



# Spring...On The Road

## Advice from the Pros: Do Not Neglect Auto Service

The average age of a personal vehicle on the road today is more than 11 years, according to recent news reports. In tough economic times, it's natural to rein in spending. But the experts at the nonprofit National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) warn that putting off routine auto maintenance or ignoring service intervals is false economy. Small issues can morph into more expensive repairs. For example, failure to replace worn brake pads or a faulty oxygen sensor -- both relatively easy services for qualified auto technicians -- can result in expensive brake rotor service or costly replacement of the vehicle's catalytic converter. Frequently neglected items include oil changes, tire and brake service, wheel alignment, air and fuel filters, and transmission service, according to ASE-certified auto technicians.

Besides, a well-maintained vehicle gets better gasoline mileage, pollutes less, is safer to operate, and lasts longer than one that's neglected, notes ASE. To help consumers choose a repair shop that fits their needs, ASE offers the following checklist:

- \* Look for a neat, well-organized facility, with vehicles in the parking lot equal in value to your own and modern equipment in the service bays.
- \* Look for a courteous staff, with a service consultant willing to answer all of your questions.

- \* Look for policies regarding estimated repair costs, diagnostic fees, guarantees, and acceptable methods of payment.
- \* Ask if the repair facility specializes or if it usually handles your type of repair work.
- \* Look for signs of professionalism in the customer service area, such as civic, community, or customer service awards.
- \* Look for evidence of qualified technicians: trade school diplomas, certificates of advanced course work, and certification by ASE.



\* Look for the ASE sign or logo; it means the shop employs nationally certified technicians. The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) was founded in 1972 as a non-profit, independent organization dedicated to improving the quality of automotive service and repair through the voluntary testing and certification of automotive technicians.

ASE-certified technicians wear blue and white ASE shoulder insignia and carry credentials listing their exact areas of certification. Their employers often display the blue and white ASE sign. Visit [www.ase.com](http://www.ase.com) for seasonal car care advice and more.

## Warning signs a tire is about to go flat

Few drivers will be fortunate enough to go their entire driving lives without encountering at least one flat tire. Flat tires range from the inconvenient flats, which may interrupt a road trip or make drivers late for work or an appointment, to more dangerous blowouts, which can compromise the safety of drivers, their passengers and anyone else on the road when the tire gives out.

But as inconvenient or dangerous as flats or blowouts can be, they also can be prevented more often than not. Tires often produce warning signs that a flat or blowout is about to emerge, so drivers who want to avoid such unfortunate developments can inspect their tires for the following signs.

**Varying wear:** Tires should exhibit the same type of wear. The wear on front tires and back tires may differ, but one front tire should have the same amount of wear as the other and the same goes for the back tires. Uneven tread on tires indicates that the tire with more wear could be about to go out.

**Worn tread:** Even drivers who know little about cars can typically recognize when tire tread has worn down to the point where the tire is a safety risk. But drivers who are unsure can employ the quarter test. Insert a quarter into the tread of the tire, with George Washington's head upright. If you can see the hairline of the United States' first president, then you need to replace the tire. **Low pressure:** Drivers who do not routinely check their tire pressure are more likely to endure a flat or blowout than those who regularly make sure their tires are at the manufacturer-recommended pressure, which can be found in a vehicle owner's manual or by calling the tire manufacturer or visiting their website. An under-inflated tire is under stress that can cause the tire to blowout. In addition, poorly inflated tires force engines to work harder, which negatively affects

a car's fuel efficiency. **Vibration:** A car that vibrates excessively may do so because tires are damaged. Poor suspension is another cause of excessive vibration. Whatever is behind a car that is vibrating, drivers should immediately take the car to their mechanic for an inspection.

**Physical damage to the tire:** Sometimes tires exhibit physical damage like bulges or cuts, and such signs could mean a flat tire or blowout is just around the corner. Tires that exhibit such physical damage need to be replaced immediately.

Flat tires and blowouts can prove both scary and inconvenient. Drivers who want to avoid such problems should routinely inspect their tires for indicators that a flat or blowout is likely to occur.



## How to drive more efficiently

Many people aspire to drive more efficiently in an attempt to conserve fuel, save money and reduce the carbon footprints of their vehicles. But driving efficiently can also make driving safer for motorists, their passengers and everyone else, including pedestrians, sharing the roads.

Drivers who want to drive more efficiently can implement a variety of strategies to do just that.

- Obey the speed limits. Speed limits are determined with safety in mind, and drivers should always adhere to posted speed limits to protect themselves, their passengers and others on

the road. The U.S. Department of Transportation notes that, in 2015, 27 percent of motor vehicle crash deaths were speeding-related. But according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, obeying the speed limit is also cost-effective. The EPA notes that miles per gallon begins to dip dramatically when vehicles travel above 55 miles per hour. While each vehicle is different, the EPA notes that increasing highway cruising speed from 55 miles per hour to 75 miles per hour can raise fuel consumption by as much as 20 percent.

- Do not idle a vehicle. The Environmental Defense Fund notes that electronic engines do not need to warm up, even in winter when temperatures are especially cold. Vehicles that are idling can produce as much pollution as vehicles that are in motion, and idling for as little as 10 seconds wastes more gas than restarting the engine. Drivers

concerned about overtaxing their engines shortly after starting them can warm their engines by easing into their drives and avoiding excessive revving.

- Use cruise control wisely. Drivers concerned about fuel economy may be accustomed to turning on their vehicles' cruise control when driving long distances on the highway. While that is an effective and fuel-efficient way to maintain steady speeds, turn cruise control off when traversing roads with steep hills. On such roads, fuel efficiency can be lost because the vehicle engine is working harder to maintain steady speeds.

- Tighten the gas cap. When gas caps are loose, fuel evaporates. The Car Care Council notes that loose, missing or damaged gas caps contribute to the evaporation of roughly 147 million gallons of gas per year. That's both wasteful and costly.

When filling up at the gas station, turn the cap until you hear it click.

Driving efficiently can make roadways safer, benefit the environment and save drivers considerable amounts of money.

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