

Self-serve motorists:

Remember the basic car care checklist

If you've gotten into the pump-it-yourself routine, commonly known as "self-serve," do yourself and your car a favor. Either patronize a full service facility every few fill-ups for a preventive check-up, or do the checking yourself.

According to a report from the American Petroleum Institute, self-service stations now account for 30% of retail sales of gasoline, luring some 40% of all motorists to pump their own gas.

While this can save motorists an average of 2.5¢ per gallon, avoiding or simply forgetting about maintenance can eat up those savings in repair bills. "People tend to forget about the benefits of car care with self-serve," according to one oil company official. "At the time it seems like a good idea, but careless repetition of the practice can mean disaster in the long run."

With the advent of self-serve, the consumer now has a choice which wasn't previously available—to opt for lower gas prices or pay a little more for service. If you elect to "gas and go," then take charge of the preventive care your car needs to keep it running properly.

"Longer motor oil drain intervals, maintenance-free batteries, and the like are all indications that a new balance in operations (self and full service) is being found," says one API official.

Expect from full-service

A motorist pulling into a full-serve station should expect the following:

- clean and wash windshield.
- check motor oil level
- check battery fluid level
- check coolant level in radiator (only if the engine is cold or check coolant overflow tank, if equipped)
- check tire pressure

In addition, a dealer should make a quick visual check of fan belts, radiator and heater hoses, and tires for wear.

A regular customer of a full-serve station additionally should expect the following to be checked:

- power steering fluid
- battery cable condition
- fan belt tension
- windshield wipers
- washer fluid level

If you're a do-it yourselfer, you should be performing all of the above on a regular basis, with weekly check of motor oil, power steering fluid, windshield washer fluid, tires and lights, plus a monthly check of coolant, transmission, brake and bat-

Easy does it if rocking car out of ice

Automatic transmissions have a tough way to go in deep snow. This is due in part to the added resistance against the tires rolling through the snow. But the greatest damage can come from attempts to rock the car out of an icy rut.

When attempting to free yourself by alternately shifting from drive to reverse, do it gently. Changing gears abruptly while wheels are spinning can be harmful, if not fatal, to your automatic transmission.

Since you probably won't get out of your rut any faster by increasing the speed of that spinning rear tire, go easy on the gas and be sure you have brought the wheel to a complete stop before changing from forward to reverse or vice versa.

tery fluids, battery cables, wiper blades and drive belts and hoses.

Other tips

Other tips worth remembering:

1. Carry a clean cloth in the trunk for checking engine and transmission dip sticks.
2. Do NOT remove your radiator pressure cap when the engine is hot. It is dangerous.
3. Don't wait until a heavy rain to check condition of your wiper blades. If yours are the type that are hidden beneath the cowl, move them into position by turning on the ignition and the wiper switch. Then turn the ignition off when the wipers are accessible.

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