

Road-Trip Ready Car Care Checklist

29 five-minute checks that catch breakdowns before they leave you stranded.

EVERY MONTH

- ☐ Check **tire pressure** on all four tires (and the spare) when cold — the right numbers are on the driver's door jamb, not the tire.
- ☐ Measure tread with the quarter test: if you can see the top of Washington's head, start shopping for tires.
- ☐ Top off **windshield washer fluid** and test both wipers for streaking or chatter.
- ☐ Walk around the car and check every exterior light: headlights, brake lights, turn signals.
- ☐ Listen for new noises — squeals, clunks or grinding that weren't there last month.

UNDER THE HOOD

- ☐ Check the **engine oil level** on level ground; note if it looks dark, gritty or smells burnt.
- ☐ Check coolant at the overflow tank — never open a hot radiator cap.
- ☐ Inspect the **battery terminals** for white or green corrosion; most batteries fade after 3–5 years.
- ☐ Squeeze the radiator hoses with the engine cold — they should feel firm, not mushy or cracked.
- ☐ Look under the car for fresh drips: brown is oil, red is transmission fluid, bright green or orange is coolant.

TIRES & BRAKES

- ☐ Feel for **vibration or pulling** to one side when braking — both are early warning signs.
- ☐ Note any squeal that stops when you press the pedal — that's the pad wear indicator doing its job.
- ☐ Check sidewalls for bulges, cracks or embedded nails and screws.
- ☐ Rotate tires every **5,000–7,500 miles** so they wear evenly and last longer.
- ☐ If the brake pedal feels soft or slowly sinks to the floor, get it checked the same week.

BEFORE A ROAD TRIP

- ☐ Get an oil change if you're within **1,000 miles** of your next service interval.
- ☐ Test the A/C and heater before you need them for a full day of driving.
- ☐ Confirm the **spare tire is inflated** and the jack and lug wrench are actually in the trunk.
- ☐ Have brakes, belts and hoses inspected if the trip is over 500 miles.
- ☐ Top off all fluids: oil, coolant, brake, transmission and washer.
- ☐ Clean cloudy headlight lenses — hazing can cut nighttime visibility dramatically.

FALL & WINTER PREP

- ☐ Test the **battery's cold-cranking power** — most failures happen on the first freezing morning.
- ☐ Swap in winter wiper blades and fill up with freeze-resistant washer fluid.
- ☐ Verify your **coolant mix** protects to at least -30°F (a proper 50/50 mix does).
- ☐ Keep the gas tank at least half full to avoid fuel-line freeze and buy yourself a margin in traffic.

IN YOUR TRUNK

- ☐ Jumper cables or a **lithium jump-starter** pack, checked and charged twice a year.
- ☐ Flashlight, work gloves and a small first-aid kit.
- ☐ Tire pressure gauge and a can of sealant for emergency flats.
- ☐ In winter: a blanket, ice scraper and a bag of sand or cat litter for traction.

Flashing check-engine light? Pull over safely and shut the engine off — a flashing light means an active misfire that can destroy your catalytic converter in minutes. Call the shop before driving any farther.