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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 challeng-

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Simple Ways To Trim Auto Insurance Costs

The cost of owning an automobile extends beyond maintenance and fueling costs. One of the biggest expenses motorists must plan for is auto insurance, the cost of which can vary greatly depending on geography and driver history. But no matter where drivers live or what their histories are, there are some simple ways for drivers to save money on their monthly insurance premiums.

- Reassess your driving habits. Auto insurance companies consider how many miles drivers drive per year when determining the cost of an insurance policy. Many drivers provide this information when opening a policy, but then never update it when renewing or extending their policies. If you drive less now than you did when you opened your policy, notify your insurance company and you might end up paying less each month, especially if your daily commute is considerably shorter than it used to be.
- Check your credit rating. Another way to save money on your auto insurance is to check your credit rating and, if necessary, take steps to improve your credit score. Credit rating is another variable insurance companies use to determine drivers' premiums, and a good credit rating can save drivers a substantial amount of money on their policies. If your credit rating has improved since you opened your policy, contact your insurance company and you might see the cost of your insurance reduced dramatically. It's also good to periodically view your credit report to determine if there are any errors that are negatively affecting your rating. Such errors may be inflating your auto insurance premiums.
- Hit the books. No matter how many years you have behind the wheel, your auto insurance company may offer you discounts if you periodically take defensive driving courses. Such classes are inexpensive, but they may save you as much as 10 percent on the cost of your auto insurance policy. Young, inexperienced drivers and seniors tend to benefit from defensive driving courses more than other drivers.
- Change your policy. Drivers also can save money by making changes to their policies. Raising your deductible is perhaps the easiest way to save money without affecting your coverage, and such a decision can save you as much as 15 percent depending on how high a deductible you're willing to pay. Drivers whose cars are older and completely paid off might want to drop their collision insurance, which pays you if your car is damaged or destroyed in an accident. Such insurance won't yield much in return if your car is not worth much money, and dropping it from your policy can save you between 10 and 15 percent. Auto insurance is a necessity for drivers of all ages, but there are several ways to cut the costs of insurance premiums without affecting coverage. Drivers looking to save money on their auto insurance policies should let their agents know if their driving habits change.

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Don't Forget Headlights When Performing Routine Maintenance

(MS) Veteran and even novice drivers understand the importance of visibility when they get behind the wheel of their vehicles. When visibility is not an issue, drivers can more easily see their fellow motorists and better anticipate potentially dangerous situations. But when visibility is compromised, drivers and their passengers are vulnerable to a host of dangers, including inclement weather and aggressive motorists.

Many things can affect drivers' visibility on the road, but those who take a proactive approach to improving their visibility can put themselves in a better position to handle any negative situations that may arise. One of the ways to do just that is to pay more attention to your headlights. Often overlooked when performing routine vehicle maintenance, headlights must be maintained to ensure optimal visibility for drivers.

The following are a few ways drivers can improve the performance of their headlights to make their vehicles safer for themselves and their passengers.

- Pay attention to the headlights' output. Perhaps the most noticeable indicator of an aging headlight is its light output. As bulbs start to dim, drivers may find themselves struggling to see during twilight and at night. That difficulty is not necessarily because drivers' own vision is failing, but may be a result of aging bulbs whose light output is gradually reduced by the effects of humidity, electrical resistance and filament fatigue. Drivers who notice their headlights are not producing as

much light as they once did should know that reduced output is a telltale sign of aging bulbs that need to be replaced.

- Say "so long" to the status quo. Recognizing dimming bulbs is just the first step toward improving the performance of your headlights. The next step is for drivers to recognize that all headlight bulbs are not created equal. Instead of replacing existing bulbs with the same type of bulbs provided by their vehicle's manufacturer, drivers can vastly improve their visibility by upgrading to a bulb designed to provide more light than the standard halogen bulbs found in many of today's vehicles. Leading automotive lighting manufacturer Philips produces a range of Upgrade Headlight Bulbs that offer up to 100 percent more light on the road than standard halogen bulbs. That's a significant benefit to drivers, as motorists' visual acuity is reduced by 70 percent at night, when statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration indicate 49 percent of all fatal accidents occur. The NHTSA also notes that the fatality rate per mile driven at night is roughly three times as high as it is during daylight hours.

- Find the right fit. The right headlight bulb can dramatically improve visibility when driving at night, but what's good for the goose is not always good for the gander. That's because motorists drive for various reasons and on various roads, so the right bulb for seniors who don't often take to the highways will not necessarily be the best fit for commuters who routinely

drive long distances. Philips makes a headlight bulb for every type of driver, and each Upgrade Headlight Bulb creates a better beam pattern that is dramatically longer than that provided by standard halogen lights, ensuring drivers can safely see no matter how accustomed they are to driving at night.

- Let there be light. Regardless of how effective a bulb has the potential to be, drivers who don't routinely clean their headlights will continue to have their visibility compromised. Certain preventative measures can help drivers address headlight issues before they appear, ensuring their visibility is not compromised. When checking your oil in the driveway or even when you're filling up at the gas station, take a few moments to inspect your headlights and address any issues that arise as soon as possible. The Philips Headlight Restoration Kit includes a post-treatment that provides long-lasting UV protection for headlight lenses. The kit also includes a cleaner/polish and restorer/protector so drivers can restore their headlight lenses to "like new" quality while increasing visibility and reducing glare in as little as 30 minutes. Such quick and simple maintenance can ensure your headlights are performing optimally.

More information is available at www.philips.com/automotive. Standard headlight bulbs (left) vs. Philips X-tremeVision bulbs (right) that provide up to 100 percent more light on the road.

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The Various Types Of RVs

Vacations are a great way to recharge and get some time away from the daily grind. While many working men and women take one or two vacations per year, recreational vehicle owners can travel more often without breaking the bank.

Recreational vehicles, or RVs, are often referred to as campers or motor homes. Equipped with many amenities, ranging from kitchens to multiple sleeping areas to entertainment spaces, RVs offer many of the comforts of home.

The Recreational Vehicle Industry Association says RV ownership is currently at an all-time high. According to Dr. Richard Curtin, RV industry analyst and director of consumer surveys at the University of Michigan, 8.9 million households now own an RV. That's up from 7.9 million in 2005.

Drivers considering buying an RV may have many questions about these increasingly popular vehicles. RVs come in two main types: motorized and towable. Understanding the differences between the two and the various subcategories of RV can help drivers make the most informed decisions when purchasing their RVs.

MOTORIZED
Motorized RVs are broken down by class, including class A, B and C. The distinction between the classes of RV is based on size.

- Class A: This class of motor home is very large and offers all of the comforts you'd expect from home. Many people who purchase a class A RV plan to travel all year long. Slide-outs can expand the living area when parked, and full bathrooms, complete kitchens and more are the norm. Because of their size, class A RVs tend to be the most expensive and may be more vehicle than many people can afford. Their large size (many look like a bus on the road) can make them difficult to navigate for novices.

- Class B: Class B RVs are often referred to as "van conversions." Class B are the smallest, fully enclosed campers available in the motorized category. Living space is limited in these RVs, but economy and versatility make them quite popular. Usually these campers can sleep between two and four people.

- Class C: Class C RVs are a compromise between types A and B. Class C are mid-sized with a driver's compartment similar to a van and a larger box in the back for the

living area. Some come with a sleeping bunk above the cab. Depending on the floor plan, class C campers can sleep up to 10 people.

TOWABLE
Towable RVs are another option and can be more affordable because they can be pulled behind your existing vehicle.

- Travel trailers: Travel trailers look similar to traditional motorized RVs but without the driving cab. They can be hitched to the back of a vehicle. Travel trailers are popular because of their versatility. Travel trailers can be ideal for those with limited budgets but the desire to have a self-contained unit.

- Pop-up: Folding camping trailers, or pop-up trailers, are inexpensive and lightweight. They provide many of the conveniences found in a basic travel trailer but in a smaller size.

- Fifth-wheel: If you own a pickup truck, a fifth-wheel trailer may be good for you. These hitch to the top of the pickup bed and have similar features to a traditional travel trailer. RVs make great investments for men and women who love the open road. They also are a great way to take the entire family on an affordable and memorable vacation.

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Items To Include In Your Automotive Emergency Kit

Road trips can make for great weekend getaways or even more lengthy vacations for those who can't get enough of the open road. But before embarking on any road trips, motorists should replenish their automotive emergency kits with the following items so they are fully prepared in the event of an accident or an injury.

- **First-aid kit:** A first-aid kit can treat cuts and abrasions suffered while you are out of the car and even some minor injuries that may result if you are in a car accident. Include essential items like adhesive tape, antibiotic ointment, anti-septic wipes, aspirin, bandages, a cold compress, gauze, and scissors. Visit www.redcross.org for a more extensive list of items to include in your first-aid kit, which should be kept in your car at all times.
- **Tools:** It's important to include tools in your automotive emergency kit. While a full toolbox might be unnecessary, bring

along an adjustable wrench, a flat head and Phillips screwdriver, a pair of pliers, a tire jack and crow bar, an ice scraper, and a flashlight. Extra roadside flares and reflectors also should be packed should you need to pull over and address an automotive problem, such as a flat tire. Keep a tire pressure gauge in your glove compartment or with your other tools so you can check tire pressure if you feel your car is not operating as smoothly as it normally does.

- **Fluids:** While it's best to check all of your vehicle's fluids before beginning a road trip, it does not hurt to bring along some extra fluids just in case you start to run low while out on the road. Fluids to pack include motor oil, antifreeze, brake fluid, and windshield washer fluid. Include a funnel with these items so you can easily pour them in should you be running low. Pack an empty spray bottle as well so you have something to spray washer fluid from if a problem

arises with your wiper blades.

- **Wiper blades:** Include an extra set of wiper blades in your automotive emergency kit. Maintaining wiper blades is an oft-overlooked component of vehicle maintenance, so bring along an extra set of blades should your existing blades succumb to wear and tear while you're on the road.
- **Miscellaneous items:** Some items that may not seem synonymous with road trips can come in handy should you find yourself in an emergency. Pack a blanket so you and your passengers can stay warm should your car break down at night. In addition, pack some energy bars and bottled water so no one gets too hungry or thirsty while waiting for help to arrive. It's also good to keep a pair of work gloves in your car so you can still use your tools or change a tire when the temperatures dip or your hands get sweaty on hot days.

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Enjoy A Frugal Fall Road Trip

Road trips are a staple of autumn for many motorists. Fall foliage and moderate temperatures make the months of September and October ideal months to hit the open road for weekend getaways. Fall road trips rarely take drivers too far away from home, but traveling can still be costly. Fortunately, there are many ways to make road trips more affordable without sacrificing fun.

- Explore alternatives to more traditional lodging. If your road trip includes an overnight stay, consider alternatives to traditional lodging. Hotels might stretch your budget, but depending on where you plan to go, you might have some less traditional alternatives. Airbnb.com allows homeowners and even some apartment dwellers to rent their homes and apartments to travelers, and these listings may pale in comparison to rates offered by nearby hotels. If weather permits, look for local campsites and spend your nights sleeping outdoors under the autumn stars. If you prefer hotels, look for deals on sites like Priceline.com or Hotwire.com, which may offer heavy discounts on rooms.
- Take steps to conserve fuel. Lodging might prove your biggest expense on a fall road trip, but fuel likely won't be too far behind. Drivers can cut fuel costs in several ways. Before beginning your trip, take your car in for a tuneup so any issues that might affect fuel efficiency are addressed before you hit the open road. Poorly inflated tires force the engine to work harder and burn more fuel, so make sure tire pressure matches the levels recommended in your owner's manual before embarking on your trip and even along the way if you feel your car is not running as smoothly as it could be. Another way to conserve fuel is to remove excess items from

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the trunk. If you don't plan to hit the links on your trip, leave your golf clubs at home.

- Plot your route. Spontaneity may make fall road trips more fun, but drivers looking to save money should plot their routes in advance so they can avoid potentially costly problems like detours or road work that can waste fuel and lead to hours sitting in traffic. Use a GPS device during your trip so you can be alerted to any unexpected developments that might cost you time and money. Plotting your route in advance also allows you to find affordable dining and lodging options and choose roads that don't require drivers to pay tolls.
- Invite some friends and family along. Inviting friends and family on a weekend getaway can make the trip more fun and more affordable. If you have room in the car, inviting friends along allows you to split fuel costs, and you may even save on lodging if you find a hotel that won't charge for extra guests in the room. Friends and family also can help split the cost of supplies.
- Bring your own food. Food is another big expense road trippers must account for. But you can save money on food by bringing your own meals along on the trip. Prepare some sandwiches the morning that you leave and keep them fresh in a cooler so you don't have to pay for lunch. In addition, pack some snacks so you and your passengers can quickly and affordably quell any hunger pangs that arise while you're on the road. If you plan to stay in a place with its own kitchen, cook your own dinners so you don't have to spend money dining out.

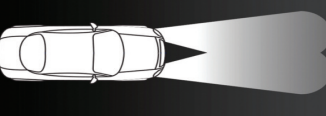
Road trips are a staple of autumn, when drivers can still enjoy the open road without breaking the bank. Drivers can make several adjustments to make their fall road trips more affordable.

How Drivers Can Enhance Nighttime Visibility


(MS) Many drivers are considerably less comfortable driving at night than during the day. Even though roads tend to be less congested when the sun goes down, reduced visibility at night can compromise the safety of drivers and their passengers. Statistics indicate that drivers' fears of driving at night are not unwarranted. According to the National Safety Council®, traffic death rates are three times greater at night than during the day, and the anxiety many drivers feel when behind the wheel at night no doubt contributes to nighttime driving fatalities. But drivers who take steps to enhance their nighttime visibility may feel more comfortable driving at night, making the roads safer for themselves, their passengers and their fellow motorists.

- Turn your headlights on earlier. Daytime running lights can make it easier for drivers to be seen during the day, but they are not designed for nighttime driving. If you find yourself struggling to see as evening transitions into nighttime, turn your headlights on earlier or use your car's automatic switch setting if it has one.
- Prioritize headlight maintenance. Headlight maintenance is often overlooked, but properly maintained headlights can go a long way toward improving driver visibility at night. Check your headlight bulbs. If they are more than three years old or dimming, it would be a good idea to replace them to ensure the best performance. Headlamp clouding is also an issue. Plastic headlamp lenses, which are common on most vehicles, grow hazy and yellowed over time from the effects of sunlight, ozone, road pollution, and wash chemicals. While many motorists accept this as inevitable wear and tear, clouding reduces headlight output and compromises nighttime visibility. Designed to restore plastic lenses in less than 30 minutes, the Philips Headlight Restoration Kit quickly and effectively combats clouding on headlights as well as taillights, turn signals and reflective lens covers, improving driver visibility while also making cars more visible to other drivers. In addition, the Philips Headlight Restoration Kit employs a protective UV coating that produces longer lens clarity while preventing future clouding for up to two years.
- Take steps to fight fatigue. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that driver fatigue contributes to 100,000 reported traffic accidents each year. Drowsiness is a concern for any motorist driving at night for long periods of time, as heavy eyes can make drivers less alert and less likely to see fellow motorists, pedestrians or animals. When driving at night for long periods of time, take periodic breaks so you can get out of the car and revive yourself with a quick walk and some fresh air. In addition, avoid smoking while driving, as the NSC notes that the nicotine and carbon monoxide from tobacco smoke can further compromise nighttime vision.
- Upgrade your headlights. According to a recent study from the automotive club AAA, the halogen headlights found in more than 80 percent of vehicles on the road today fail to safely illuminate unlit roadways, even when vehicles are moving at speeds as low as 40 miles per hour. The solution for this problem is simple: Put more light on the road. There is new bulb technology available to help you do just that. Philips Upgrade Headlight Bulbs can deliver up to 100 percent more light on the road than standard halogen bulbs. They also create a better beam pattern for the drive, greatly improving nighttime visibility.

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Sudden car trouble is something no driver wants to experience, but many a driver has been driving down the highway only to feel his or her vehicle start to sputter. Such sputtering might indicate a car is running low on fuel, or it could be a sign of something more serious that requires motorists to think as quickly and safely as possible. When car trouble strikes while a vehicle is on the road, the first thing many drivers do is check their fuel gauges. A car that runs out of gas is certainly inconvenient, but if you can pull over to the shoulder or make it to the nearest filling station, then this unfortunate situation can be remedied rather easily. But when a car's tank is full and it is still showing signs of trouble, drivers must take steps to protect themselves, their passengers and their vehicles. The following are a few simple tips motorists should keep in mind so they can safely handle any car trouble that may arise while they are out on the road.

- Keep a first-aid kit, spare tire and tire jack in the car at all times. Flat tires are no fun, but they are even more of a nuisance when drivers are not prepared to address them. Always keep a jack and spare tire in your car, even if the spare is a donut you can temporarily use to replace a flat tire until you make it to a filling station or automotive supply store. As an added safety measure, keep a fully stocked first aid kit in your vehicle in case you cut yourself while changing the tire or need to address another medical situation. Visit www.redcross.org for a list of items to include in your automotive emergency kit. Keep a blanket in the trunk as well so your passengers can stay warm should you experience car trouble on a cold day or night.
- Make note of your surroundings. Some car troubles can only be fixed by the professionals, so pay careful attention to your surroundings in case an issue arises and forces you to pull over and call for help. Always pay attention to mile markers and any landmarks that might help you describe where you are. Car troubles

How To Handle Car Trouble While Driving

can strike at any time and anywhere, so be sure to pay special attention to your surroundings when driving in unfamiliar areas.

- Pull over. Don't panic if an issue arises suddenly. Remain calm and pull over onto the shoulder. The right shoulder is the area for pulling over on most roads, but you may also use the left shoulder on multi-lane highways with medians. Try to get as far away from traffic as possible without driving off of level ground, and always use your signals when pulling onto the shoulder. If the vehicle can't make it to the median, put your emergency flashers on and get out of the car, moving away from both the vehicle and traffic. Immediately call for emergency roadside assistance, alerting the authorities if need be.
- Use flares or triangles to alert other drivers. So long as you are not risking your well-being, you can place flares and/or warning triangles behind your

vehicle so oncoming traffic knows to drive around it. The popular not-for-profit motor club AAA recommends placing the first flare or triangle 10 feet directly behind the side of the vehicle that is closest to the road. The second should be placed between 30 and 60 feet (increase the distances as the posted speed limit increases) behind the middle of the bumper, while the third flare or triangle should be placed

between 120 and 360 feet behind the vehicle's right side.

- Stay with the vehicle. Once you have called for help and set up flares or triangles, stay with the vehicle, though do so at a safe enough distance so you are not in harm's way. Sudden car troubles can be scary, but drivers who approach such issues calmly and quickly can reduce their risk for accident or injury.

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Protect Your Vehicle From Snow, Ice And Damage From The Cold

Winter can be an unforgiving season. Freezing temperatures coupled with snow and ice can take its toll on people who live in climates where cold weather is a fact of winter life. While winter can test people's patience, it also can be harsh on cars and trucks. Understanding what components of a vehicle can be compromised by dropping temperatures and snowy roads can help drivers take action to safeguard their automotive investments. While the Canadian Automobile Association notes that winter can wreak havoc on just about every part of a vehicle, there are some parts that seem to bear the brunt of Old Man Winter's abuse. Properly servicing and caring for a car or truck can help. Drivers should take their vehicles for a tuneup and inspection before wintry weather arrives. A mechanic will examine the car battery and check antifreeze levels and make sure that the thermostat, defroster, brakes, and even wiper blades are working effectively. Have the tires inspected for adequate tread, which can make navigating roads safer. If the treads are worn, replace the tires. In addition to visiting their mechanics, drivers can perform some inspections and fixes themselves.

- Check that all of the vehicle's lights are operational so your car can be easily seen during inclement weather. Exchange your existing windshield washer fluid with one that will not freeze in cold conditions. Check the nozzles on the windshield-washer system routinely and clear out any blockages of ice or debris. While addressing windshield washer fluid, also

replace worn out windshield wiper blades with ones that can withstand snow and icy weather.

- A new coating of wax can serve as a shield against road salt, snow, sleet, and rain. Try a polymer wax to protect the paint. Whenever possible, rinse off salt and grime so it does not dry on the car and gradually wear away at the paint. Some drivers mistakenly believe that salt stops being a problem once it dries simply because moisture is the active ingredient for a corrosive reaction. But humidity in the air is enough to keep the salt eating away at the car's paint, and that can contribute to rust. Be sure to rinse off the undercarriage of the vehicle as well.
- Have your tires' alignment checked toward the end of winter or early spring. A season of

traveling over pothole-ridden roads or hitting curbs buried under snow drifts can affect the alignment. Get everything back on track. Similarly, inspect tires routinely, as weather changes can affect tire pressure and strength.

- Use a soft snow brush or a foam brush to clear snow off of the car. Avoid hard plastic scrapers you might use on your windshield, as they can scratch painted surfaces.
- Try to park the vehicle in a garage or under a car port, each of which can protect cars and trucks from the often harsh elements of winter. Vehicles can be affected by the cold weather. Keep them running efficiently to prevent damage this winter. Scrapers should only be used on windows and not on the body of the car.

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Waxing 101: What To Know Before Waxing Your Car

Waxing a car is a great way to maintain its exterior. Including waxing as part of your routine vehicle maintenance can protect the car or truck from some natural hazards, including sun damage, pollen and the dirt and grime that can accumulate on a car over time. Motorists unfamiliar with waxing may be intimidated by the sheer volume of waxes on the shelves at their local automotive supply stores, which will no doubt offer an array of both liquid and paste waxes as well as many spray waxes. When testing waxes in 2013, Consumer Reports found that liquid and paste waxes were relatively equal with regard to their effectiveness, while spray waxes were very convenient though not very durable. Waxing a vehicle is no small task, and drivers should learn as much as they can about car wax and the different types of waxes before attempting the job themselves. The differences between waxes in their study of liquid, paste and spray waxes, Consumer Reports found that paste waxes were eas-

ier to apply than liquid waxes, but that the overall performance of paste waxes fell short of liquid waxes. Liquid waxes were very durable and provided the gloss many motorists look for when waxing their vehicles. But liquid waxes were difficult to apply evenly, something first timers should consider when choosing a wax. Spray waxes were convenient and easy to use, and many can be wiped off without drying. But Consumer Reports found spray waxes were not as durable as liquid or paste waxes, so they may need to be applied more frequently. Because waxing is done to protect a car and improve its appearance, it's important that drivers waxing their vehicles for the first time test the wax on an area of their vehicles that is not easily seen to the naked eye. This affords some room for error as you learn the waxing ropes while also allowing you to test out different waxes until you find the right fit. There are some additional tricks drivers can employ when waxing

their vehicles that can make the job easier and the wax that much more effective.

- Wash first, then wax. Make sure you give your car or truck a good wash before you apply any wax. Allow the car to dry completely before applying any wax.
- Avoid sunlight. Consumer Reports notes that sunlight can soften paint and make it susceptible to scratching, so avoid washing and waxing your car in direct sunlight.
- Use microfibre towels. Microfibre towels were found to be more effective than cloth rags at removing residue. In addition, cloth rags can trap dirt and scratch finishes, so opt for lamb's wool mitts instead.
- Go from top to bottom. The bottom of a vehicle is more susceptible to grime, so work your way down when waxing so you are not contaminating your towels. A contaminated towel increases the risk of scratching your vehicle's exterior.

When waxing your vehicle, the right wax and technique can make all the difference.

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Types Of Sunroofs

Today's vehicles are equipped with more amenities than ever before. Drivers willing to spend a little extra can now cruise down the highways in vehicles equipped with built-in WiFi and cameras that allow drivers to see everything around their cars and trucks. While new gadgets attract drivers' attention, sunroofs, which have been around since 1937, remain very popular as well. Drivers who like to allow a little light and fresh air into their vehicles may be surprised to learn that there are many different types of sunroofs. The following are a just a handful of sunroof options drivers may want to consider when buying their next vehicle.

- Top-mount: Drivers who want a top-mount sliding sunroof may be able to find both manual and electric sliding options. In a top-mount

sunroof, a large glass slides on tracks on top of the roof, and many feature integral wind deflectors that eliminate noise from the wind no matter how fast the car is traveling.

- Panoramic roof systems: Like their name implies, panoramic roof systems provide a wider view than other sunroofs. That view is available whether the sunroof is open or closed, and panoramic systems are typically made of glass. Passengers in both the front and rear seats can enjoy the view through panoramic roof systems.
- Spoiler: Spoiler sunroofs are also known as tilt-and-slide, and these sunroofs are a popular built-in factory option. The view through a spoiler sunroof is not as wide as that of a panoramic system, but they tilt to vent and slide open, so passenger headroom is not typical-

ly affected by their presence.

- Inbuilt: Inbuilt sunroofs are common in luxury vehicles. With an inbuilt sunroof, the panel slides open between the metal roof and interior headliner. That creates a full opening, but it takes away some headroom. Unlike imported models that use painted steel, American-made inbuilt sunroofs typically use a glass slider, which provides a view whether the sunroof is open or closed.
- Pop-up: Pop-up sunroofs are compatible with many vehicles, and they are among the least expensive options to install. Pop-up sunroofs are manually operated tilting panels that typically are made of glass. Panels must be stored when removed, but they also can be tilted to provide a venting effect.

Wet Weather

Wet weather can be fickle, vacillating between dry, wet and even icy conditions. Drivers need to remain on their toes to safely traverse roadways near and far.

Wet roadways and poor driving conditions contribute to thousands of road accidents each and every year. As roads get wet, oil and other substances rise to the surface of the pavement, which can quickly become slippery and compromise the traction offered by tires. According to the United States Department of Transportation, there are around 707,000 automobile crashes each year due to rain. Heavy rains also may lead to puddles, which can obscure hazards on the roadway. Cars may stall out in puddles or hydroplane, which occurs when cars coast along the surface of the water. Puddles also can be splashed by oncoming cars, leading to visibility issues.

It is in every driver's best interest to use caution when driving on wet roads. The following tips can help

prevent accidents, injuries and even fatalities during the rainy season.

- Slow down. Drivers should drive slower when roads are wet and when rain compromises visibility. It can take up to three times longer to stop on a wet road than a dry one. By slowing down you will be able to stop or veer out of the way of danger.
- Leave room. When driving on wet roads, leave more room between your vehicle and the one in front of you. Again, this plays into stopping distance. Tailgating increases your risk of rear-ending a vehicle if you cannot stop in time on a wet roadway.
- Stay alert. It can be easy to be lulled into complacency while driving. But staying alert and conscious of every detail going on around you can reduce your risk of accident when driving in less than ideal conditions.
- Skip cruise control. As a driver, you want to remain in control of acceleration and speed, rather

than leaving it up to the cruise control system. If you begin to hydroplane on cruise control, the car may actually speed up.

- Use your headlights. Headlights can light up the road in front of you, helping illuminate potential hazards. Lights on a car also make your vehicle more visible to others on the road. Always turn on the headlights in inclement weather.
- Avoid jerky movements. Keep a steady pace and the vehicle in control. Jerking the wheel or accelerating and braking in an erratic fashion can cause the vehicle to spin out or skid on wet roads.
- Check your tires. Inspect your tires for tread wear and air pressure. Tires should be rotated as part of routine maintenance. Poorly performing tires are a significant safety risk. If you live in an area known for a lot of rain, invest in tires designed for wet road conditions. Don't let wet weather get the best of you. Slow down, stay visible and be on the alert.

Warning Signs A Tire Is About To Go Flat

Few drivers will be fortunate enough to go their entire driving lives without encountering at least one flat tire. Flat tires range from the inconvenient flats, which may interrupt a road trip or make drivers late for work or an appointment, to more dangerous blowouts, which can compromise the safety of drivers, their passengers and anyone else on the road when the tire gives out. But as inconvenient or dangerous as flats or blowouts can be, they also can be prevented more often than not. Tires often produce warning signs that a flat or blowout is about to emerge, so drivers who want to avoid such unfortunate developments can inspect their tires for the following signs.

- Varying wear: Tires should exhibit the same type of wear. The wear on front tires and back tires may differ, but one front tire should have the same amount of wear as the other and the same goes for the back tires. Uneven tread on tires indicates that the tire with more wear could be about to go out.
- Worn tread: Even drivers who know little about cars can typically recognize when tire tread

has worn down to the point where the tire is a safety risk. But drivers who are unsure can employ the quarter test. Insert a quarter into the tread of the tire, with George Washington's head upright. If you can see the hairline of the United States' first president, then you need to replace the tire. Perform this test on each of your vehicle's four tires.

- Low pressure: Drivers who do not routinely check their tire pressure are more likely to endure a flat or blowout than those who regularly make sure their tires are at the manufacturer-recommended pressure, which can be found in a vehicle owner's manual or by calling the tire manufacturer or visiting their website. An underinflated tire is under stress that can cause the tire to blowout. In addition, poorly inflated tires force engines to work harder, which negatively affects a car's fuel efficiency.

- Vibration: A car that vibrates excessively may do so because tires are damaged. Poor suspension is another cause of excessive vibration. Whatever is behind a car that is vibrating, drivers should immediately take the car to their mechanic for an inspection.
- Physical damage to the tire: Sometimes tires exhibit physical damage like bulges or cuts, and such signs could mean a flat tire or blowout is just around the corner. Tires that exhibit such physical damage need to be replaced immediately. Flat tires and blowouts can prove both scary and inconvenient. Drivers who want to avoid such problems should routinely inspect their tires for indicators that a flat or blowout is likely to occur. Routinely checking tire pressure and inflating underinflated tires is one way drivers can reduce their risk of flat tires and blowouts.



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Stick Shifts Not Always What They Seem

Many auto enthusiasts prefer stick shifts, or manual transmissions, over automatic transmissions. Such supporters of stick shifts tend to feel as though a manual transmission engages drivers in ways that an automatic one simply cannot, making stick shifts more fun to drive than the more staid, automatic alternatives.

While the fun factor associated with manual transmission vehicles may be difficult to dispute, there are other commonly held beliefs about stick shifts that are far easier to contest. The following are a few things about today's manual transmission vehicles that might surprise even the most ardent automotive enthusiasts.


* Manual transmission vehicles are not necessarily cheaper than automatic transmission vehicles. Stick shifts are often less expensive than automatics, but that's not always the case, and certain manufacturers, including BMW, tend to charge the same price for their vehicles regardless of which type of transmission buyers choose. In the past, manual transmissions were almost

always a less expensive option than automatic transmissions because they were easier for manufacturers to install, which enabled automakers to cut back on labor costs, and those savings were passed along to consumers. While that difference in sticker price might once have been significant, nowadays it is often negligible, meaning buyers won't necessarily save substantial amounts of money by opting for a stick shift.

* Stick shifts are not readily available in all models. As the popularity of manual transmission vehicles has waned, so, too, has their availability. According to Edmunds.com, 67 percent of 2013 model-year vehicles were offered only with automatic transmissions. While it might be possible for buyers to still purchase such vehicles with manual transmissions, that opportunity is not guaranteed. Even if it is available, buyers will likely have to pay a premium price to order such custom-made automobiles, and it takes longer to deliver such vehicles than it does when buyers simply buy a car already on the lot.


* Stick shifts may not be expensive to maintain. Some drivers of manual transmission vehicles like to bemoan the costs of replacing the clutch on their vehicles, and that raises some concern among buyers considering a stick shift. But skilled stick shift drivers need not be worried about constantly replacing the clutch, which tends to be most in need of replacement when novice drivers struggle to get the hang of a manual transmission. In addition, manual transmissions are often much less expensive to replace than automatic transmissions. Also, skilled stick shift drivers who can deftly down-shift often note the positive long-term effect that such a practice has on their brake pads and rotors, which can last considerably longer on vehicles with manual transmissions than those with automatic ones.

* Stick shifts may not repel car thieves or cost less to insure. Because vehicles with manual transmissions require more skill to drive than automatics, some feel as though this deters car thieves, who may not know how to drive stick shifts. But there is no evidence to support this theory, nor any evidence to dispute it. And while those who subscribe to this theory feel that manual transmissions are therefore cheaper to insure because they are at a decreased risk of being stolen, that is also untrue. While the standards used to determine the price of an insurance policy vary between providers, many insurance providers view manual transmission vehicles as more risky because they take longer to shift, stop and accelerate. But manual transmissions also are less expensive to repair, and insurance companies consider that as well when determining the cost of a policy. Such factors may cancel each other out, and drivers will be left with an insurance policy that's roughly the same as if the vehicle included an automatic transmission. The demand for manual transmission vehicles continues to shrink, and there are things drivers should know about such automobiles before driving one home.



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