

SPRING CAR CARE

An ounce of wax is worth a pound of protection



There's nothing like a good coat of wax to restore the beauty of your vehicle.

Summer is finally here and that means it's time to treat your vehicle to some esthetic touchups. Naturally, one of the tasks on the top of your "to-do" list should be restoring the beautiful shine of your vehicle's exterior. After all, a vehicle that glimmers in the sun will turn more heads than one that's rusty and faded. How can you get the results you're looking for? With a touch of wax, of course!

This Saturday, get up nice and early (well, not too early) and head down to your local car parts and accessories store and stock up on all the required items. Unfortunately, this is where the tricky part comes in. Today there's a wealth of products to choose from and buying the right product requires a bit of knowledge and some divine intervention.

The most popular choice these days is wax, which

comes in either regular or synthetic variations. Regular wax comes in a paste form and requires a bit of elbow grease to be applied and polished. Having said that, however, it offers excellent protection. Alternatively, there is synthetic wax, which comes in a liquid format. Not only will it help fill in any scratches on your paint job, but it is much easier to apply. While the experts generally prefer paste wax, synthetic wax still offers great results.

Regardless of the product you end up using, however, it's worth knowing that wax should be applied at ideal temperature and humidity levels to ensure maximum protection for your vehicle. What's more, some car manufacturers recommend that you wax pale-coloured vehicles two or three times a year and darker-coloured vehicles a bit more frequently.

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Listen! Your tires are talking to you

It might sound a bit strange, but the tires on your vehicle are talking to you. It's true; you just have to listen. How? By performing a visual inspection of your tires and by touching their treads.

More specifically, a visual inspection will tell you if the tires are under-inflated. By looking at the treads

you'll also see if there are any signs of premature or unequal wear and tread. But that's not all your tires have to say.

Can you hear your tires? If they seem to make more noise than usual, or if they start to sound like those old, aggressive winter tires that were used years ago, your tires are definitely telling you that its time for closer inspection. Thankfully, this is something you can easily do yourself. Simply run your hand over the treads. You'll most likely feel some imperfections, which is normal in most cases. However, if these imperfections are significantly more noticeable on one side or the other, or if they are spaced out regular distances, chances are you'll have to get your tires aligned. The suspension might also have a problem.

If you don't trust your ability to detect such imperfections or want to rely on an expert just to be sure, bring your vehicle in to your regular mechanic or to a tire specialist. If the experts tell you to replace certain parts, follow their advice. It will save you additional time and money down the road—and perhaps even your life.

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SPRING CAR CARE

What to do if your car overheats

You hope it never happens but if it does, be ready. Yes, modern cars can overheat. Many factors might make a car overheat, including accidental mechanical mishaps. How will you know if your car is overheating? First of all, a light will come on in the instrument panel. If the vehicle is equipped with "real" gauges, you'll see the needle creep up to the higher zone. If you are not paying attention to the dials, though, the engine will start knocking, bucking, and losing power. If that happens, don't go any further or you will damage the engine. If you don't catch the problem before that point, you will see steam coming from under the hood. That is definitely the sign that you need to stop the car.

Don't try to fix things yourself right now. As a matter of fact, if there is steam coming from the engine compartment, don't even open the hood! Give the engine ample time to cool down before doing anything. That can take up to an hour. Once it seems to have cooled down, open the hood and check for signs of leaking. If liquid is dripping out of the radiator, the best thing to do is call for emergency roadside assistance. No matter what, don't touch the radiator cap until the whole system has completely cooled down.

The most likely problem is a leaking radiator hose. Try to see if there is one and where it might be. If it is close to one of its ends and if you have some basic tools in the vehicle, you might as well try to loosen the clamp and cut the hose off exactly where it leaks. If you have enough hose to be able to put it back and tighten the clip, you're in luck. Then you could try to reach a service station or garage to have the car fixed and the liquid replenished. Not many drivers will be prepared for such a rescue operation, though, and will have to rely on roadside assistance.



Always be careful with an engine that has overheated.



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SPRING CAR CARE



There are many driving tricks that can help you save fuel.

Drive to save fuel

No matter what kind of car or truck you drive, with the price of fuel these days, you'd better learn to drive in a way that saves fuel. That means driving as smoothly as you can.

City driving uses a lot of fuel, because drivers have to stop and start so often. The best way to manage that is to avoid jackrabbit starts. Gentle accelerations save

fuel. Along the same lines, try not to drive fast and stop suddenly. Anticipate your next stop. If you see a red light further up the street, ease off the gas pedal and let the car coast as close as possible to the street corner. Some new cars equipped with a "stop-start" function will help save more fuel in situations like this.

If you are into serious fuel economy, try to combine your trips. If you have to do multiple stops, plan your route first so you will not have to retrace your

steps. Make sure your trunk is emptied of useless material that adds weight and requires a little more fuel to carry.

Of course, you should always be checking the air pressure in all your tires so that the car is experiencing the least resistance possible on the pavement. If the vehicle is equipped with air conditioning, use it only when very necessary. Air conditioning compressors require effort from the engine, and that burns more fuel.

Avoid problems by checking your A/C

Today's cars require less and less maintenance by their owners, with the biggest part of the job being done by dealership garages at specific intervals. That said, there are still some simple ways for owners to avoid future problems. Take, for instance, the air conditioning system. This is one component that can be easily maintained (but not serviced) by just about anybody, without the need for specific tools.

Air conditioners can be a source of problems, and the best way to avoid them is to keep the air conditioning system in top shape. If it works well, it does not need to be fixed, but it can be cleaned. The most important component to be cleaned is the condenser. That is the large heat exchanger (it looks like a bright radiator) placed in the front of the car, usually just forward of the radiator.

Make sure there is no dirt or debris caught in the light mesh. Dirt can block the air flowing through it, and it can even block fresh air to the engine's radiator. Carefully remove the biggest debris and use a garden hose to wash away bugs or stuck-on dirt. Don't be concerned by some slightly bent wire mesh. They will not affect the way the condenser works. Be careful, though, of the sharp edges on which you could cut yourself.

The other thing you can check is the compressor belt. If it's loose, have it tightened by your mechanic, who will inspect it also for wear and tear. Check the air filter for the passenger compartment, if your vehicle is equipped with one. If it looks dirty or clogged up, replace it with a suitable replacement part which can be found at your dealer's or at your local auto parts store.



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