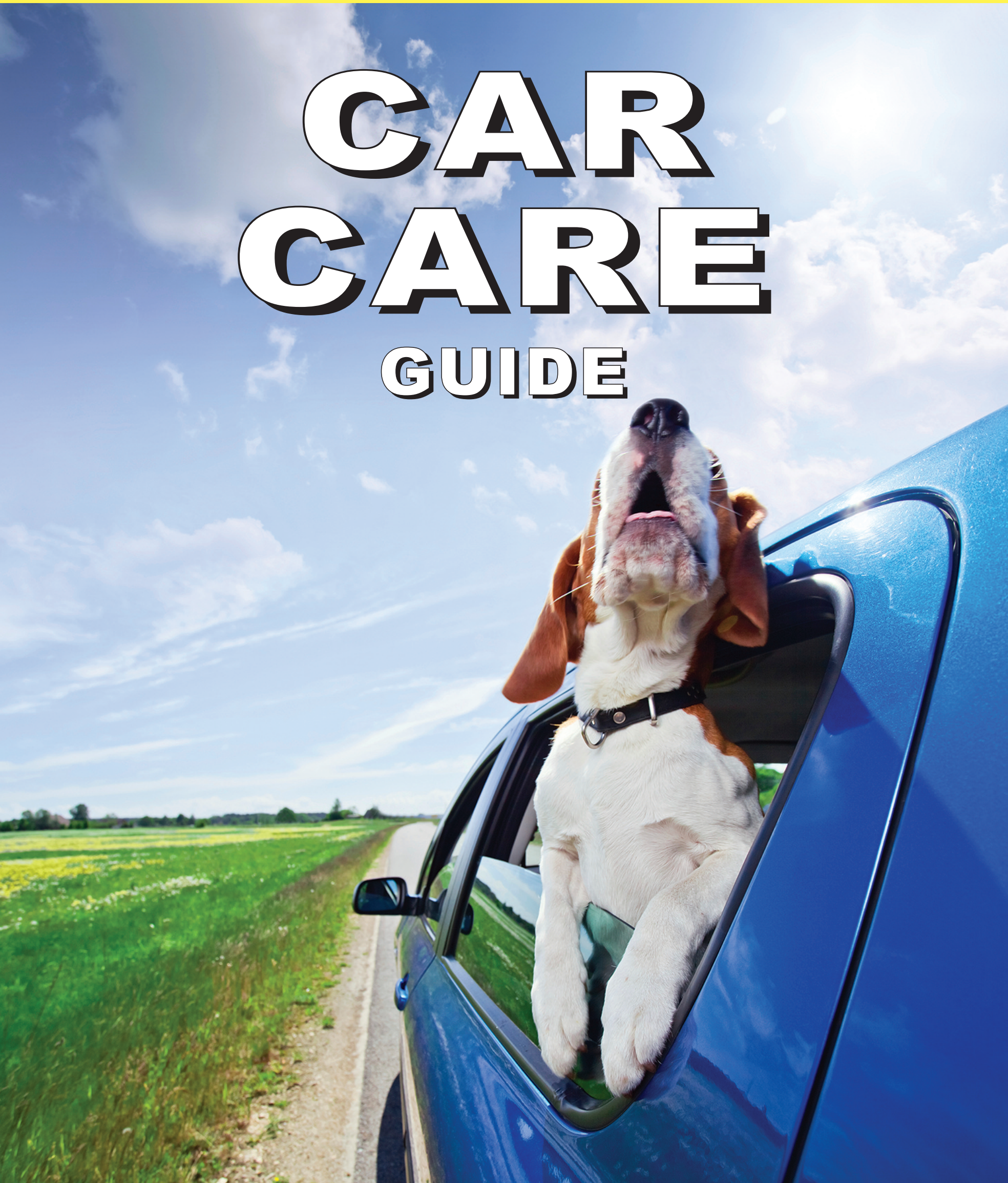


2020

# *Spring* on the Road

# CAR CARE GUIDE





# 2020 Spring Road on the CAR CARE GUIDE



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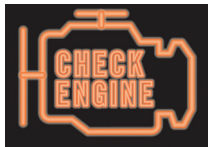
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### Common Symptoms Of Engine Control Module Problems

The notion of vehicle maintenance often conjures images of greased-stained hands and car hoods propped up. While professional and amateur mechanics are still no strangers to getting their hands dirty, vehicle maintenance in the 21st century also involves diagnosing issues that might arise with a car's engine control module.

**WHAT IS AN ENGINE CONTROL MODULE?** An engine control module, or ECM, serves as the primary computer system for many critical components in modern vehicles. ECMs essentially serve as the brains behind the engines, controlling everything from fuel mixtures to emissions controls. Sensors within the engine send signals to the ECM, and the ECM then uses that information to help the car run smoothly.



Issues that arise with the ECM can make driving difficult and, in some cases, impossible.

**WHAT ARE SOME POTENTIAL SIGNS OF ECM ISSUES?** The automotive service provider Aamco notes that a faulty or failing ECM will exhibit various symptoms. However, it's important to note that these symptoms are not always indicative of issues with the ECM, so when they arise drivers may want to schedule appointments with their mechanics so the true culprit can be identified and the problem can be fixed.

- **CHECK ENGINE LIGHT COMES ON:** Many drivers have experienced the dreaded check engine light, which indicates some type of issue with the engine. That issue can be a failing engine component, or it may indicate a failing or bad ECM. A mechanic can determine why the light has come on.
- **ENGINE PERFORMANCE ISSUES:** Even though the ECM is a separate entity from the engine itself, a bad or failing ECM can affect engine performance. That's because such ECMs throw off the timing and fuel settings of the engine, leading to a sudden and noticeable reduction in engine performance. Engine power may be affected, and the vehicle may experience a drop in fuel efficiency and issues with acceleration.
- **Vehicle will not start:** A failed ECM means the vehicle won't start, as there's nothing controlling the engine to tell it to do so. Failing ECMs may lead to struggles starting the vehicle, and whenever drivers experience these issues, they should consult their mechanics immediately so the issue does not escalate to the point where the engine won't start at all.
- **ERRATIC ENGINE BEHAVIOR:** A malfunctioning ECM can lead to stalling or misfiring. These issues are often sporadic, which may give drivers the impression that nothing is seriously wrong. However, erratic engine behavior is a strong indicator of problems with the ECM, and these issues should be addressed immediately. Identifying ECM issues and promptly addressing them can help drivers keep their vehicles on the road.

### Signs Transmission Fluid Is Low

Vehicles require all sorts of maintenance to operate safely and efficiently. Contrary to popular belief, motorists need not be amateur mechanics to keep their vehicles running strong. Major vehicle repairs are best left to the professionals, but drivers can learn to identify the causes of relatively minor issues that, if left untreated, can cause significant damage. For example, vehicles may exhibit certain signs of that indicate their transmission fluid needs replenishing. In many of the following instances, drivers may only need to top off the transmission fluid in their vehicles. However, if issues persist, schedule an appointment with a mechanic.

- **OVERHEATED TRANSMISSION:** Smoke billowing from a car is a sight no driver wants to see. But as bad as it may look, smoke coming from a car may only indicate the transmission is overheating due to lack of fluid. Smoke also can be indicative of a host of other problems, so if transmission fluid levels are not low, consult a mechanic. Loss of power and a burning smell also may indicate low transmission fluid levels.
- **ERRATIC SHIFTING:** Drivers can notice how their vehicles shift whether the cars or trucks have automatic or manual transmissions. Transmission fluid may be low if shifts appear to be delayed or faster than normal or if the vehicle appears to be slamming into a new gear. The automotive service provider Aamco notes that shifting issues related to transmission fluid may indicate the presence of a leak. If the issue disappears after refilling transmission fluid but then



reappears shortly thereafter, consult a mechanic.

- **PAUSING WHEN ENGAGING GEARS:** A two- to three-second pause when shifting into drive and reverse is another indicator that transmission fluid levels are low. The automotive experts at Firestone note that manual transmissions require fluid to

keep gears lubricated, while automatic transmissions rely on fluid to create the hydraulic pressure necessary to power movement within the transmission. When fluid levels are low, shifting from park to drive or reverse can take longer than it should.

- **SLIPPING TRANSMISSION:** Vehicles that are not staying in gear also may be in need of transmission fluid. However, a slipping transmission also may indicate significant damage to the transmission has already occurred, so this issue should be brought to the attention of a mechanic. Low transmission fluid levels can contribute to various symptoms. Keeping an eye on fluid levels and recognizing low fluid symptoms can keep cars running smoothly.

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### What Noisy Brakes May Be Telling You

The only noises many drivers ever want to hear coming from their vehicles are the sounds of their favorite songs blasting from their car stereos. But cars sometimes make noises that aren't nearly as inviting as music. Noises that seem to pop up when applying the brakes can be especially scary for motorists. No one wants to drive a vehicle with faltering or suspect brakes, so learning to distinguish between the two most common brake noises can be a wise move for drivers.

**GRINDING BRAKES** - Grinding noises indicate a serious problem with the braking system. According to CarsDirect.com, there are two major causes behind the grinding noise made by brakes. If the grinding sound is audible when pressing on the brake pedal, this likely because the rotor disc is coming into contact with part of the caliper. This typically occurs because the brake pads or rotors are extremely worn down, causing the steel backing of the worn out pad to grind against the rotor. In



such instances, it is recommended to replace the brake pads immediately. If the grinding noise is audible while the vehicle is in motion, debris might be stuck inside the brakes. Drivers might be able to dislodge this debris by repeatedly moving their cars forward and backward in a safe place, such as a driveway. If that does not work, have the brakes serviced by a qualified mechanic.

**SQUEALING** - Many drivers are familiar with the high-pitched squealing sound that comes

from their vehicles or those of fellow motorists. That squeal, while certainly not music to the ears, might be a good thing. That's because some brake pads are equipped with small steel clips that serve as wear indicators. When brake pads have worn down, these devices produce a squealing sound to let drivers know it's time to get new brake pads. But squealing can be indicative of other things as well. Squealing noises are sometimes heard immediately after brake pads or rotors have been replaced. In such instances, the noise typically subsides within a day or two once the pads have been broken in. Glazed pads also can create a squealing sound. When calipers stick, the brakes stay partially applied, producing excessive friction or heat. The heat causes the brake pads to glaze. No one wants to hear noises coming from their brakes. However, such noises are often a car's way of telling drivers that brakes need to be serviced.

### How To Inspect And Maintain Vehicle Belts

Responsible vehicle ownership involves taking inventory of the automobile and ensuring it is working at peak capacity. Hundreds of parts work together to keep vehicles on the road, but quite often drivers do not look under the hood until something is amiss. Routine maintenance is widely acknowledged as a critical component of responsible vehicle ownership, but many motorists may not know how to care for their cars. Belts are one example of components that are integral to efficient, well-running vehicles. The automotive resource iDriveSafely.com indicates that belts are some of the most crucial moving parts in the engine. Belts transmit power between shafts, and all belts, from serpentine belts to V-belts to timing belts, all serve important functions.

• **SERPENTINE BELT:** Firestone® Complete Auto Care says a serpentine belt is a long, snaking, winding belt that keeps parts such as the water pump, alternator, power steering pump,



and air conditioning running smoothly. Serpentine belts transport power to automotive accessories. A failing serpentine belt can cause enormous and expensive headaches, including overheating and loss of steering power.

• **V-BELTS:** Also known as drive belts, these are usually found in older vehicles. Unlike serpentine belts, which run through various parts, V-belts run through one or two accessories. Older cars with many belts and whistles will have multiple V-belts, and should one break, it may not cause as much of an issue as if a serpentine belt were to falter.

• **TIMING BELT:** Advance Auto Parts says that most cars have

interference engines in which the clearance between moving parts is so small that they can end up bumping into each other if they're not running on the same timing as one another. That is where the timing belt comes into play. It connects the crankshaft to the camshaft, helping them stay in sync. Failing to pay attention to a timing belt can result in an expensive engine repair. Belts have finite service lives, and heat and wear and tear are usually their nemeses. It is important to look for fraying or cracking of belts. Even belts that look new may have worn out grooves that lose their grips on matching pulley grooves. Mechanics often use special gauges to check belts. Belts also may need to be replaced due to oil or grease contamination that can damage the rubber or synthetic rubber. It is important to check the owner's manual and seek advice from a qualified mechanic about when belts should be serviced.

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### Successfully Switch Auto Insurance Providers

Once drivers purchase an auto insurance policy, many simply let the policy renew each year. But with a little digging, drivers may be able to reduce their insurance costs considerably. According to the Insurance Information Institute in New York, consumers should ask themselves if they're happy with the cost, service and coverage of their existing policies whenever it's time to renew. If they are, they should stick with their existing policies. However, if customers feel things can be better, then it's a perfect time to see what's available. Many driver advocates advise shopping for a new policy every two or three years. When it comes time to switch car insurance companies, follow these steps and remember to avoid gaps in the coverage.

- Compare apples to apples. When shopping for new policies, consumers should compare the same features offered by various providers, including coverage types, deductibles and any limits. Keep a copy of your existing policy's declarations page so that all quotes can be accurately compared to the existing policy.
- Research any cancellation fees. Before switching over, find out if there are any cancellation fees associated with an existing policy.
- Eliminate coverage gaps. Eliminate gaps in coverage by ensuring a new policy begins the moment the existing one ends. This prevents potential financial ruin should a driver get into an accident without any insurance during a gap period.

### Keep Tires Road-Worthy For Safer Driving

Making driving more safe can come down to ensuring that the vehicle is in good working order - starting from the ground up. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration warns that an average of 200 people die each year in tire-related crashes. In 2016, 733 people across the United States lost their lives in accidents in which tire malfunction was a contributing factor. Roughly 70 percent of single vehicle accidents are tire-related. Taking tire maintenance seriously can greatly reduce the chances of blowouts, accidents and fatalities.

**MAINTAIN THE RIGHT PRESSURE** - Caring for tires not only improves safety, but also it extends the life of the tires, saving drivers money as a result. Michelin Tires says that simply checking the tires' inflation pressure can make a significant difference in how long tires last. For example, a tire that is consistently 20 percent under-inflated may see its life expectancy reduced by 20 percent.

Tires that are not properly inflated also can have a high rolling resistance. In such instance, the engine must expend more effort to move the vehicle - thus eating up fuel.

Pressure should be checked at ambient temperature before driving, states AAA. The recommended inflation pressure can be found in the drivers manual or on the tire.

**CHECK TIRE TREAD** - Tires rely on good tread depth to maintain traction and shed water during wet conditions. AAA recommends checking tread with a visual inspection and with the "quarter test." Insert a quarter into a tread groove with the top of Washington's head facing down. If the top of his head is not

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visible, the tires have at least 4/32" of tread and are acceptable for continued use. If the top of Washington's head shows, tires need to be replaced.

**LEARN ABOUT TIRE AGING** - Check the owner's manual for specific recommendations concerning replacing the spare tire for the vehicle. Some manufacturers state after six years, while others say 10 years is the maximum service life for tires. While most tire centers will use newly manufactured tires when replacing tires, you can double check the age of any tire by looking at the sidewall for the tire identification number (TIN), offers NHTSA. The last four digits are the week and year of manufacture.

**KEEP UP ON MAINTENANCE** - Wheel alignment, tire rotation and tire balancing are all key to minimizing wear and extending the life and safety of tires. Each vehicle has specific recommendations, and drivers should consult their manuals to find those specifics.

Tire function is an important part of maintaining vehicle safety and performance.

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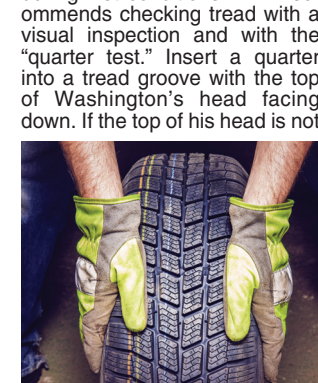
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