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Are You and Your Car Ready for Spring?

Winter is shifting toward spring (it's about time) and that means it's time to get your car ready for warmer weather. Here are a few simple things you can do to ensure happy motoring — and make your car look and feel great.

Wash winter off your car and get it detailed. This is a deep-dish cleaning, inside and out. Spring is the best time to do it. Prices vary for this "spring cleaning" from about \$50 to as much as \$200 but especially for a newer vehicle that you intend to keep and actually enjoy driving, it's well worth the cost. Detailing should include a thorough washing (especially the underbody to get rid of winter weather chemicals and grit) and hand waxing that will make the exterior really sparkle.

For the interior — detailing includes vacuuming and extracting all the ground in gunk from hard-to-reach places, shampooing, and treating all leather and plastic surfaces.

Change your car's cabin air filter. A feature found on most late-model vehicles, a cabin air filter cleans the air that comes into the interior through the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system. It catches dust, pollen and other

airborne material that can make riding in a car unpleasant, particularly if you have allergies or other respiratory problems.

Touch up the paint and have dings and dents repaired. This does not always mean a trip to the body shop. You can buy small bottles of automotive paint to fill in small scrapes and scratches that come from winter road grit. It is not a professional job, but it will at least prevent the enemy of sheet metal — rust — from gaining a foothold.

Check/Change your oil. Modern vehicles perform so well that they do not need oil changes as frequently as cars did in the past. But that doesn't mean they never need oil changes. And the shift of seasons is always a good time to make sure your engine oil is up to snuff. If you are running low, it could be an indication that there is a more significant problem with your motor.

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Replace your wiper blades every spring and fall. When wiper blades no longer make proper contact with the windshield surface, they can begin to squeak, chatter, skip, smear or streak reducing driving visibility. And don't forget to check your washer fluid reservoir...everybody uses more wiper fluid over the winter.

Make sure your tires are in good shape. Early spring is a good time to examine your tires. Worn tires are dangerous and can reduce fuel economy. You should also check that your tires are properly inflated — and that your spare tire has enough air. This is a good time of year to have your tires rotated and balanced, as well, so that they wear evenly and you get the maximum lifespan from each tire.

Get an alignment check. Around here, it is almost impossible to not to encounter a pothole or two on a regular basis. They are the number one

enemy of not only your tires but also your vehicle's suspension system. Almost everyone should have his or her vehicle alignment checked every spring. It assures that the suspension components are doing their job and that the angles of the tires, which affect how they make contact with the road, are still within manufacturer recommended specs. It is preventative maintenance that helps prevent irregular and premature wear out of your tires.

Lastly... remember that all cars need to be serviced at regular intervals, so now is a good time to dig out the owner's manual or go online to see what you're due for, given the mileage on your vehicle's odometer.

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