

FALL/WINTER CAR CARE

A Classified Advertising Feature Page

Cars...the true second home

"Home is where the heart is," the saying goes. But home also is where the car is.

People often call the places they frequent — their office, classroom, or the house of a relative or friend — their "home away from home." For those who don't own an automobile, this may be true; but those who own a car also own a second home.

From home to car

It is difficult to leave habits from home inside of the house; they seem to follow people directly to the station wagon, hatchback, van, jeep, etc., and sometimes remain there.

How many times have you been seen driving along the highway, steering wheel in one hand, compact in the other? Or men smoking, drinking coffee, reading the newspaper and driving simultaneously?

People can't wash their hair in the car, but they manage to comb, brush, spit, and even hot curl it (it is possible, with a battery-operated, portable curling iron).

Hamburger in one hand...

Food can't be cooked in a car, but breakfast, lunch and dinner — and snacks — frequently appear, and some times are eaten on plates and glasses fit for a fancy dining room table.

Minor inconveniences, such as the lack of running water, is by no means a deterrent. One woman was spotted on a Long Island thruway brushing her teeth while driving at about 60 miles per hour in rush hour traffic, rinsing with a puddle of unidentifiable liquid, and using the pavement outside as a sink.

Personal hygiene on the road

No time to shave? Not for two men driving a minivan on a Connecticut road. Shaving cream and all — they made do.

Many people are absolutely shameless — their car is an important part of their lives, and they will do it in whatever comes naturally, such as changing their

baby's diaper or, in some cases, changing in and out of their own clothes.

Business often is conducted while driving. Homework is done, speeches are written, notes jotted, and reports and memos are reviewed. And if you have ever seen a person driving with hand to mouth while speaking — he or she may be recording something on a mini-cassette — or just talking to him or herself.

Why wait to be at home to enjoy the luxuries in life? People who own cars can equip them with televisions, CD players, magazines and car phones.

Kids and cars

For children, the car can be a place of excitement and joy — they can play portable games designed for traveling, have sing-alongs and make periodic pitstops at parks, playgrounds and tourist spots. There are times, however, when the automobile can be a place where a child is unable to escape discipline. There are no closets, basements or bedrooms in which to hide, no walking away in a huff — and in a car, tuning out is nearly impossible.

Punishments are twice as unpleasant when stuck in a moving vehicle, because there is no escape. Many a child has been seen in the back seat of a car crying tears of frustration and embarrassment, probably intensified by the audience of curious onlookers in the cars nearby.

Catching some zzz's

Cars are great sleep inducers — sometimes a leisurely car ride is more enticing than your own bed, proven by those who have been seen snoozing across the back seat.

The owners of mobile homes are truly privileged people — what they have is a house on wheels, plus the option to move — at anytime — to the mountains, or to a warmer climate, to a farm, or perhaps to an area with a view of the ocean. But for people whose homes are forever stationary, the key to a second home is the one that starts the ignition.

FC921728

How to communicate for better automotive service

Even though today's vehicles are high-tech marvels, when it comes to automotive maintenance and repairs, some things stay the same. Whatever type of repair facility you patronize — dealership, service station, independent garage, or national franchise — old-fashioned communication between customer and shop is vital.

The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE), a non-profit group that tests and certifies the competence of automotive technicians throughout the repair process can help ensure smooth repairs.

ASE offers the following information on the importance of good communications in the automotive repair process:

Do your homework

Get involved and take an active role. Read the owner's manual, familiarize yourself with the basic components, follow the service schedules listed in the manual, and keep a log of all repairs and service. Get in the habit of keeping good records.

Use all of your senses to inspect your vehicle frequently. Check for:

- Unusual sounds, odors, drips, warning lights, smoke, etc.
- Changes in acceleration, engine performance, gas mileage, fluid levels.
- Worn tires, belts, hoses.
- Problems in handling, braking, vibrations or steering.

Note when the problem occurs. Is it constant or periodic? When the vehicle is cold or after the engine has warmed? At all speeds? When did the problem first begin?

Describe, don't diagnose

Once you go to the repair facility, be prepared to describe the symptoms. Many shops are very busy, so try to be concise, but avoid establishments where you feel rushed, intimidated, or that your comments are not welcome.

Carry a written list to give to the technician or service manager. This is especially important in larger shops, where the work order may be passed from service writer to technician.

Resist the temptation to suggest a specific course of repair or to demand an on-the-spot diagnosis. Just as you would with your physician, tell where it hurts and how long it's been that way, but let the technician diagnose the problem and recommend a remedy.

Ask questions

Ask as many questions as you need. Do not be embarrassed to request every-day definitions and non-technical terminology.

Ask if the technicians have earned ASE certification, the only national, industry-wide credential available. ASE-certified technicians usually wear "ASE" shoulder insignia and carry cards listing their areas of certification. Their employers often display ASE signs and decals.

Request that the repairs be performed by a technician certified in the appropriate area, such as brakes or engine performance.

In addition to technician credentials, look for other signs of professionalism such as overall neatness, customer service swags, membership in the Better Business Bureau, up-to-date equipment, and a positive, professional attitude from the shop personnel.

Before you leave, make certain you understand all shop policies, including guarantees, labor rates and diagnostic fees.

Ask to be called and apprised of the problem, course of action, and costs before work begins.

For ASE's free brochure, "Putting It All Together: How to Communicate for Better Automotive Service," send a long, stamped envelope to ASE, Dept. MCPS92, P.O. Box 347, Herndon, VA 22070. FC921583

A three-step car tune-up that can save your life

When most people think of auto maintenance, images of high costs, scheduling and dealing with mechanics often pop into mind. As a result, many people put off some routine maintenance that is very critical to safety on the road. Fortunately, there's a quick and easy way to do a safety tune-up on your car. And, best of all, it's free.

First, check your tires. Remember that these are the critical elements that determine how well your vehicle travels on the road and how it stays on the road. Start by looking at them. But don't just stand there and give each a glance. Actually get down on the ground and really look.

Evaluate the tread. Is it almost worn off? Is it worn in only one area? Is the wear dramatically different from any of the other tires? Are there any nicks or other objects embedded in the tire? Look at the backside of the tire that faces underneath the car. Are there any bulges? Also measure the air pressure of each tire, and then add or release air to the level specified on the tire or in your car's owner manual.

Should the tire show any signs of problems, consult a reputable tire dealer. They can let you know if you need a patch, need to rotate the tires to even out wear, or if, in the case of irreparable damage, you must purchase a new tire.

Next, do a thorough check of your windshield wipers. Virtually all your driving decisions are based on being able to see, so you must be sure that everything is in perfect working order.

To check the wiper blades, simply lift them off the glass and look at the squeegee, which is the rubber element that actually wipes the glass. It should be flexible, with a straight edge that has no cracks, tears or warping. Especially look at the ends, where worn, rotten squeegees often can tear during use. Make sure the entire blade is firmly attached to the wiper arm that moves it across the glass.

Finally, fill your washer fluid reservoir with cleaning solution specifically formulated for this use. Don't try to use household soaps that will foam excessively and possibly damage the paint of your car.

If your blades are no longer in ideal condition, you have the option of purchasing either replacement blades or just a replacement squeegee. If you want to take care of wiper repair permanently, you can install lifetime guaranteed wipers that are sold under the name TRIPLEDEGG® Lifetime Wipers or SPECTRA® Silicone Wiper Refills (available in stores or by calling 1-800-55-CLEAR). Instead of being made of rubber, the squeegees on both these items are made of a virtually indestructible synthetic. As a result, the manufacturer guarantees them for as long as you own your car.

The last step of your safety tune-up involves checking your lights. If any of them are not functioning, you are asking for trouble at night and whenever you turn or brake. Turn all the lights on and check their various functions. Make sure they come on, blink and dim as they should. If the lenses have a lot of build up, use a soft bristle brush and a good quality cleaner to make them sparkle again.

If any of your lights are not operating correctly, the problem is most likely a burned out bulb. Replacing a burned out fuse is another inexpensive fix. Sometimes, however, wiring may be involved, and you should stop by a service station for an evaluation.

By taking a few minutes to do this simple safety tune-up, you can not only save money, but also your life. FC921336

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