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BASIC VEHICLE MAINTENANCE CHECKS

It is important to ensure that basic vehicle maintenance checks are carried out on a regular basis - ideally every week, but at least every couple of weeks. You don't need to be a trained mechanic to do so, and doing so could help prevent vehicle breakdown, large garage bills and major inconvenience.

The simplest way to remember what to check is the word 'FLOWERY'.

Fuel

Ensure that you have enough fuel for your journey - particularly if you are in, or are planning to travel to an unfamiliar area. Top-up when you pass a filling station as opposed to waiting until your fuel warning light appears on the dashboard.

Lights

Clean all exterior lights and check for damage both externally as well as internally (a visual check through the lens is sufficient). Ensure that all of the lights fitted to your vehicle are working correctly - replace any blown bulbs if necessary.

Oil

Check the engine oil level. This is important as even new and well maintained engine can consume as much as a litre of oil over the course of 1,000 - 1,200 road miles. If you are unsure of how to do this, your vehicle owners' manual will show you how - alternatively you should seek advice from a professional. Do not wait until the engine oil pressure light appears on the dashboard as costly internal damage may have already occurred by that stage.

It is also worth checking the brake fluid and power steering fluid levels. These systems will also have dashboard warning lights which will illuminate when system pressure is low, however the fluid reservoirs generally show minimum and maximum fluid level markings which are usually fairly visible.

Water

Ensure that the vehicles' cooling system has sufficient liquid. If you are unsure of how to do this, your vehicle owners' manual will show you how - alternatively you should seek advice

from a professional. Overheating is a fairly common reason for vehicle breakdown (particularly in warmer weather). Modern vehicles' generally use a fluid which acts as both a summer coolant and winter anti-freeze. You should check both for coolant level as well as for any leaks that may be present.

It is worth topping-up the windscreen washer fluid also.

Electrics

Battery problems are likely the major cause of vehicle failure throughout the course of the year, but particularly in the winter months. Of course, the battery is the heart of any vehicle, therefore if you have noticed any issues in regards to starting the vehicle, it may be worth having the battery tested and, if necessary, replaced before it lets you down - which will probably be at the most inconvenient time!

In addition to the battery, it is also well worth checking that the engine cooling fan is operating correctly. You can check this by starting the engine and allowing the engine to get up to and beyond normal running temperature whilst the vehicle is stationary. Providing that the cooling fan is operating correctly, you should be able to hear the sound of the fan cutting in.

You should also take this opportunity to check the correct operation of the vehicles' other ancillary electrical systems such as the horn, wipers, air-conditioning etc.

Rubber

Ensure that the tyres - including the spare if supplied, are fit for purpose. Check for their general all around condition. This involves checking both the inside and outside side-walls of the tyre for cuts, cracks, dents and lumps, as well as ensuring that the tread depth is legal - minimum of 1.6 mm across the centre $\frac{3}{4}$ (75%) width of the tyre and consistent all around the circumference.

The tyre pressures are also important as incorrectly inflated tyres are both unsafe and will wear out faster, and can increase the vehicles fuel consumption by up to around 5-6% due to the increased rolling friction.

Incorrectly inflated tyres will also affect the vehicles handling which would be particularly noticeable should you be carrying additional passengers or luggage. If you are going to be carrying additional weight, remember to increase the tyre pressures accordingly (please see your vehicle owners' manual for details).

You should also take this opportunity to check the vehicle wiper blades for their general condition.

Yourself

Lastly, the often underappreciated check to be carried out is that of you - the driver.

Ensure that you are fit to drive and that you aren't tired - tiredness and generally feeling unwell can drastically affect both your awareness and reaction times.

You should also ensure that you are not under the influence of drink, drugs or medicines - it's worth noting that even some over the counter medicines can cause drowsiness.

Best wishes and 'Safe Driving for Life'

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