

## But I remembered to check the oil...

By **TAMMY MALGESINI**  
Community Editor

Reminiscent of the familiar line "This one time, at band camp ..." in the 1999 film "American Pie," my husband, John, doesn't let me forget about this one time I added oil to my pickup.

My first vehicle, a 1973 Ford Courier pickup, ran like a champ. The only problem is it burned oil.

I had just graduated from college and struck a deal with the youth pastor of the Free Methodist Church. I gave him my 100 Honda motorcycle and a couple hundred dollars and he handed over the keys to the baby-poop brown colored pickup.

I loved that truck. It gave me the freedom to throw gear in the back and hit the road. Since I wasn't able to afford to get it fixed, I bought a case of oil and always carried a couple of quarts with me.

When I first met John, he had an old 1971 Volkswagen Beetle. To start the VW Bug, you often had to be on a hill to get a rolling start and then pop the clutch.

So, when we were taking a trip to Seattle, we decided to take my truck. In preparation for the long drive, I checked the oil level and topped it off.

I was proud of the fact that I was an independent woman with a college degree and could take care of my own rig. I made a point of telling John that I added oil for the trip.

After packing, I went to John's apartment to pick him up. He tossed his bags in and then slid behind the steering wheel. I figured he had driven that rode numerous times and could deal with city traffic better than me.

We also picked up an-

other George Fox student, who hitched a ride with us. We laughed and talked as we cruised up the road. Everything was going smoothly until we dropped the gal off in Tacoma.

Stopping at a mall just off the freeway, John turned off the engine while we waited for her ride to pick her up. All hell broke loose with black smoke pouring out of the engine compartment.

John opened the hood — that's when he noticed that the oil cap wasn't on (and the inside of the hood was covered in oil). Evidently in my excitement about the trip, I forgot to put it back on. By some stroke of luck — after driving 150 miles — the cap was still sitting in the engine compartment where I put it while adding the oil.

To this day, John grins and shakes his head whenever we recall this story. And, if I add any fluids to vehicles, he double-checks to make sure all the caps are secure.

*Tammy Malgesini is the community editor. Her column, Inside my Shoes, includes general musings about life and appears every other week in the Hermiston Herald. Contact her at [tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com](mailto:tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4539. Her car care tips are something of a cautionary tale of how not to best care for your vehicle.*

## A cold weather car care checklist

### Prepare your vehicle for challenging road conditions

To ensure vehicles are prepared for fall and winter driving conditions, AAA Oregon/Idaho suggests drivers follow a maintenance checklist to determine their vehicle's fall and winter needs.

AAA recommends checking the following things:

**Battery and Charging System** — Have the battery and charging system tested by a trained technician. A fully charged battery in good condition is required to start an engine in cold weather.

**Battery Cables and Terminals** — Make sure the battery terminals and cable ends are free from corrosion and the connections are tight.

**Drive Belts** — Inspect the underside of accessory drive belts for cracks or fraying. Many newer multirib "serpentine" belts are made of materials that do not show obvious signs of wear; replace these belts at 60,000-mile intervals.

**Engine Hoses** — Inspect cooling system hoses for leaks, cracks or loose clamps. Also, squeeze the hoses and replace any that are brittle or have an excessively spongy feeling.

**Tire Type and Tread** — In areas with heavy winter

weather, installing snow tires on all four wheels will provide the best winter traction. All-season tires work well in light-to-moderate snow conditions, provided they have adequate tread depth.

Replace any tire that has less than 3/32-inches of tread. Uneven tire wear can indicate alignment, wheel balance or suspension problems that must be addressed to prevent further tire damage.

**Tire Pressure** — Check tire inflation pressure on all four tires and the spare more frequently in fall and winter.

As the average temperature drops, so will tire pressures — typically by one PSI for every 10 degrees Fahrenheit.

Proper tire pressure levels can be found in the owner's manual or on a sticker typically located on the driver's side door jamb.

**Air Filter** — Check the engine air filter by holding it up to a 60-watt light bulb. If light can be seen through much of the filter, it is still clean enough to work effectively. However, if light is blocked by most of the filter, replace it.

**Coolant Levels** — Check the coolant level in the overflow tank when the engine is cold. If the level is low, add a 50/50 solution of coolant and water to maintain the necessary antifreeze capability.

Test the antifreeze protection level annually with an inexpensive tester available at any auto parts store.

**Lights** — Check the operation of all headlights, taillights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers and backup lights. Replace any burnt out bulbs.

**Wiper Blades** — The blades should completely clear the glass with each swipe. Replace any blade that leaves streaks or misses spots. In regions where snow is common, consider installing winter wiper blades that wrap the blade frame in a rubber boot to reduce ice and snow buildup that can prevent good contact between the blade and the glass.

**Washer Fluid** — Fill the windshield washer fluid reservoir with a winter cleaning solution that has antifreeze components to prevent it from freezing.

**Brakes** — If there is any indication of a brake problem, have the system inspected by a certified technician to ensure all components are in good working order.

**Transmission, Brake and Power Steering Fluids** — Check all fluids to ensure they are at or above the minimum safe levels.

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