

# On the Road

## Telltale signs of engine troubles

Take action after the first warning



Engine troubles are many drivers' worst nightmares. Whether they occur out on the road or they prevent drivers from leaving their driveways in the morning, engine troubles can quickly derail plans and cost drivers substantial amounts of money.

Thankfully, engine troubles are often noticeable long before cars break down. Drivers who learn to recognize the signs that suggest engines might be in need of work can avoid being strand-

ed on the road or at home.

- **Vehicle shaking:** One telltale sign of engine trouble is when a vehicle shakes while it's moving. Drivers of old cars and trucks may not expect the smoothest of rides, but cars that shake, sometimes violently, could be experiencing problems. Sometimes a car might shake if its spark plugs need replacing. That's an easy, inexpensive fix that drivers can do on their own in a matter of minutes. A more serious cause of the vehicle shaking could be problems with its timing belt or fuel intake system. Drivers who inspect and/or replace their spark

plugs but notice their vehicles are still shaking should take their cars into their mechanics immediately.

- **Sudden gas mileage reduction:** Drivers who notice they're not getting as much bang for their gas bucks as they used to might have engine troubles to blame. According to Pep Boys, a dropoff in gas mileage might be indicative of an issue in the compression stroke of the engine. Such an issue can typically be fixed by having the fuel system serviced, which will clean the fuel system and can help restore the vehicle's performance and reduce emissions.

- **Noises:** If driving has become as noisy as a rock concert, drivers should take heed that this could be indicative of engine trouble. Pep Boys notes that noises typically indicate abnormalities in the combustion flow. Such noises may include knocking, hissing and popping. Vehicles making these noises should be taken to a mechanic immediately.

- **Stalling:** Vehicles that jerk or stall also may be experiencing engine troubles. While old spark plugs might be the culprit, stalling or jerking may indicate clogged fuel lines or fuel filters. Such issues may also be traced to issues with the vehicle's computer system. Bring such issues to the attention of a mechanic, and reduce their frequency with regular oil changes.

## Improving your trade value

Get the most out of your vehicle

When the time comes to purchase a new vehicle, many drivers explore trading in their existing cars or trucks. Trade-ins can reduce the cost of buying new vehicles and save drivers the hassle of selling their vehicles on their own.

Motorists who think trading in is the best way to unload their current cars can take various steps to improve the trade-in value prior to visiting the dealership.

- **Know the trade-in market.** Some trade-ins may be more valuable than others, even if the cars are relatively similar with regard to mileage. For example, pre-owned vehicle buyers typically prefer late model vehicles as opposed to cars that are older. This is even more apparent now that many car buyers want smartphone-friendly vehicles that afford them access to the apps and GPS systems on their phones. Drivers who want to get maximum value for their trade-ins may benefit by trading in a year or so earlier than they initially planned, as this will make their cars or trucks more attractive to prospective

buyers, which should make it easier for dealerships to sell the vehicle.

- **Address any issues.** Dealerships will offer to tend to any repairs trade-ins may need, but that will come at a cost, which will be reflected in the trade-in value of the car. Vehicle owners should address any issues before taking their vehicles to the dealership. Fix any doors that stick or minor scratches on the vehicle's exterior, remembering to have the car detailed, washed and waxed. Investigate if any major problems, such as engine troubles, are worth fixing on your own, or if you're better off receiving less for your trade-in and letting the dealership address such issues.

- **Keep maintenance records.** Maintenance records illustrating that the vehicle was taken care of can help owners get more for their trade-ins. Drivers who intend to trade the vehicle in to the same dealership where the vehicle was purchased should still keep their own maintenance records to eliminate potential problems as

they negotiate the trade-in value of their vehicles.

- **Shop around.** Drivers who are not satisfied with the trade-in value assigned by a specific dealership can shop around until they find better offers. Some dealerships may not offer much for a vehicle because they already have a similar car or truck sitting on their lot, while others may jump at the chance to make

their preowned inventory more diverse. Exercise patience when shopping around to reduce any frustration that might develop during the negotiation process.

Various factors impact the trade-in value of cars and trucks. When purchasing new cars, vehicle owners can employ various strategies to get the most money for their current automobiles.

## Cars for kids

Selecting a first car for a teenager can be challenging. According to the experts at Edmunds.com, an automotive research and advice group, involving teens in the process of selecting a car helps teach them responsibility and learn lessons about money that may help them make smart future choices.

- **Manage expectations.** Cars are generous gifts and not something teenagers have a right to. Teenagers may not realize the expenses involved in acquiring, running and insuring a vehicle. Parents can explain all of

these factors. Unless the teen has enough money to buy his or her own car, the final call is up to the parents.

- **Note that bigger isn't always better.** Some parents think their teens will be safer in a truck or SUV. While large vehicles may fare slightly better in a crash, they can be more cumbersome to park and drive, especially for novices. A large vehicle may tempt teens to pile in friends for a Saturday night, but research indicates the risk of a crash increases with multiple teens in a car.

- **Choose safety over looks.** Safety should be the top priority. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teen drivers between the ages of 16 and 19 are four times more likely to crash than older drivers. Choose a vehicle with a high safety rating over one that looks stylish.

- **Pass down the family roadster.** Teenagers may anticipate being handed the keys to a brand-new or previously owned vehicle off of a dealership lot. But giving him or her a set of keys to a car already in the driveway may be more practical. Everyone involved already knows the history, driving capabilities and safety statistics of cars that have been in the family for years. It may not be flashy, but cars already in the driveway will get teenagers from point A to point B just as effectively as those currently sitting idle on the dealership lot.

## Tire tools

Items needed if faced with a flat

Flat tires are a nuisance, but even the most well-maintained vehicles can be vulnerable to the occasional flat. Ensuring tires are properly inflated and in good condition can help drivers avoid accidents, but won't necessarily make tires immune to flats. The following are some essential items that all drivers should keep in their vehicles so they can quickly and correctly replace flat tires.

- **Spare tire:** Spare tires are typically located in the trunk beneath the carpet-like mat covering the area. SUV drivers may have their spare tires mounted on the back of their vehicles, but some are located beneath the automobile. Periodically inspect spare tires to make sure they are inflated. When buying or leasing new cars, drivers should always confirm if the vehicle comes with a spare.

- **Jack:** A jack is necessary to change a flat tire. Scissor jacks are widely used and tend to be the jacks most people keep in their trunks. These jacks are lightweight and won't take up much space, and the handle is typically the tire iron that comes with the vehicle. Some jacks are specially designed to fit the vehicles they came with, so when shopping for replacement jacks, make sure any you are considering are compatible with your car or truck.

- **Lug wrench:** A lug wrench is necessary to remove hubcaps or wheel covers. Drivers should determine if their vehicles require a special tool to remove wheel covers. Such information will be indicated in the owner's manual, which should be kept in the vehicle at all times.

- **Wheel wedges:** Wheel

wedges can be placed in front of or behind tires to prevent the car from rolling while drivers change their flats. When changing a rear tire, place the wedges in front of the front tires. When changing a front tire, place them behind the rear tires.

- **Miscellaneous items:** While the aforementioned items are all that's necessary to change a tire, some miscellaneous items can facilitate the process of replacing a flat.

## Pickups remain a favorite

Pickup trucks have long been among the most popular vehicles sold, and Statista states the number of new pickup trucks sold in the United States continues to grow. Between 2015 and 2016, 2.7 million pickups were sold, and some 2.24 million of those were full-sized pickups.

A recent study from the Automotive News Data Center found the big three pickup manufacturers, which include Ford, GM and Dodge, sell an average of 6,500 trucks every day in North America. The automotive news resource The Drive points out the Ford F-150 has been the best-selling truck for 40 consecutive years.

Motorists who have never before driven pickup trucks but are mulling whether or not to join the truck-loving masses can consider a host of factors as they begin looking for trucks.

- **Size:** Pickups are larger than many other vehicles and tend to be heavier. As a result, when driving a pickup, leave more space for braking and do not tailgate.

In their cars, drivers can keep a small cloth bag containing a pair of gloves, a flashlight, batteries to go with the flashlight, a poncho to keep them dry should they need to change a tire in the rain, and a ballcap that can keep rain or sunlight out of their eyes so they can focus on the job at hand. It's also a good idea to keep a blanket in the trunk of your car so passengers can stay warm inside while the flat tire is replaced.

- **Blind spots:** Because pickup trucks are longer than cars, they may have larger blind spots. Drivers should adjust the mirrors to diminish as much of their blind spots as possible. Also, give ample notice when changing lanes or making turns.

- **Reverse:** Upon purchasing a pickup, first-time truck owners may benefit from practicing driving in reverse so they can grow accustomed to doing so in a truck.

- **Hauling gear:** Be sure to properly restrain items that are hauled in the pickup truck bed, or invest in a bed cover so nothing is lost and safety is not compromised.

- **Inclement weather driving:** Pickup trucks have very little weight in the back when their beds are empty. This can cause trucks to fishtail on wet or snowy roads. Alleviate this by placing some sandbags in truck beds before driving in poor weather.

Pickup trucks are among the most popular vehicles on the road, but drivers may need to alter their driving habits when operating them.

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