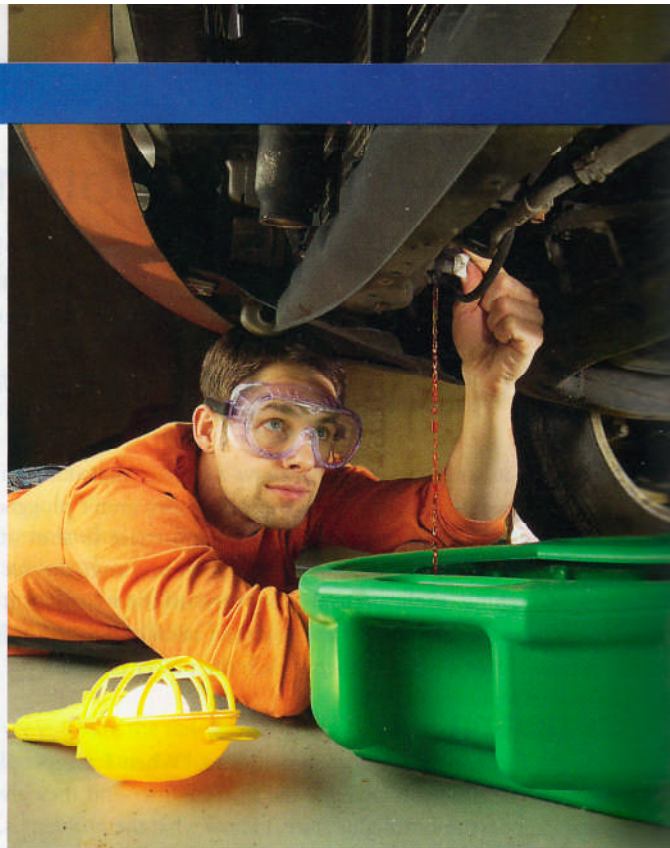


Expert auto care advice

Car mechanics are like doctors—wherever they go, people ask them for free advice. Bob and Rick, our ace mechanics, can barely remember their kids' birthdays, but they did manage to remember the best questions and answers from friends, relatives and customers. Here are their "Best Of" fixes and tips and their most-avoidable "oopses."

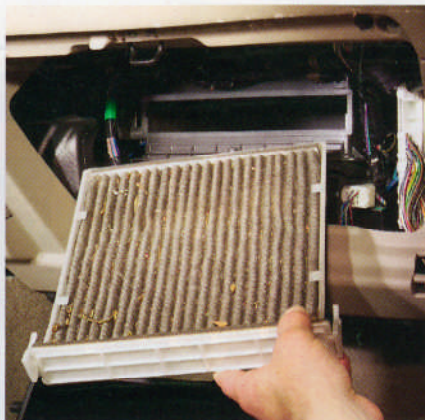


Most-ignored maintenance items



1. Transfer case fluid and differential oil changes. Replacing these components will cost you about \$1,500 each—that's a high price to pay for neglect.

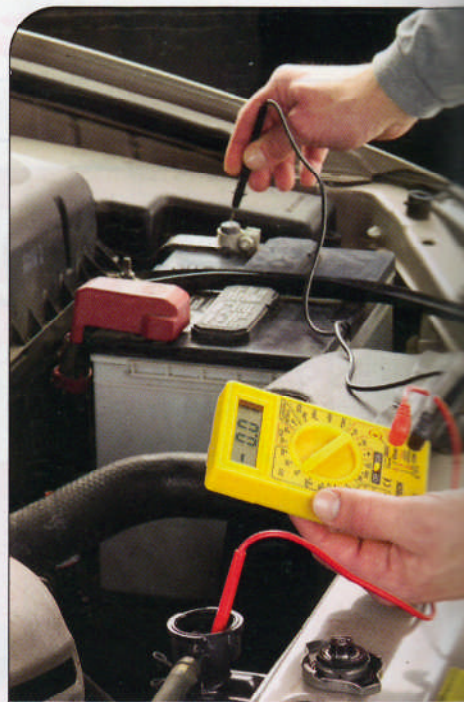
2. Shocks and struts. They're not just for comfort—they help stop your car! If you've already clocked 80,000 miles and



want to keep driving on them, stay well behind other vehicles on the freeway. You'll need an additional 22 ft. of stopping distance.

3. Cabin air filter. A clogged cabin air filter puts an added load on your car's A/C system and reduces heat in winter. Replace at least once a year.

4. Coolant change. Coolant doesn't last forever. You have to change it every 24,000 miles (green coolant) or 100,000 miles (extended-life coolant). If you keep driving on worn coolant, expect to replace the radiator, heater core and water pump.



Best quick tip

Test your coolant with a voltmeter. Set your digital voltmeter on the lowest DC setting reading and dip the positive probe right into the coolant. Touch the negative probe to the negative battery terminal and rev the engine to 2,000 rpm. If the reading is .4 volts or more, your coolant is toast.

10 best 10-minute DIY fixes

Save money or prevent future expenses with these 10-minute fixes you can do yourself.

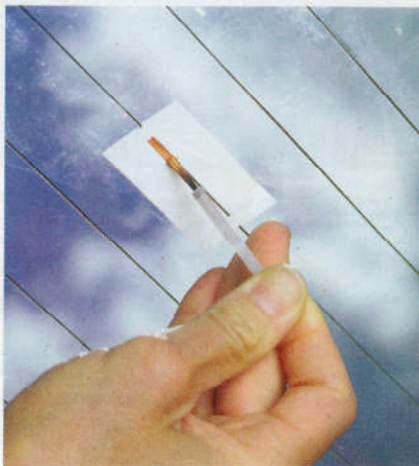


1. Cloudy headlight lenses. You don't have to replace cloudy headlights. Buy a headlight restoration kit at any auto parts store and follow the sanding and buffing instructions.

2. Sticking or slow power windows. Give each window channel a shot of dry Teflon or silicone spray lubricant. Then run the window up and down a few times to spread the lubricant.

3. Avoid iced-up wipers. Install winter wiper blades. They're covered by a rubber boot that prevents ice from building up in the wiper and provides streak-free wiping.

4. Defroster grid out of action. Yes, you can fix this yourself. Pick up a Permatex Quick Grid repair kit (\$13) at any auto parts store. Follow the instructions and you'll be defrosting in no time.



5. Clogged radiator fins. Disconnect the electrical connectors to your electric cooling fans and remove the fasteners. Lift out the entire fan assembly. Then use a garden hose and nozzle to spray the back of the radiator. That will dislodge the gunk stuck to the front side and provide better cooling. Reinstall the fan assembly.

6. Squeaky door hinges. Rusty hinges wear faster, causing the door to sag and not close properly. Replacing the hinges can be costly. A quick spray of white lithium grease is all you need to keep them from wearing out.

7. Prevent false ABS trouble codes. Anti-lock brake sensors contain a magnet that can pick up metallic road debris and set off a false "trouble code." Use a rag to wipe the debris off the sensor any time you have your wheels off.

8. Fix paint chips and scratches right away. Use these cool applicator tools and a can of touch-up paint to prevent rust.



9. Corroded battery terminals. Corrosion puts added strain on your charging system and can mess with computer-controlled systems. Cleaning is your cheapest insurance against electrical problems.

10. Rattling exhaust pipe. Replace exhaust clamps and brackets at the first sign of rust-through or rattling. They're cheap and easy to install, and they protect other exhaust components from vibration damage.

Best avoidable "oopses"

Mixing different types of coolant.

Green, yellow, red, orange and blue coolants create cool "mud" when mixed. Cost of a new heater core: \$400 to \$1,000.

Putting E-85 in a "non-flex-fuel" car.

This little mistake will cost you the price of a tow, a fuel tank and fuel line flush, a new fuel filter and a new tank of gas. Expect to pay about \$400 for this "oops."

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