

Economy, Auto Travel Make Car Maintenance Critical

People today are keeping their cars longer, a trend that is putting automobile owners better in tune with their car maintenance needs. Add to that the added annual miles from a decline in airplane travel, and vehicle upkeep becomes paramount for safety, reliability and enjoyment.

Best practices for car care are surprisingly easy, says one expert.

"Car maintenance shouldn't be intimidating," said Lauren Fix, SAE-certified mechanic and author of "Lauren Fix's Guide to Loving Your Car." "Many of the simple tips our parents told us still hold true -- get regular tuneups, keep your tires inflated correctly, change your filters."

Fix says what has changed, though, is the interval at which you need to change those filters.

"Check your car owner's manual. You might be surprised at how today's filtration technologies and high-performance oils can extend the time between oil changes," she said.

Another change in car maintenance is the number of filters your technician should check. Fuel filters, when left dirty, can lead to decreased fuel mileage and other problems in the fuel system. Also, make sure your technician checks both your engine and cabin air filters, which help your engine and HVAC systems work at peak performance, says filtration expert Paul Bandoly.

"Many people don't realize that the majority of cars manufactured since 2000 have a cabin air filter, whose job is two-fold," said Bandoly, manager of technical services at WIX Filters. "Not only do cabin air filters clean the air before it enters the vehicle's HVAC system, protecting vital system components from damage, but they also filter the air breathed by occupants in the vehicle, making car travel more enjoyable."

Prior to packing up the car for the vacation drive, tend to filtration needs, check your tire air pressure and top off the engine's fluids. But don't put off car maintenance until the last minute.

"Taking your car to your regular shop for maintenance visits allows technicians to monitor your vehicle's condition, and provides them with the opportunity to identify symptoms of distress before costly repairs become necessary," said Fix.