familiar with.

It's hard to be patient, as most of us feel completely incapacitated without our vehicles. Make sure you ask to be called and informed of the problem, recommended action, and costs BEFORE work begins.

Before you leave, ask about labor rates, guarantees, and what methods of payment are acceptable.

Leave a telephone number where you can be called.

The information you share with your auto technician will enable him to more easily locate the problem, diagnose it, and repair any damage. Then you and your car will be on the road again!

## Helping Your Car Run the Extra Mile

A little extra care here and there when it comes to your car, and you'll find yourself saving loads of money - not just on repairs, but on fuel as well!

Keep your engine tuned up. A misfiring spark plug can reduce fuel efficiency as much as 30 percent. This means less money in your wallet. Follow the service schedules listed in your owner's manual. Replace filters and fluids as recommended.

I know it doesn't always fit into your schedule. You just have to make yourself do it. If the dealer is charging an arm and a leg for a tune-up, get a second opinion at a local reputable car repair shop. They can do the same service schedule, usually at a greater savings to you.

These tune-ups not only keep your car running smoothly, but they'll help when you're ready for a newer vehicle. A smooth running car means a better trade in value for you.

Check your tires for proper inflation. Under-inflation actually wastes fuel. It causes your engine to work harder to push the vehicle. Wheels that are out-of-line (as evidenced by uneven tread wear or vehicle pulling) make the engine work harder, too. Keep those tires inflated properly, and you will save when you fill up.

Drive gently. Avoid sudden accelerations and the jerky stop-and-go routine. (Pass the barf bag, please!) Use cruise-control on open highways to keep your speed as steady as possible.

Avoid excessive idling. Shut off the engine while waiting for friends and family. Today's vehicles are designed to "warm up" fast, so there's no need to warm your car up for half an hour on cold winter mornings.

Keep your air conditioner in top condition.

Remove extra items from the vehicle. Less weight means better mileage. Storing luggage in the trunk rather than on the roof reduces air drag. All these little things add up.

Plan your daily errands to eliminate unnecessary driving. Try to travel when traffic is light to avoid stop-and-go conditions.

Join a car pool. At least, ask if someone wants to share a ride if you're just headed one place and then back.

Remember, how you drive your car, and how its fluids, old parts, and tires are disposed of all affect the environment. So take good care of your baby! Go the extra mile for it, and it will run the extra miles for you!

## How to Summer-ize your Car

We go to great lengths to make sure our vehicles are ready for winter. Who wants to get stuck in sub-zero degree weather with a stalled car?

But what about during the summer? Believe it or not, the heat takes its toll on your car, too, so it's important to keep your car serviced.

Periodic maintenance on your car will save you tremendous hassle in the long run. Your vehicle should last longer and command a higher resale price, too! I made it a point to get my car serviced according to the dealer's schedule, and when I traded it in, I got far more than I expected due to the stellar condition of the engine.

Now I know this isn't bedtime reading, but the owner's manual can be your best friend – assuming you read it! At least take a look-through periodically. How about while you're waiting to get your oil changed?

Follow the manufacturer's recommended service schedules. This could save you a major breakdown.

Have the air conditioning system looked over by a qualified technician. A check up here can save you a huge bill later.

The greatest cause of summer breakdowns is overheating. Prevent this problem by making sure the cooling system is flushed and refilled as recommended.

Have your car's belts, clamps, and hoses checked by a technician. This only takes a few minutes and is usually inexpensive.



Change your oil and oil filter every 3,000 miles or four times a year.

Replace air and fuel filters as recommended.

Get plenty of windshield washer solvent – we have a tendency to use a lot of this in the winter, so your fluids may be low.

Tires should be rotated every 5000 miles or so.

Check the spare tire to make sure it's inflated properly. Also, make sure you have a jack along with it!

Transmission troubles equal money troubles equal emotional troubles! Have your transmission serviced periodically, and prevent big-time repair bills.

If you notice that your brakes are less efficient, get them checked out right away.

Have your battery checked periodically to see how much life it has left!

Inspect all lights and bulbs to make sure they're working.

Carry a first aid kit, flares, jumper cables, a flashlight, and a cell phone.

There you go – a simple list to keep your car in great running shape. Remember, your car needs to be maintained and checked over even in the summer.

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