

Schedule An Alignment

Have you noticed your vehicle veering to one side during your travels? This is a good indicator that an alignment is in order. An unaligned vehicle not only causes uneven wear to your tires, but also is a safety concern, as it affects your control and handling.

Alignments are typically required any time you replace the tires on your vehicle, but it also can be a part of routine maintenance. Luckily, it is a relatively

quick process that isn't too hard on the wallet. Talk to your dealer or a qualified service center to get your vehicle in line and ride in comfort.

Why It's Important

Aside from taking away the amount of control you have over your vehicle, there are expensive issues that come with driving a vehicle that

isn't properly aligned.

According to Consumer Reports, family-car tires can last for up to 70,000 miles. Keep in mind that is with scheduled rotations

and proper care.

When a vehicle is unaligned, uneven tire wear is a common occurrence. Tires will require replacement much sooner, and you will also notice a decrease in fuel mileage. Comfortability is another advantage of a properly aligned vehicle. The need to constantly correct a veering automobile can not only be annoying but can create dangerous distractions.

When It's Necessary

You'll know your vehicle is in need of realignment if you notice the steering wheel will no longer line up straight, or your front-end shakes after hitting a bump. Most vehicle manufacturers don't recommend a specific mileage or timeframe

for alignment. It should be performed when symptoms are noticed.

A vehicle can easily become unaligned by hitting potholes or curbs or after a minor accident. If you experience one of these occurrences, be sure to ask a professional if you're in need for service.

How It's Done

Wheel alignments require a service center that offers a special alignment rack. Once a vehicle is placed on this innovative tool, it is analyzed by sensors to determine the actual angles of each wheel. A technician will then adjust each component until the vehicle's specifications are met.



Inspect Belts & Hoses

The impact belts and hoses can have on your vehicle's performance might surprise you. Belts play a key role in operating every part under the hood with a pulley, and hoses keep the cooling system running. With spring's arrival, be sure the rubber in your engine compartment is in good working order to avoid becoming stranded. Warmer temperatures create under-the-hood conditions that can aggressively deteriorate older belts and hoses.

Role of Cooling-System Hoses

If you have ever looked in your engine compartment, you likely have seen a maze

of hoses, but do you know what they do?

Some are there to transport fuel, air-conditioning refrigerant and even air to vacuum-controlled components, such as a cruise-control actuator. Your vehicle's cooling system also relies on hoses to carry important coolant to regulate engine temperatures. When an engine overheats, it causes immense damage to its internal parts. Early detection of a failing cooling-system hose can save you big bucks in repairs as well as keep the wheels turning during a spring vacation. Here are some signs you'll notice when your hoses

start wearing down, as reported by the American Automobile Association:

- Visible fluid leakage under your car. It's a good idea to know what kind of coolant your vehicle operates with, so you'll know which colors to look for.
- A sweet burning smell can often indicate a coolant leak is present.
- Visible steam or smoke from beneath the hood. Hoses take a lot of abuse, often being exposed to drastic temperature changes that may cause swelling, cracking or bulging. Regular inspections can give you the advantage in catching a problem before it requires an expensive repair.

Understanding Belts

Most of today's passenger vehicles rely on a single belt to power important components, such as the alternator, AC compressor and even power steering. They are called serpentine belts, and they feature ribs that ride on the pulleys to operate each part.

The AAA suggests signs of a failing belt can include:

- A squealing noise as the engine accelerates;
 - A whirring or grinding noise from a pulley while engine is on; and
 - A slow, rhythmic slapping sound at idle.
- Noticing cracks or noises coming from your belt usually means a replacement is necessary. Most vehicles feature a diagram for the correct routing position.

Changing a belt can be accomplished without the need for special tools, but may be better left to professionals unless you feel comfortable doing the repair. Don't find yourself stranded this spring. Make sure the rubber in your engine compartment is ready for the warm weather.

Essential items for roadside emergency kits

Motorists never know when problems with their vehicles may force them to pull off the road and onto the shoulder. Whether it's a flat tire, a sputtering engine or an empty gas tank, such circumstances are never welcome. But such situations need not be so unbearable. Drivers who keep roadside emergency kits in their vehicles may find themselves getting back on the road more quickly the next time an unforeseen problem forces them to pull off the highway.

The following are some must-have items drivers should include in their roadside emergency kits.

- Roadside flares
- First-aid kit
- Jumper cables
- Warm blankets
- Flashlight
- Screwdrivers (flat-head and Phillips)
- Tire-pressure gauge
- Spare tire and jack
- De-icing agent
- Nonperishable snacks and water
- Extra fluids (i.e., motor oil, brake fluid, antifreeze, windshield washer)
- Pliers
- Cell phone charger
- Important phone numbers (i.e., mechanic, auto insurance company)

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SPRING BACK
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