

Small things can keep car running better

by MARK STEWART
of The Outlook staff

Keeping an engine in tune is a relatively simple but time-consuming task which many motorists can do themselves with a few tools and a little spare time.

The benefits will be a smoother running vehicle which will save fuel, says Eldon Smith, Mt. Hood Community College automotive instructor.

A motorist who does not have a vast mechanical background can make many of the adjustments necessary to keep a car and truck running smoothly, Smith says.

For example, a driveway mechanic can:

- Make sure the battery has enough water and the terminals and cables are free of corrosion, which creates a poor connection between the battery and starter. This

reduces the amount of power available to crank and start the engine;

- Check the spark plugs, cleaning or replacing them every 5,000 miles for small cars and less often for larger vehicles. If plugs are replaced, make sure they are of the proper heat range and that the gap is set to specifications for the engine;

- If the car has electronic ignition, check the distributor cap and rotor when spark plugs are changed. The engine can misfire if the cap and rotor points have a condition called carbon tracking. The tracking is caused by the system's high voltage;

- On many older cars, the points and condenser should be replaced. Remember to lube the cam which opens and closes the points each time the points are replaced. The point gap either can be set using a

feeler gauge or a dwell meter, which is more accurate;

- Change the air filter regularly. A dirty filter will cause the carburetor to use more gasoline. Although most newer carburetors are sealed and cannot be adjusted, make sure all vacuum lines between the engine and carburetor are connected and in good shape;

More and more cars also are using an injection system to deliver fuel to the engine. Most weekend mechanics should take their cars to a shop if problems with the injection system is suspected;

- Check the belts which run the cooling fan and power accessories. If the underside is cracked or they look excessively worn, belts should be replaced. Also fill all fluid reservoirs and check hoses for leaks,

replacing ones which are worn;

- Also, change the engine oil and filter at regular intervals. Follow manufacturer's recommendations unless most trips are short, then make the change more often.

Smith says he's found that many cars used primarily for short trips and stop-and-go driving are flunking state emission tests because gasoline seeps into the engine oil. This increases crankcase emissions beyond acceptable levels. The condition usually can be cured by an oil change.

- Check the tires regularly, making sure they have adequate pressure and are rotated every 5,000 miles. Include the spare when checking for proper inflation. Radials should be rotated front to rear on the same side of the car, while bias-ply tires can be moved from front to rear diagonally.

Here's some fresh ways to save on gas

Looking for fresh ideas on ways to save gas this summer? Here are some, with the estimated percentage of mileage increases in parentheses:

- Replace fouled spark plugs promptly (9%)
- Maintain correct carburetor and choke operation (2%)
- Maintain correct tire pressure (2%)
- Avoid jackrabbit starts; drive at an easy pace (18%)

Amoco, whose surveys provided these results, points out that these percentages aren't exactly cumulative since the same factors may apply to one or more of the conditions on which comparisons are based.

Keep records

The oil company also suggests maintaining records to identify fuel waste, minimizing braking by anticipating speed changes and keeping your car properly lubricated, maintaining the prescribed oil level. Belts should be tight; a loose fanbelt also is a gaswaster.

Eliminating needless driving, using the air conditioner advisedly, correcting any transmission slip, maintaining proper wheel alignment and installing a fresh air cleaner are other helpful fuel-saving hints.

Sikorsky's savers

If you're driving late at night and dangerously close to empty, Robert Sikorsky, author of *How to Get More Miles Per Gallon*, suggests this emergency economy method:

Accelerate slowly to 20 miles an hour, then quickly turn off the ignition and shift the car into neutral. Let the car slow to five to eight miles an hour, restart the engine and repeat until you find an open gas station.

While you can double or triple normal gas mileage this way, Sikorsky says he doesn't recommend it for everyday use, driving down steep grades or if your steering wheel locks when the ignition is turned off.

When starting a car after the engine has flooded, don't pump the accelerator. That only wastes more gas.

Instead, push the accelerator pedal to the floor and hold it there while cranking the starter. This will open the throttle and drain the excess gas from the carburetor. If the engine has an automatic choke, be sure to prop the butterfly valve open while the starter is being turned, Sikorsky advises.

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