

Preventive maintenance key to vehicle longevity

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM

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Outside of the sound of metal colliding with metal, one of the most ominous noises a car owner may ever hear is that unexplainable sound — the indication that something is wrong with your vehicle.

That's the bad news.

According to the Car Care Council and local professionals, the good news is that preventive maintenance, which is critical to a long car life, is fairly easy and inexpensive to perform.

There are many options for dealing with vehicle problems before consulting the professionals, by relying on one's senses — sight, sound, smell — and a little basic information.

Lon Kinney, owner of Kinney's Complete Auto Service in Traverse City, said that the change of seasons, especially the shift from summer to fall, provides an opportunity for some attention to your car.

"The first thing that comes to mind at this time of year happens to be one of the most overlooked, and that's air pressure in the tires," said Kinney. "The first slippery road weather is always the worst, and you can make some surprising discoveries about what kind of condition your tire tread and tire pressure are in."

Kinney advised that instead of giving your tires an eyeball inspection, take your vehicle an auto shop or service, most

of whom will give you an evaluation quickly and for free.

"No doubt, we're in the business to sell tires, but our first concern is to give you good, accurate information," he said. "The whole issue is about safety, it's everyone's top priority."

Second on Kinney's "most overlooked" list is the potency and level of antifreeze, His shop has a policy of routinely checking that beginning in September.

Third is the condition of belts in the car, something that he said is sometimes difficult to check unless you know what to look for.

"Again, these are simple things that most garages can check at no charge, but they're the three biggest things that

can cause breakdowns," said Kinney. "Personally, I check all of those in my own cars every fall, which is the perfect time because it's right before we go into bad weather. What's the worst time of year to be stranded in a vehicle? During cold weather, so check those tires, belts and antifreeze now."

John Redmond, owner of Redmond Automotive in Traverse City, agreed. With belts and hoses, he says you usually can't tell if they're bad until it's too late, and that with regular inspection, you can save time and expense later. He recommended 50,000 miles as a good time to check on those items, if you haven't done it already, and said that the thermostat, in addition to

antifreeze, should also be looked at least every two years or 30,000 miles.

"I like to do my tire rotation twice a year, at fall and spring," said Redmond. "Take a look at the wiper blades and put on a new set if they're worn out. As it gets colder, you also need to watch out for your fuel and filters. And get a winter washer solvent that de-ices windows, one that works better than what you'd use in the summer. All these things are inexpensive and don't take a lot of time, but together, they all pay off."

Regular maintenance practices also include oil changes, which most people accomplish at quick-stop places, but

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