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Ask Six Simple Questions To Select The Right Auto Repair Shop

(NAPS) - By asking six simple questions, you may be better able to identify the right auto repair shop to properly care for one of your most valuable assets, your car.

WHAT TO ASK:

1. Does the business employ ASE-certified technicians? Credentials and affiliations are indicators of professionalism and the management's commitment to training and education.
2. Is the shop and customer waiting area clean and organized? Cleanliness and organization are signs of a well-run business.
3. Are customers greeted and treated in a friendly and respectful manner? Many auto repair businesses excel in the area of customer service and satisfaction. A simple phone call to the shop to inquire about their services can give you a glimpse of how they treat customers.
4. Does the business provide a written estimate? The

business should complete a written estimate and request your signature prior to starting any repairs on your car.

5. Does the business offer a warranty? Most auto repair businesses offer a warranty on parts and labor and the warranty is usually in writing or posted in the waiting area.

6. Does the business have a list of satisfied customers or references that it is willing to give you? Satisfied customers and recommendations from family, friends and neighbors are helpful in finding a good shop. Many auto repair facilities also have company websites that are worth checking out as they often include testimonials and additional information about the business.

"A vehicle is a major purchase for most people, so it makes sense to take the time to select an auto repair facility that will take the best care of that investment," said Rich White, executive director of the non-profit Car Care Council. "Being

an informed auto care consumer means not only learning about your vehicle and its service needs, but also the facility that will make the repairs."

A Car Care Council video, titled "Auto Service and Repair: What to Expect," provides valuable information on such topics as what to expect at the shop and covers the real truth about consumer rights and the manufacturer's warranty.

The Car Care Council is the source of information for the "Be Car Care Aware" consumer education campaign promoting the benefits of regular vehicle care, maintenance and repair to consumers.

LEARN MORE

To order a free copy of the popular "Car Care Guide," visit the council's consumer education website at www.carcare.org. It may pay to find out a few facts before you let anyone work on your car.

Six

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Maintain Tire Balance And Alignment For A Smooth Ride

It is easy for motorists to take their tires for granted when everything is working correctly. Wheels and suspension systems bear the weight of cars and trucks and must bear the brunt of rough roads, pot holes and any additional obstacles, so some wear and tear is to be expected. Many drivers know to monitor their tire pressure, but it's also important to check for worn treads and inspect tires for punctures or damage. Proper tire alignment and balance also is essential for a comfortable and smooth ride.

BALANCE:
Balancing tires involves equalizing the weight of the combined tire and wheel assembly so that each tire spins smoothly on the road. Tires are mounted on the wheel assembly, and the chances of this assembly having precise weight distribution is nearly impossible without a little help. According to Discount Tire, the slightest imbalance in the tires, even as little as half an ounce, can be felt by drivers.

Unequal mass can make tires wobble, causing noticeable vibrations. Mechanics will test tire balance by putting it on a balancing machine. The machine will spin the tire and determine the tire's heaviest point. Counteracting weights will be placed on the tire hubs to create a more uniform balance of weight. Lead weights are often used, but some are being phased out for other metals, such as zinc, because of the medical and environmental implications of lead. Tires that are not balanced will not only cause vibration, they also can lead to uneven wear.

ALIGNMENT:
Tire alignment is another way to reduce wear on tires and help avoid steering and "pulling" problems. Bridgestone Tires defines tire alignment as an adjustment of the vehicle's suspension, or the system that connects a vehicle to its wheels. When tires are not properly aligned, drivers may notice uneven tread wear. Misaligned tires also may cause the vehicle to pull to the left or right. Drivers who notice their steering wheel is off-center or vibrating when they are driving may need to adjust their tires' alignment. Camber, or the inward or outward angle of the tire when viewed from the front of the vehicle, will be adjusted. In addition, "toe," or the extent to which the tires turn inward or outward when viewed from above, will be adjusted. Caster angle also helps balance steering, stability and cornering. Caster is the angle of your steering axis when viewed from the side of your vehicle. When tires are balanced correctly and aligned, vehicles will offer a smooth ride with little to no vibrations. Having tires serviced can maximize their performance and lifespan. Tire balance is checked on a machine that will measure heavy spots. Technicians will apply weights to the tires to balance any inconsistencies in weight.



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4 Simple Ways To Extend The Life Of Your Vehicle

Automobiles are significant investments. According to Kelley Blue Book, the average transaction price for light vehicles was \$34,968 in January 2017, marking a 3 percent increase from just a year earlier. The decision to spend tens of thousands of dollars on a new vehicle is not one consumers should take lightly. Once drivers purchase their new vehicles, they can protect their investments and get greater returns on those investments by prioritizing maintenance and taking simple yet effective steps to extend the lives of their cars and trucks.

1. DRIVE DEFENSIVELY. Aggressive driving is dangerous and can have adverse effects on a vehicle. When driving, always obey posted speed limits and avoid accelerating and decelerating quickly. Such a style of driving can strain vehicle engines and drive trains while negatively affecting fuel efficiency and wearing down brakes, states the National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence.

2. MAINTAIN A CLEAN VEHICLE. Car washes do more than just clean a vehicle. Routine washing and waxing can remove dirt that, if left on a vehicle, can gradually scratch paint and contribute to chips and rust. Over time, rust can affect vehicle performance and may even compromise the safety of drivers and their passengers if bad enough frame rust affects structural integrity. Routine washing also can remove road salt from vehicles. Road salt can build up during winter when roads are routinely treated during and after snowstorms. Road salt can be extremely corrosive and, if left unremoved from a vehicle, can contribute to rust that ultimately can cause extensive damage to a vehicle.

3. ROUTINELY CHECK TIRE PRESSURE. Many of today's new vehicles alert drivers when tire pressure is low. Drivers should not ignore such warnings, as low tire pressure can affect engine performance by forcing it to work

harder than should be necessary. Engines that are forced to work harder than they need to likely won't last as long as those that run efficiently. Low tire pressure also negatively affects fuel efficiency, potentially costing drivers substantial amounts of money over time. Drivers of older vehicles without tire pressure alerts should routinely check tire pressure and keep tires adequately inflated. Vehicles that are slow to accelerate from resting positions may not have enough air in their tires.

4. ADHERE TO MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES. Drivers may have heard that today's vehicles were built to go longer periods of time between

oil changes and tuneups than the vehicles of yesteryear. But drivers should still adhere to manufacturer-recommended maintenance guidelines. Upon buying new vehicles, drivers should read their owners' manuals to determine recommended maintenance intervals, and stick to those intervals for as long as they have their vehicles. Cognizant of the sizable investments they're making when buying new vehicles, many drivers want to get as many miles out of their vehicles as possible. Simple maintenance and safe driving habits can go a long way toward keeping vehicles on the road for years to come.



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Items Necessary To Fix A Flat Tire

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. 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.



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The Basics Of Driving With Trailers In Tow

Active adults and busy families understand that one perk to owning a pickup truck or an SUV is the ability to tow items behind the vehicle. Many of these trucks already come equipped with trailer hitches that make it possible to tow boats, RVs, snowmobiles and more. But safe and successful towing requires knowledge of the basics of hitching a trailer and some special rules of the road. The following are a few safety tips for drivers unaccustomed to towing.

- Know your vehicle's tow weight capacity. The owner's manual will list the maximum weight a vehicle can tow safely, but this is just a simplified estimation of data. To tow successfully, it's important to know your vehicle's gross combined weight rating, or GCWR. This includes the vehicle itself, its passengers and cargo, as well as the trailer and the trailer's cargo. More passengers on board reduces the amount of weight you can pull. Another weight factor is the tongue weight, or how much of the trailer's weight rests on the hitch, which should be around 10 percent of the trailer's weight. This helps reduce trailer sway and can improve steering.

- Practice proper weight distribution. Distribute the weight of the item being towed to make towing smoother and safer. The cargo's center of gravity should be low, and most of the weight should be toward the front. Weight on either side also should be even. These steps will help prevent the trailer from fishtailing or flipping over.
- Use the right hitch equipment. Adjust the hitch so that the trailer being towed is relatively level to your vehicle when attached. Connect lights to your trailer through the hitch system so that brake lights and other indicators work properly. Make sure the hitch ball is the right size for your trailer, otherwise the trailer might disconnect during towing. Use a pin and safety chains to keep the trailer secure.
- Check if extra brakes are required. Many states require a separate braking system on towed vehicles with a loaded weight in excess of 1,000 pounds. Newer trucks may have a built-in controller for brakes or you may need to have a system installed. Experts from Popular Mechanics advise using a trailer brake output system that matches the trailer

- brake output to the tow vehicle's deceleration.
- Slow down and drive more cautiously. A vehicle towing a trailer will not maneuver the same way as a vehicle without a trailer attached. Give yourself a greater cushion of space between other vehicles. It may take longer for you to brake because of the added weight. Get used to using side-view mirrors because the trailer may block your rearview. Larger, extended side-view mirrors may help you feel more comfortable and safe. Make wide turns so that the trailer will clear curbs and not tip over.
- Avoid backing up. Unless you're experienced with driving large rigs, you may find reversing with a trailer very challenging. Limit situations that require backing up. Park in pull-through parking spots when possible. If you need to back up, move slowly and with your hand on the bottom of the steering wheel, turning it in the direction you want the trailer to go.
- Practice, practice, practice. Get acclimated with towing in a parking lot or on empty streets before taking your trailer out on the open road.

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4 Reasons For A Check Engine Light

Vehicles rely on many components working harmoniously to function at optimal capacity. Any number of systems can go wrong, and oftentimes the first indication that something has gone awry is an illuminated dashboard signal. One such signal is the "check engine" light. Many drivers have little idea what to do when this indicator lights up, and this light can cause some anxiety. According to Consumer Reports, a check engine light

turning on does not usually require immediate action. However, it does mean that you should make an appointment to have the vehicle inspected for potential problems. Check engine lights are part of a car's onboard diagnostics. The light turning on may indicate something minor, such as a loose fuel cap, or something more serious like a misfiring engine. When the light turns on, drivers wondering why may want to see if the answer is

related to one of the following issues.

1. Loose gas cap: Fuel vapors can leak out and air can get in when the fuel cap isn't secured correctly. This can compromise the fuel system and make the check engine light come on. Take off the cap and then reseal it to see if that alleviates the problem. Cracked caps will need to be replaced.

2. Dirty oxygen sensor: A faulty or clogged sensor may not provide the right information about unburned oxygen from the vehicle's exhaust. This sensor monitors how much fuel is burned. Compromised data can cause a decrease in fuel efficiency. Some do-it-yourselfers can replace an oxygen sensor on their own, but those who can't should have the issue addressed immediately by a professional.

3. Too much speed or load: Towing a trailer or another heavy item may put strain on the vehicle and cause the light to come on because of loss of power. Lightening the load and

reducing speed can help fix the problem. Always consult with the owner's manual to determine the towing capacity of your vehicle.

4. Short or faulty code: Computers aren't always fool-proof, and sometimes an electrical short or another similar problem can cause a light to come on. Bring the vehicle to an automotive supply store. Such stores typically have diagnostics tools that can be hooked into the car's computer and provide a more detailed understanding of what is triggering the check engine indicator. In many cases, a steady check engine light is not a serious concern. However, when such a light comes on, drivers should try to find out why as soon as possible.

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Factors That Impact Auto Insurance Premiums

Auto insurance rates vary from person to person, even though it may seem like the offerings are the same. But no two drivers are the same, and certain factors may be affecting drivers' auto insurance premiums without the motorists even realizing it. Automotive insurance provider State Farm says most insurance companies consider several factors when calculating the cost of car insurance. Recognizing which situations can increase or lower costs can help drivers get the best rates and coverage needed. Although it can be tempting to reduce the price of insurance by

choosing lower amounts of coverage, there are other ways to make insurance more affordable.

- Move. Insurers typically look at where a person lives when calculating rates. Those people who live in highly populated, urban areas likely will have higher premiums than others who live in more rural towns. That's because greater population density often translates into more people on the road, and a greater chance for insurance claims due to fender benders or theft. By moving, a person may be able to cut rates.
- Gender and age are factors. One can't step into a time machine, but

it's helpful to know that growing a little older can lower insurance premiums. The financial advice source Money Crashers say that young men usually incur higher rates than young women because statistically men get into more accidents. However, as a person moves into his or her senior years, the roles reverse. Older women may see higher rates than men the same age.

- Keep make and model in mind. The type of vehicle driven can affect insurance premiums. Certain insurance carriers will increase premiums on vehicles that are more susceptible to damage. Flashy sports cars or those that do not score as highly on vehicle safety ratings calculated by industry experts may result in high premiums. Vehicles that are desirable to car thieves also may cost more to insure. Researching vehicles prior to purchase and checking the rates for those cars or trucks with insurance companies can help keep costs low.
- Commuters may pay more.

Individuals who use a car for business or frequent commuting may pay more than people who drive less because statistically there is a greater risk for an accident, says State Farm. Reducing commute times can lower premiums.

- Tie the knot. Insure.com says married couples have been found to be less of a risk to insurance providers statistically than those who are single. A study by the National Institutes of Health found that single drivers were twice as likely to be in an auto accident as married drivers. Combining policies also can help married people save.
- Follow the rules of the road. Drivers who have moving violations, drink and drive or engage in otherwise risky behavior behind the wheel may see their rates soar. Insurance companies weigh factors such as driving record, age, locality, and more when assessing premium costs. Drivers have some room to get lower rates by knowing the factors that determine their premiums.



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Two Headlights Are Better Than One: How Changing Headlights In Pairs Makes Nighttime Driving Safer

(MS) - When it comes to vehicle maintenance, professional automotive technicians and organizations that promote safe driving have always advocated replacing certain safety components in their vehicles, such as tires, brakes, shocks and wiper blades, in pairs. Replacing parts in pairs ensures that the vehicle is properly balanced and functioning safely. But it's not just tires, brakes and shocks that should be replaced in pairs. Vehicle lighting plays an integral role in keeping drivers and their passengers safe,

and motorists should exercise the same level of caution regarding their vehicles' headlights, taillights, and turn signals that they do with other parts of their cars and trucks. WHY REPLACE AGING HEADLIGHT BULBS? Most drivers are not aware that headlight bulbs can wear out and degrade over time. As a result, headlights are often overlooked when drivers conduct routine vehicle maintenance. As they age, headlight bulbs put out less light, which can dramatically compromise visibility at night,

when drivers' visual acuity is already naturally reduced by as much as 70 percent. According to Lumileds, a leading lighting solutions company for the automotive industry, headlight bulbs begin to project significantly less light within two to three years of their initial installation, producing dimmer light outputs that can compromise the safety of drivers and their passengers. WHY REPLACE BULBS TWO AT A TIME? Though replacing both headlight bulbs when only one is dimming may seem unwarranted, maintaining a consistent light output from both headlights makes the road safer for drivers, their passengers and oncoming motorists. When only one bulb is replaced, the resulting light output can be both unbalanced and unpredictable, providing inadequate lighting that can compromise driver visibility. In addition, when one bulb burns out or starts dimming, the other bulb will likely follow, forcing drivers

to deal with the expense and inconvenience of getting it replaced all over again. HOW ELSE CAN DRIVERS IMPROVE VISIBILITY? In addition to properly maintaining their headlights, drivers can take the following proactive measures to make nighttime driving safer. • Replace worn out wiper blades each season or in three-month intervals to ensure adequate visibility during rain or snow. • Clean interior glass and mirrors to remove any film-like buildup that reduces vision and creates hazy reflections from the sun. This is especially important for smokers who smoke while driving. • Don't hang accessories on rearview mirrors. This includes fuzzy dice, photos and other items that can be distracting and block your vision. To learn more, check out the public service website and video produced by Lumileds at: philipsautolighting.com/chips.



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Why Clean Air Filters Are Important

Vehicle owners likely know to check fluid levels and get their cars' oil changed, but air filters may not be at the top of their maintenance checklists. Despite being a relatively inexpensive part, air filters often go overlooked. Air filters have an important job in a vehicle, prolonging the life span of engines and helping

cars run more smoothly and efficiently. **PURPOSE OF VEHICLE AIR FILTERS** Vehicle combustion engines operate with a mixture of fuel and air. Without oxygen, gasoline or diesel fuels cannot burn properly and power the engine. The air filter's job is to prevent dirt, dust and other debris from



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being sucked into an engine. Otherwise, grime can build up and impede engine performance or cause erosion of parts under the hood. It is much more cost-effective to routinely change air filters than replace expensive engine parts. Rather than ignoring air filters until the last minute, drivers can take steps to keep filters clean and functioning at peak performance.

- IMPROVE FUEL EFFICIENCY. Clogged air filters reduce air flow to engines,

resulting in an improper ratio of air to fuel. As a result, spark plugs can be negatively affected and the engine may idle roughly or misfire. These scenarios can greatly affect fuel efficiency as well as cause engine deposits from rich fuel. To save money and trips to the fuel pump, replace filters regularly. According to GearHeads, for older cars, studies have indicated that by replacing a dirty air filter, one can improve gas mileage by as much as 14 percent.

- REDUCE STRESS ON THE ENGINE. Because of the air-to-fuel mix in engines, even a mixture that is slightly off balance can affect what is going on under the hood. That means the engine must work harder to get enough clean air into the chamber to complete the combustion cycle, says the Automotive Training Center.
- ENJOY MORE POWER. A filter that is saturated with dirt will restrict air flow. In such instances, drivers may notice a lack of power during acceleration. Replacing the filter can easily restore that pep.
- REDUCE VEHICLE EMISSIONS. Environmental concerns are a priority for many people. By keeping the engine working properly, with the advantage of clean, unobstructed air entering the chamber, a vehicle may produce lower emissions. Replacing air filters is an easy fix that many drivers can do themselves, or ask their mechanics to do during oil changes or other repair shop visits.

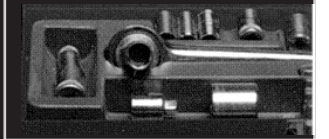
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How To Recognize Potential Brake Problems

Maintaining a vehicle is more than just a way to protect one's financial investment. Vehicle maintenance can protect against accidents and make the road safer for drivers and their passengers as well as their fellow motorists. Fully functioning brakes are an important component of automotive safety. In its 2015 Crash Stats report, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said that brake-related problems accounted for 22 percent of crashes where vehicular failure was cited as the cause of the collision. Bad brakes are particularly notorious for rear-end collisions. Faulty,

worn brake lines, antilock brake system malfunctions and worn brake pads and discs are some potential brake problems. It is important that motorists learn to recognize the first symptoms of brake trouble so they can address issues before they put drivers, their passengers and other motorists at risk of accident or injury.

- UNUSUAL NOISES: Screeching, grinding, rubbing, and high-pitched sounds are common indicators that brake pads, rotors and other parts of the braking system need attention. Worn pads can cause damage to other vehicle parts, resulting in more expensive repairs if they're not addressed promptly.
- PULLING: If the car pulls to one side when applying the brakes, this may indicate brake pad linings are wearing down unevenly. A brake adjustment may be necessary. Pulling also may be indicative of an object or debris caught in the brake fluid.
- LESS RESPONSIVE: If when

pressing on the brake pedal the brakes just do not seem to be as effective as they once were, or it is necessary to press the pedal harder for the brakes to engage, there may be a brake fluid leak or an air leak. Check under the vehicle to see if any fluids are pooling.

- PUNGENT ODORS: Firestone Tire Company says a burning smell may be indicative of worn out brake pads and friction on the tires. Each of these issues require immediate attention.
- VIBRATIONS: Certain vibrations may indicate brake issues. Rotors can become warped from metal-on-metal rubbing, potentially leading to a failure of the vehicle to brake properly. Vibrations also may indicate tires are misaligned. These problems can be properly assessed by a trained mechanic. Do not let potential brake problems go unchecked. Keeping brakes in good working order helps drivers stop more readily and avoid collisions.



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