

GETTING YOUR CAR READY FOR STORMY WEATHER



Getting your car ready for bad weather isn't difficult or expensive, but it does require some forethought. Here are some things to check to make sure your car is ready to face a storm.

WIPER BLADES

Most drivers forget about their windshield wiper blades until they need them the most: in the middle of a heavy rainstorm.

Don't wait until a storm hits to think about your wipers. While it's dry and sunny, check the condition of your wiper blades. The rubber should be soft and easily bendable. If it seems hard, dry, cracked, torn or peeling, get new blades right away.

The Car Care Council recommends you replace the blades every six months to make sure they're in good condition.

WINDSHIELD WASHER FLUID

Have you ever had a big truck splash mud and grime onto your windshield after a storm? If so, you know how nerve-racking it can be to see your frontal vision completely obscured on the highway — even for just a few seconds.

It's important that you're able to clear your windshield very quickly, which is why keeping your washer fluid topped off can actually be a big safety advantage for drivers.

While you should use special de-icing washer fluid during the winter months, there are more specialized washer fluids that can do a better job during the summer driving season for removing bugs or sticky mud from your windshield.

TIRE AND ALIGNMENT

Finally, nothing provides more confidence in wet conditions than a set of good, all-weather tires.

You should always keep your tires in top condition, but it's especially important in areas that see a lot of stormy, rainy weather. The deeper your tire treads are, the more water they'll be able to displace on wet roads, which gives you added traction and better handling in the rain.

For even more confidence, you can opt for tires that are specially designed for wet-weather driving. These tires will funnel extra water away from the driving surface as they roll, which keeps the vehicle firmly planted during storms.

It's also a good idea to get your car's alignment checked. Over time, your suspension can get out of adjustment, which can result in worse handling and sometimes unpredictable skids.



FALL MAINTENANCE

BRAKES

SIGNS THEY ARE GOING BAD



SQUEAKS

Most cars are designed to emit a high-pitched squealing noise when the brake pads are dangerously thin. A small, metal clip will rub up against the brakes, telling you it's past time for a brake job.

VIBRATIONS

If you sense any unusual vibrations when stopping, this can also mean it's time to get your brakes checked.

Brakes that are worn unevenly can also manifest themselves through the steering feel, especially if the vibrations get worse when you step on the brake pedal.

SQUISHY PEDAL

If the brake pedal doesn't seem to exert much pressure, or even lets you push it all the way to the floorboard, your brakes could be on the verge of total failure due to a loss of brake fluid, air or water in the brake lines, or a leaky or broken power brake system.

SMELL

If you smell a metallic burning scent, especially after hard stops, there's a good chance it could be coming from your brakes. You should get a brake inspection to check it out.

FALL MAINTENANCE

WHEN TO REPLACE YOUR SHOCKS

MAINTENANCE PLANS

The best way to decide when to replace suspension components is by following the maintenance plan in your owner's manual.

The owner's manual contains recommended intervals for replacing certain parts, including the shocks and struts. While this can vary some based on how you drive it — jackrabbit starts and lots of potholes may wear out your suspension faster, for example — the owner's manual will give a good idea of when the parts ought to be replaced under normal use.

It's good information, and it could also void your car's warranty if you don't follow it.

If you don't have an owner's manual, consider buying one from an online auction, looking up your car's maintenance needs online, or checking with a certified repair center that can tell you exactly what the factory recommends for your car's age and mileage.

DO AN INSPECTION

Even before the planned maintenance, it's a good idea to check the conditions of your shocks and struts regularly. You can peek under your car to look for any obvious signs of leaks or damage, such as oil that has dripped out of the shock or bent parts that could have been caused by debris in the roadway.



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