

Stretching Your Dollars: You and Your Car¹

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Private transportation is very important because public transportation is so limited. We need ways to get to the places we must go. Most people have access to a car, truck, or van. Unfortunately many people view their vehicle as a magic carpet that transports them wherever they wish to go with the turn of the key.

Cars, trucks, and vans are machines. To operate efficiently they require care and maintenance. To save money and have reliable transportation you must arrange for their care and maintenance.

Battery Care. The Car Won't Start -- What Will You Do?

Take good care of your car's battery. Check the cables that connect it to the motor. If you see a whitish residue on the cable connections, it is corrosion which will affect the battery's performance. Sprinkle baking soda on the corrosion, pour water

over it and brush the connections with an old toothbrush. **Be very careful to avoid** getting any soda water into the battery cells through the small round top openings (vents). Soda is alkaline and will neutralize the battery acid. Check the fluid level in the battery often, even if it is a low-maintenance battery. Add water to the vent cells as needed to keep the level near the indicator rings located beneath the vent caps. If the fluid level is too low, the high concentration of sulfuric acid will permanently damage exposed plates in the battery. Also, do not overfill or the fluid will bubble up under the vent caps and spill over the battery causing corrosion. Most batteries show symptoms before failing. A failing battery is usually slow cranking. If this occurs visit a service center and have the battery checked.

Auto Repairs. How Much Will It Cost?

Florida law requires that you be offered a written estimate if your repair bill is expected to exceed \$50.00. For your protection ask for the estimate. The bill cannot exceed the estimate by more than 10% (maximum \$50) without your authorization. The estimate lists what is to be done and the cost.

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Tires. *When Do I Need New Tires?*

Tires should wear evenly. Check tire tread depth by placing a penny (head toward the tire) in the shallowest groove. If you can see the top of Lincoln's head, the tire should be replaced. The tread depth will be less than 3/32 of an inch. If smooth bands begin to appear across the tread or the wear is uneven with part of the tread almost smooth, get new tires. Slick tires will not grip the road well creating safety problems such as skidding and blowouts.

Refer to your **operator's manual** for the correct air pressure for your tires. Check tires when they are cold. Over inflation causes the center treads to wear. Under inflation causes outside treads to wear. When replacing tires use the information on the sidewall to make informed selections.

Look for:

- The size and type of tire for your car. (Size relates to wheel diameter and vehicle weight.)
- Tread wear, stated as a number such as 100 or 150. (The higher the number, the longer the tread will last.)
- Traction (stopping power, A is best, C meets minimum standards)
- Temperature (internal temperature affects the life of a tire and how it performs with heavy loads. A is best, C is minimum)

Gasoline. *Which Grade Should You Buy?*

Gasoline is inspected by state regulators to ensure that it meets established standards for detergents, corrosion-resistance and grade level. The grade is expressed as octane rating, the measure of the fuel's combustion ability when mixed with air under pressure. Use the lowest octane rating that does not knock in your car. (Higher levels of octane do not increase mileage.) The lower the octane the lower the cost per gallon.

Motor Oil. *How Often Should I Change Oil?*

Generally, the oil and filter should be changed about every 3,000 to 5,000 miles and certainly within the time period recommended by your operator's manual. Check the oil level of your motor often. Never operate a car with the oil low. It will damage the engine. Choose the grade of oil recommended by your manual for your climate and vehicle.

Coolant. *Do I Put Water Or Coolant In The Radiator?*

You should check the fluid level in your radiator often. If it is low, add a mixture of one half water and one half coolant. The coolant increases the boiling temperature of the water and helps keep the fluid from "boiling away" in your cooling (and heating) system. Today's small engines generate high temperatures that require the use of a coolant.

Service. *How To Keep The Car "Running."*

You are the guardian of your car. Check the car often to make sure all fluid levels are at the correct height and all accessories are operating efficiently. For example if your windshield wipers streak when operating, replace the wiper blades. Make sure the air filter is clean. If your brakes pull, squeak or the pedal goes almost to the floor, have a qualified mechanic check your brakes. The car may need new pads (shoes), brake fluid or other repairs. If you care for your car it will reward you with reliable transportation. If your car begins to skip or not "run smoothly" have your mechanic check it. It may need a tune-up which includes new spark plugs and a thorough check of systems. A well-cared-for vehicle will operate more efficiently and save money on repairs.

Safety

Each time you travel in a motor vehicle fasten your safety belt, both shoulder and lap belts. Make sure everyone is safely buckled up. Remember, an airbag is a supplemental safety system to be used with a lap/shoulder belt. Never place an infant carrier in

front of an airbag. Airbags are excellent protection when used with safety belts.