

Check trouble spots

By Bob Balmer Of the Emerald

Cold mornings and torrents of rain are typical winter weather patterns in Oregon. And as people need external protection from these elements, so do the internal workings of automobiles.

A service adviser for a local garage encourages motorists to have a variety of checks performed on their cars and trucks before winter weather sets in.

John Petty of Sears Auto Center lists four automotive trouble spots that should be checked before winter: the cooling system, the tires, the battery and the exhaust system.

To winterize water-cooled vehicles, use antifreeze to keep the engine block from cracking during freezing weather.

Petty says a visual check can help determine whether antifreeze must be added to the radiator. If the radiator fluid is clear, antifreeze is needed, he says. And if there are metal flecks in the water or the water appears dirty, the radiator must be flushed before antifreeze is added, he says.

Petty does not recommend studded or snow tires for winter driving. "Your best bet, dollar for dollar, is an all-season radial tire," he explains. "That way you don't need to invest in two sets of tires."

Of course, chains are essential for mountain traveling.

To check the battery, only two steps are needed. First, check the water level in the cells and add water if needed; second, clean the cables and the terminals, wiping off all corroded areas.

Petty says most people don't worry about the exhaust system when weatherizing their cars, even though the exhaust might be the most important thing to check.

He suggests looking for smoke coming out from the muffler, which is a sign of possible exhaust leaks near the front of the car. During winter months people drive with their windows up and their heaters on, making exhaust leaks more dangerous than in the summertime. Petty says.

Finally, he says, check all hoses. Extreme temperature shifts cause the hoses to crack and the clamps to loosen. Tighten all loose clamps and replace any worn hoses, he warns.

Prepare with proper equipment

Like a medicine cabinet, the trunk of every car should be wellstocked, containing as many items for routine maintenance and emergencies as cost and space permit. Terry White, manager of Eugene True Value Hardware, says that following items are particularly useful during the winter season:

- ▶ Extra light bulbs and fuses; jumper cables.
- -Screwdriver, crescent wrench and pliers.
- -A flashlight and three flares.
- ✓ Tire chains.
- A heavy-duty ice scraper and a spray can of de-icing fluid.
 Jugs of water and antifreeze; a bottle of window-washing
- solvent.

▶ Empty gas can; extra cans of motor oil, transmission and brake fluids.

- -Duct and electrical tape; baling wire.
- A basic first-aid kit; a small fire extinguisher.
- Sleeping bag and/or thermal blanket.
- Gloves, a tarp and a few rags.
- ~ A pad and pencil; road maps; the vehicle owner's manual.

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Thursday, November 15, 1984

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