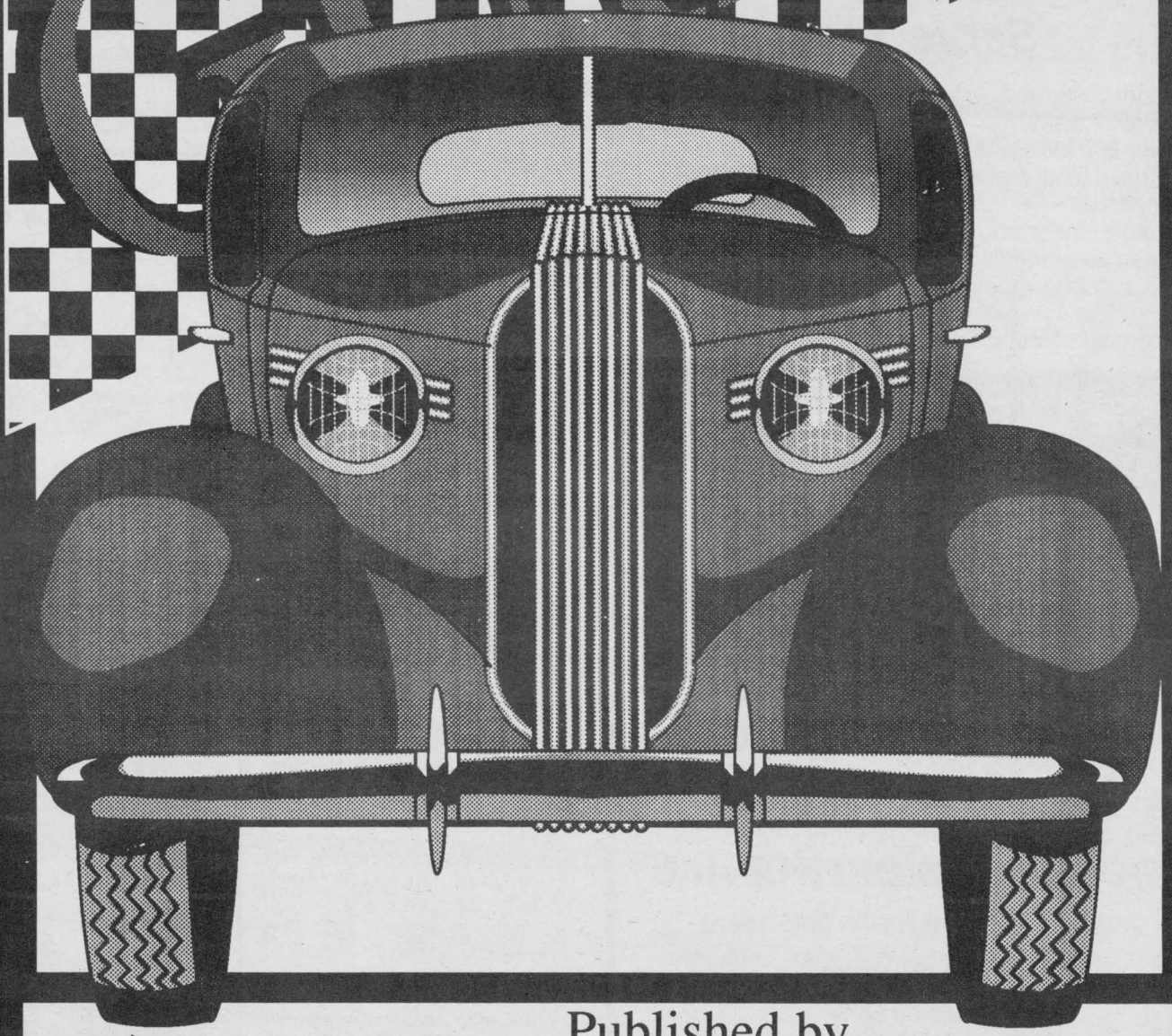
WINTER

CAR CARE & BUYER'S GUIDE



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Oil your way to longer engine life

Women were the principal vehicle maintainer in 36.4% of households in Canada, that's up from 32.2 % in 1996. One of the most frequent and most important maintenance jobs to perform on your vehicle is the oil change. Whether you're a women or a man, you may often wonder why you should bother changing the oil in your car?

The answer is simple. Your car's engine generates temperatures in excess of 200 C under normal operating conditions. If it's a turbo, that's more like 300 C! The oil helps protect your engine. Oil prevents metal to metal contact and cleans out dirt and combustion by-products. Many people don't realize that oil is also an important part of the cooling system, dispersing about 20% of engine heat.

Today's cars are designed with smaller, more fuel efficient engines, and are built to tighter tolerances. The engine oils you put in have to be of an equally high standard, and the manufacturers are continually researching new and improved products.

But nothing lasts forever. Over time, the oil will lose some of its viscosity (ability to flow) and will pick up enough dirt and water in suspension that it needs to be replaced. Engine manufacturers generally recommend an oil change every 5,000 to 6,000 km. If you do nothing else in the way of preventive maintenance, do these oil changes. They are the single most effective thing you can do for long engine life. And at about $20 per oil change, it is also one of the cheapest.

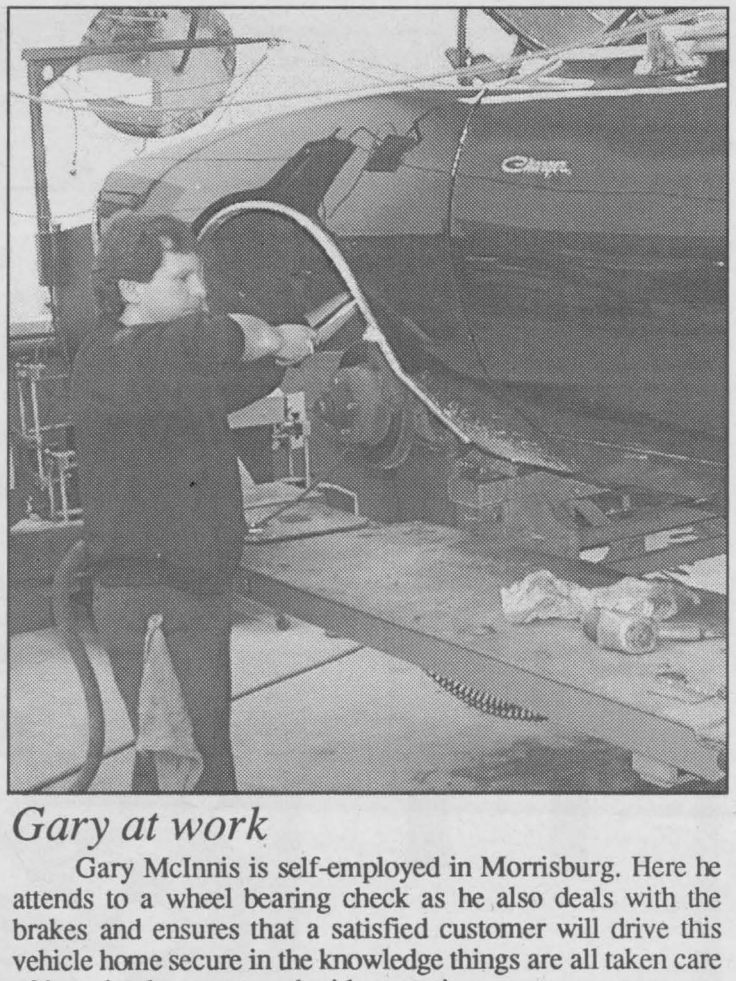
Are all oils the same? Should you just put any kind of oil in your car? The short answer is no -- not all oils are equal. All oils conform to high standards. The biggest difference is in the additives that each company adds. These additives will enhance the oil's cleaning effects in the engine, will lay down a protective layer on the metal walls to reduce internal friction, and help the oil to resist thermal and viscosity breakdown.

There are also other additives or oil treatments you can buy separately. Such additives can help any oil remove engine deposits, protect engine parts, and improve fuel consumption. They are available at automotive stores or wherever you get your oil changed.

What about synthetic oils? Synthetic oils are not refined from crude oil, they are specifically engineered for high performance engines. They give you superior low temperature fluidity, better high temperature stability, and greater resistance to oxidation and shear stress. Synthetic oils are also less volatile, and so you are less likely to have to add oil between oil changes. Some synthetics contain an additive that actually bonds to engine surfaces, providing an extra layer of protection. And that layer is there before you start your engine, so you have no metal to metal contact even at start-up.

Synthetic oils can be mixed with conventional mineral oils -- they are fully compatible, and they are recyclable. There are also semi-synthetic oils on the market. These blends of synthetic and mineral oil offer the best of both worlds -- the low cost of a mineral oil and the high performance of a synthetic.

GO WITH SAFETY



Gary at work

Gary McInnis is self-employed in Morrisburg. Here he attends to a wheel bearing check as he also deals with the brakes and ensures that a satisfied customer will drive this vehicle home secure in the knowledge things are all taken care of in a timely matter and with expertise.

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Making certain your car starts despite the cold

A terrific cold snap that struck last year at this time came with a vengence and without regard for anyone or anything. A report that may help us get through our winter that looms on the horizon follows, enjoy as it tells about what was endured...

The long cold snap that has enveloped the province has not only been hard on people. It has been murder on motor vehicles. Arctic winds have kept temperatures everywhere well below seasonal values for this time of year. Stepping outdoors when it is 30 below zero Celsius is bad enough, having to coax a frost-bitten automobile to move on square tires is worse.

Short of visiting Moosonee where the mercury routinely dips below -40°C this time of year, one of the coldest places in Ontario right now is Kapuskasing —a community of 10,000 people situated on Hwy 11, 175 km north of Timmins —800 km north of Toronto.

Kapuskasing is home of General Motors Cold Weather Testing Facility, selected for its stable winter temperatures—a steady -40°C. Kapuskasing set a new cold record in January (1994), an average temperature of -27°C, four degrees colder than the previous record, set in 1982.

What better place to ask mechanics about what people should worry about in order to avoid winter driving nightmares. This winter, service stations in Kapuskasing have handled more calls for a tow truck than they can handle.

Jean Fortier, of Fortier's Car Care, said 90 per cent of the break-downs are due to the fuel injection system on newer vehicles. "When you turn your key, it is electrical and pushes gasoline into the fuel injection system," he said. "People will turn their key to start, then stop and try again. So every time you turn the key you push up gasoline, just as if you were touching the pedal and the first thing you know it's flooded."

Mr. Fortier said the majority of fuel-injected vehicles that are flooded have to be brought into the shop to remove the spark plugs, change the oil and, sometimes, the battery.

Last year was relatively mild compared with January where the temperature hovered close to the minus 30-degree range, resulting in a busy season for Mr. Fortier and his fellow workers.

Preventative maintenance is cheaper in the long term, said Mr. Fortier. "It is less expensive to bring your car into the garage in the fall for the winter check--up, including an oil change and battery check-up," he said. "It is better to pay $35 in labour and have the whole car checked than to suffer the consequences of having the vehicle break down in colder weather."

Even though cars give you a good reading, some won't take it at -40°C. At the check-up, the mechanic will know if the battery is low or has to be replaced in order to stand up to a long, cold winter.

Mr. Fortier recommends people go to a lighter oil in the winter, such as a 5W-30 instead of 10W--30 because it is better for cold weather and easier on the engine.

"At -40 degrees there are certain things you have to do. A lot of people think that because a car is newer it will start easier in the cold, but that is not the case," he said. Mr. Fortier suggests that people read up on their cars as to what they should be doing in cold weather because it could save them money.

Most of the service calls answered by Marcel Lepage, owner of the PetroCanada station on Government Road, have to do with malfunctioning block heaters. "When the heater is working you never have any problems," said Mr. Lepage. "But if the cord breaks off in the cold or the block heater shorts out then the car won't start."

Mr. Lepage has been overly busy because the cold weather, which usually lasts for up to 10 days. Frigid temperatures have remained in place since Christmas. He receives anywhere from five to 10 service calls for his tow truck, a marked increase over last year.

Bert Gaulin of B&D Shell service station, said it has been a good season for the garage business in Kapuskasing. Mr. Gaulin said his experience this year has been break-downs in the power steering system and block heaters due to the cold weather.

"Let your car heat up," said Mr. Gaulin. "It's been so cold and it costs so much in gas that people sometimes leave too soon. But people know now to plug in their cars, they are watching the weather closely because it's been so cold. At first people got caught, we usually had cold weather for a few days but it is lasting, so people are more conscious to plug in their vehicles."

Mr. Gaulin said people should change the oil at a minimum of 3,000 kilometres. He is also an advocate of lighter oil, namely Zero-30W, which is very good synthetic oil, although it is more expensive than regular brands of motor oil.

All of the mechanics were in agreement that a bit of preventative medicine goes a long way, especially in the cold Northern Ontario climate.

Lessen the pinch at the pumps

As gasoline prices continue to pinch the wallets of Canadians, many motorists have reduced the kilometres they drive, looked for cheaper gas or even cancelled road trips.

Gas prices throughout Canada have soared to close to 8- cents a litre in many places, leaving most drivers frustrated wondering when prices will come down.

In the meantime, proper tire inflation can help offset the rising cost of fuel. Tires play a major role in fuel efficiency their importance is growing as costs climb. Back in 1995, the U.S. Energy Department said underinflated tires wasted an estimated 4 million gallons of gas a day in America. That can be expensive at todays prices.

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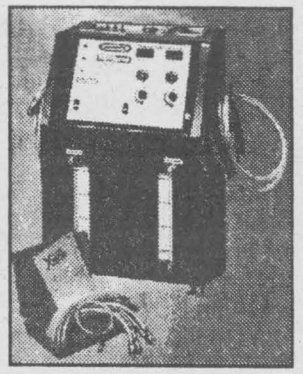
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Tips for winter driving

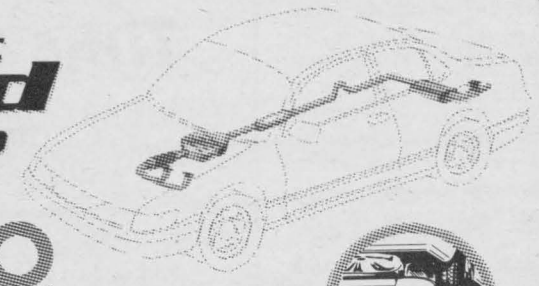
* When winter weather strikes, **SLOW DOWN**. Wet, snowy or icy roads offer less traction and make it harder to stop and turn. By slowing down, you give yourself more time and you make it possible for your tires to better use the available road grip.
* Use extra care when crossing bridges or overpasses during the winter. Because they are exposed to cold air and winter winds above and below, ice can form on bridges even when the roads on either side are free from ice.
* Carry a sack of sand or gravel in the trunk of your car. If your car has rear wheel drive, the added weight over the drive wheels will improve traction and it can also be used to help you or someone else get out if you or they become stuck.
* Avoid sudden inputs on the steering wheel, brakes or accelerator, because there is less traction on wet, icy or snowy surfaces. Instead, make gradual movements to avoid upsetting the balance of the car. If you feel your car begin to skid, ease off the gas and steer into the skid, look at where you want the car to go.
* Ice, mud and snow build up on wheels as well as underneath your car, this could cause your wheels to become unbalanced and in turn upset the ride leading to unnecessary wear on your tires and suspension parts. Check the wheels and underneath of your car often and wash off mud and ice as soon as possible.
* Be sure your safety kit is up-to-date and if you do end up in a snowbank or the ditch, stay with your car until help arrives. Never leave the car to strike out searching for help.
* Contrary to common belief, the best protection for your engine is a 50-50 mixture of water and anti-freeze. Check this level, the hoses and belts as well as water pump for wear and for leaks.
* Check tires for proper inflation regularly throughout the winter.
* In snowy conditions check to make sure that the car's intake is free from build up of snow. Many of the newer cars draw the air needed for engine and cooling system from below the radiator. If this intake becomes clogged with snow, your car could overheat, even on a cold wintry day.



Service with a Smile

Rob Shaver works at Strader's in Morrisburg and here we catch him checking the brakes for wear before winter sets in.

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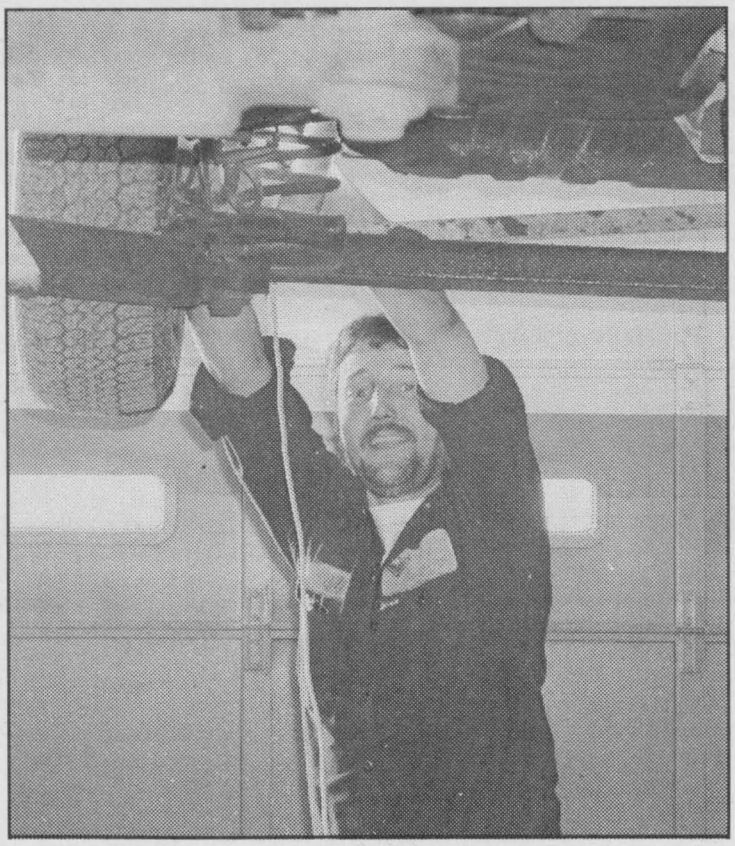
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Better Safe than Sorry

Jeff checks the front-end of this vehicle for defects. It is important to ensure your vehicle is safe and ready to face whatever winter throws at us. Shocks and struts can cause trouble on the best of roads, and when snow and ice pile up there is more cause for concern.

Be sure to check belts and hoses

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" That expression isn't always true. Some things you should fix before they break, because if they break it can be very distressing. Take your vehicle's fan belt. Please.

It's a simple thing, just a piece of rubber. But it runs the alternator, which provides electrical power and keeps the battery charged. Without that electrical power, your car will run for only as long as the battery lasts -- maybe ten minutes. If you're lucky, maybe thirty minutes.

For many cars, other things run from belts, too. Power steering, water pump, air conditioning -- with the exception of the water pump, these are things you can live without while you limp to a repair centre.

Some cars have several belts, others a single, long belt that does everything. The belts today are mostly V-shaped. They have cogs on the underside to allow a better fit around the pulley and increased air circulation. The air circulation keeps them cooler, so they will last longer.

When you inspect your belts, look for cracks in the rubber, frayed edges, missing cogs -- anything to suggest it's getting brittle or worn. Replacing a belt when you're having an oil change is easy. Doing it by night at the side of the road is not.

Hoses are equally important. Coolant is carried from the bottom of the radiator to the engine block, circulates through a water jacket, and then returns to the radiator via the upper hose. A thermostat in the upper hose regulates the flow.

Inspect the hoses every time you have the hood up. Run your fingers along the hose to feel for cracking. Squeeze the hoses to make sure they remain firm -- a mushy spot is likely to give out at an inconvenient moment.

Watch the level of your coolant. If it drops regularly, or if you see a puddle of greenish liquid under your car, you could have a leak. Any pinhole leak in a radiator hose could turn into Niagara Falls while you're driving on the highway, and nobody needs that kind of excitement.

The hoses are held in place by clamps. It's a good idea to check the clamps every so often to make sure they haven't worked loose due to road vibration.

The right boots for your car

The contact between your vehicle and the road is about the size of a medium pizza box and a good set of winter tires is essential to ensure your car maintains traction on snow or ice covered roads.

Before winter hits, be sure to check your tires. Some tire companies suggest putting your all-season tires away for the winter and installing winter tires.

According to Gus Liotta, Director of Brand Channel Marketing for Goodyear Canada, "A set of winter tires can make the difference in keeping your family safe on the roads this winter. It is difficult to predict when a storm will hit, but with a good set of winter tires, you will be prepared for any winter weather."

A variety of winter tires are available to suit various driving styles and budgets. Before going to a tire retailer it is a good idea to rank the tire performance attributes that are most important to you...snow traction, ice traction, quiet ride, superb handling, long tread life, price...whatever. A reputable tire dealer will ask a lot of questions before making a recommendation. It is a good idea to know what is important to you before you go shopping for tires.

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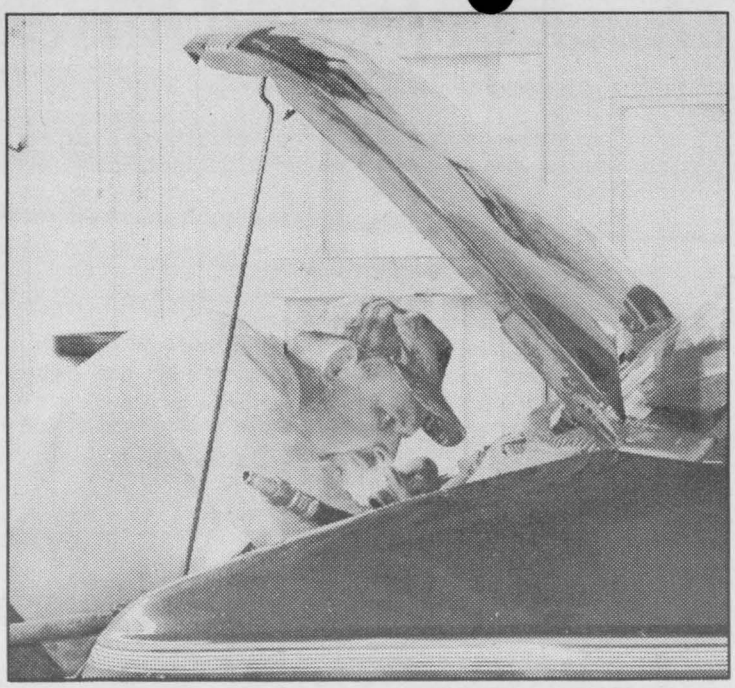
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Under the Hood

Todd, at Tommy's Automotive in Iroquois is busy under the hood of this minivan as he makes certain the hoses are in good shape, all fluid levels are up and the belts do not need replacing. This is the time to check all these and more, no one wants to be stranded along an icy roadway on a snowy day with vehicular problems.

Where the rubber hits the road

Accelerating. Cornering. Stopping. Get a grip!

Have you ever stopped to think how much contact your car actually has with the road? You stay on the road courtesy of about four hand-sized pieces of rubber compound. Without that contact, your car is a candidate for making soup cans. It's well worth your while to keep your tires properly inflated, rotate them at least once a year, and replace them when the tread gets worn.

But there's more to it than that. Your tires can also be an early warning system for other problems such as alignment or a failing suspension. Suppose you look at your tires, and you notice that the tread seems to be more worn on the inside than the outside edge. You probably need your wheels aligned. Getting the alignment fixed will improve your car's handling and fuel economy, as well as giving you a more comfortable ride.

Does your car start to shake when you reach certain speeds? It could be that you need your wheels balanced. All wheels and tires have very slight differences in the weig ht distribution, and at the speeds they're turning that translates into a powerful vibration. All it takes to fix it is the positioning of those little lead weights around the edge of the wheel.



Feathering is caused by incorrect toe-in or toe-out. The tire drags across the road, instead of rolling easily. You need an alignment.

Wear on one side only means that the camber is out of adjustment. This, too, means you need an alignment.

Cupping occurs when the tire bounces, rather than rolling freely. Small areas of excessive wear appear. This is generally caused by worn shocks or loose suspension components. You need to have your suspension adjusted.

A series of cups suggest that the tire is shimmying -- you need your wheel balanced.

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Get a grip on engine grime

The old cast iron engine is going the way of the dinosaur. Aluminum is the manufacturers' metal of choice, making today's engines more susceptible to the onslaught of dirt and grime. Oil is your engine's lifeblood and when contaminated can cause premature wear to your engine. Did you ever notice that your car runs better after a lube, oil and filter service?

Dirt is the enemy and to fight it you need an oil filter that is capable of blocking even the most minute dirt particles. The best protection is an oil filter that will trap up to 96 per cent of the dust and dirt particles that attack your engine everyday.

Under normal driving conditions it is recommended that you change your oil & filter every 5000 kilometers or three months. Fram's Sure Grip Oil filters give you not only 96 per cent filter protection during the life of the filter; they make changing those slippery, oil filters a whole lot easier.

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Be prepared for winter travel

The motto of Scouts Canada and Girl Guides of Canada could not be more appropriate for safe winter travel...be prepared!

With a well maintained car, a good set of tires (preferably winter tires) and some flexible, common sense planning, winter can be a pleasant time to take a road trip. To plan ahead, read this list and take heed:

* Take your vehicle in for a full mechanical inspection including the tires, cooling system, battery, hoses, belts and water pump.
* Plan your route and ensure you have good maps.
* Let someone know your planned route.
* Make a list of items to have in your vehicle...extra blankets, cellular phone, water, food, a shovel, sand or gravel, chemical heating packs, extra windshield washer fluid, flashlight, road flares, booster cables, matches, candles and a first aid kit.
* Be flexible and take your time. If the weather takes a turn for the worst, take a break and make a stop, for as long as it takes.
* Check your tire pressure regularly. Proper inflation ensures that your tires have maximum contact with the road.
* Dress in layers of loose, comfortable clothing.
* Listen to local radio stations for the latest road and weather conditions.
* Completely clear your car of ice and snow before heading out on the road.

Winter can be a great time to travel if you and your vehicle are prepared. The recent advances in winter tire technology provide drivers with peace of mind during serious winter storms activities.



Mr. Goodwrench

Changing the oil at regular intervals is as important in the colder months as it is during the warmer weather. Here an automobile technologist at a local GM dealership changes the oil for a customer.

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Collector's Delight

This 1981 Malibu would be just right for cruisin' as the radio plays some Beach Boys tunes. Just like the day she rolled off the assembly line, this beauty sits in the showroom at Upper Canada Motors in Morrisburg waiting for the right buyer.

Tips to prepare your vehicle for the cold Canadian winter

It's a well-known fact that every year a large majority of the more than 16 million vehicles on the road are caught unprepared for the first blast of really cold weather. Don't be caught unprepared. Spending a little bit of time and effort now, can save you time, effort, frustration, and even money later on.

Here is a quick list of things to check before that first nasty blast of winter:

Cooling System

If it hasn't been done in a while, flush out your cooling system with a good chemical cleaner and put in fresh anti-freeze. Remember to use the anti-freeze in its proper proportions. Pure anti-freeze (most often made of ethylene glycol) does not cool or protect as well as the proper mixture of water and anti-freeze which is described on the anti-freeze container. And don't forget to check containers, belts, hoses, the pressure caps and thermostat.

Battery & Electrical System

If your battery is more than a few years old, have it checked. Cold weather is hard on batteries. Be sure connections are clean and tight. Corroded or loose connections can give the symptoms of a weak or dead battery.

Engine

Is it time for a tune-up? Faulty wiring, worn spark plugs, a sticking choke or emission control devices that need attention, can all lead to hard starting. A diagnostic check-up of the engine can be a good winter pre-investment.

Oil & Filter

Dirty oil can give you trouble in the winter. Now's the time to change it. Change the oil filter too! And don't forget to check the other filters on your car, including the fuel, air and transmission filters. (The transmission filter should be changed with the transmission fluid when it is changed during regular preventative maintenance.)

Tires

For every 50 Celsius of temperature drop, your tire pressure decreases by one pound. Tires which are under-inflated by only eight pounds can reduce gas mileage by five percent and cut tire life by 25 percent or more. Check your tire pressure regularly.

Emergency Kit

And don't forget to carry an emergency kit in your vehicle during the winter months, it could save your life.

Following these simple tips will help you to survive another Canadian winter.

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1000 Island Mall
Parkedale at Windsor
Brockville 342-4812

WINTER AUTOMOTIVE HOURS
Mon., Tues. & Wed 8 am - 7 pm
Thurs. & Fri. 8 am - 9 pm
Sat. 8 am - 5 pm; Sun. 10 am - 5 pm