

Car Maintenance Guide

Get the Car Repairs You Really Need

BY KIMBERLY YAVORSKI

When you take your car to the mechanic for inspection and repairs, you may wonder if your car really needs the repairs that the mechanic is recommending. With 15-minute oil changes on every corner, most people merely fill the tank and leave the rest to the professionals.

There are a few things even the most nonmechanical person can do to help make sure you get the repairs you need. First choose your mechanic, your car's "doctor," carefully. Ask your friends and neighbors where they go and how happy they are. As you do with your doctor, you will want to develop a personal relationship with this person. Try to use the same shop for annual inspections and routine repairs, so your mechanic will know you and how you use your car.

John Hill, owner/operator of Hill Automotive in Ambler recommends that people "stay close to where you live or work" when choosing a mechanic. It doesn't make sense to drive a distance for regular repairs. Being close also increases your chance of having a good relationship with your mechanic.

Routine maintenance

With so many makes and models of cars, routine maintenance can vary from car to car. Although the manufacturer-provided manuals give recommendations for service intervals, remember these are merely guidelines. "If you service your car routinely, having the oil changed and so on," adds Mr. Hill, "you'll be surprised at how long the car will last."

Your annual state inspection is a prime time to discover needed repairs. Common inspection repairs



your rights

are worn brakes, tires, and exhaust problems. However, according to Mr. Hill, "you should not need brakes every inspection. This would indicate a problem."

Red flags

❗ Don't have a repair done because the part "is going to go bad soon." In many cases, the part in question can be left to die gracefully and repaired later.

❗ When the muffler and pipe need to be replaced, ask if it's possible to cut off the bad section, and replace only what needs to be replaced.

❗ Some repairs such as chipped paint and other defects are covered by the auto manufacturer, even after the warranty period, due to recalls. Ask if such a problem is common in your particular make/model and whether the factory would cover the expense.

❗ At state inspection, a mechanic may find problems with your car that do not need to be addressed to obtain the sticker. Ask if all items are needed for inspection. It may be easier to have everything fixed at one time, but also may be more time- and cost-efficient to have some repairs postponed, or to get a second opinion on the more costly ones.

❗ Beware of too-good-to-be-true ads and coupons. Some shops have been known to take cars apart and "forget" to put something back. Others will tap rusty exhaust pipes with a hammer, resulting in pinholes in the exhaust that will become a problem.

Other Tips

❗ If it is a costly repair, always get a second opinion.

❗ For more than everyday maintenance, get a written estimate of parts and labor and compare item



The factory provides funds for certain types of repairs and will help pay for them to keep a happy and, hopefully, repeat customer.

According to Tony Venturi, a retired Nissan executive, when you need a repair on "something that would generally be covered under warranty and is not,

by item with your second opinion. Some garages will charge you for several steps that should all be included in one procedure.

❗ Ask for the old parts back. Although you may not have any idea what they give you, the mechanic doesn't know that and will be less inclined to take advantage of you. This also gives you concrete evidence.

For certain repairs, such as a transmission or engine problem that crops up shortly after the warranty has ended, ask about a "policy adjustment" or "goodwill" policy.

either due to mileage or time, sometimes the company will extend the warranty in full or in part." When appropriate, "the dealership will, on your behalf, go to the factory and request goodwill assistance. If the factory covers only part of the cost, the dealership may pick up a portion as well." Another option, he says, is a "repurchase incentive." With this option, you pay full cost for the repair, and if you buy another car within six months or a year, you get a set amount of cash back from the factory in addition to other incentives. ■

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE CHART

REPAIR/REPLACE

oil change and lube (if needed)	every 3,000 miles or three months
rotate tires	every other oil change
flush engine coolant	every 30,000 miles
tune up	every 30,000 miles
replace timing belt	60,000 miles

INSPECT & REPAIR/REPLACE IF NEEDED

air filter	every other oil change
brake pads, discs, drums & lining	every other oil change
PCV valve and fuel filter	every 30,000 miles
CV joint	60,000 miles and periodically thereafter

CHECK & FILL IF NEEDED

Every Oil Change:

brake fluid
clutch fluid
coolant fluid
power steering fluid
transmission fluid

Every Fill Up:

oil level
tire air pressure
windshield washer fluid

** Note: These are approximate guidelines. Actual service intervals may vary depending on use of car and road conditions. See your owner's manual for more details.