

Drive into SPRING

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What to look for when test driving preowned vehicles

Preowned vehicles have become hot commodities in recent years, reflecting a change in what drivers are looking for when it's time to get a new ride.

According to the market and consumer data experts at Statista, preowned vehicle sales increased every year between 2014 and 2019 and more than doubled the number of new cars sold each year during that period. For example, in 2019 United States car buyers purchased 40.8 million preowned vehicles and right around 17 million new vehicles.

There are many reasons why more car buyers are increasingly looking to the pre-owned vehicle market when replacing their existing vehicles. Certified preowned vehicles have increased consumer confidence in used cars and trucks and extended warranties have helped ease concerns buyers may have about such vehicles.

As reliable as preowned vehicles can be, prospective buyers must remain diligent when considering a used car and truck. Potential mechanical issues can be discussed with a mechanic of buyers' choosing, but it's up to drivers to gauge other factors that can affect how enjoyable it may or may not be to drive a given vehicle. Test drives remain a great way to get a feel for preowned vehicles and prospective buyers can consider various factors to determine if a given car or truck is for them.

• **Comfort:** Comfort is a big consideration when purchasing new vehicles, and there's no reason to downplay the importance of

comfort when shopping for preowned vehicles. Consider the available headroom and legroom when test driving a vehicle, but also take note of comfort-based accessories that the vehicle may or may not have. For example, if you've grown accustomed to heated seats on your existing vehicle, then a preowned vehicle without such seats, or one without functioning heated seats, will likely bother you in the years to come.

• **Visibility:** Sight lines vary from vehicle to vehicle, so make sure your test drive is long enough to give you an accurate idea of a vehicle's visibility. Blind spots may not differ much in new versus older models or even in vehicles made by the same manufacturer, but they can differ considerably between manufacturers (i.e., Toyota versus Nissan). Get a feel for blind spots during the test drive to determine if the you'll be comfortable driving a given vehicle.

• **Connectivity:** Modern vehicles are designed to connect with our devices, and drivers have quickly grown to prioritize connectivity. Compatibility with devices can make it easier to use GPS and stream music while driving, so don't hesitate to connect your phone when test driving a vehicle. If the car and phone are incompatible, that can affect how much you enjoy driving the car.

Preowned vehicles are incredibly popular. Buyers considering used cars or trucks can look for certain things during a test drive to determine if a given vehicle is the right fit for them.

Avoid drowsy driving incidents

Driving offers a sense of freedom that is hard to replicate. Is it any wonder young drivers are so eager to get their licenses while older drivers aim to hold on to them as long as they can?

Certain hazards come with getting behind the wheel, though most are largely preventable — including drowsy driving. As more people take to the roadways this spring and summer, it is important to remember that drowsy driving is a major problem.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that as many as 6,000 fatal crashes each year may be attributed to drowsy drivers. The National Sleep Foundation found about half of adult drivers in the United States admit to consistently getting behind the wheel while feeling drowsy. In addition, more than 40 percent of survey respondents say they have fallen asleep behind the wheel at least once.

The impact of drowsiness on driving is just as dangerous as driving while intoxicated, distracted or under the influence of both legal and illegal drugs.

- Reaction times are greatly reduced and worsen the drowsier the driver becomes.
- Awareness of hazards and the ability to sustain attention are diminished.
- Driving after being awake more than 20 hours without sleep is the equivalent of driving with a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.08 percent.

• The National Safety Council warns that fatigued drivers are three more times more likely to be in a car crash than drivers who are not fatigued.

• Insufficient sleep is tied to poor decision-making, which can lead to risk-taking behind the wheel.

Some drivers may not recognize they are driving while drowsy. Drivers with certain sleep disorders, such as obstructive sleep apnea, may not recognize that their interrupted, less restorative sleep can adversely affect their safety behind the wheel. Addressing sleep disorders can help drivers be more safe. Other people may be sleep deprived from working shift hours or taking care of young children. Asking for help to catch up on sleep can alleviate drowsiness when behind the wheel.

Individuals can take additional steps to make them less susceptible to drowsy driving.

- Avoid driving between midnight and 6 a.m. or in the mid-afternoon when sleepiness peaks, according to the Sleep Foundation.
 - Ask to change medications if they cause drowsiness. Check to see if supplements list drowsiness as reactions and avoid those that do.
 - Take breaks when driving long distances. Travel with a driving partner who can share the responsibility of driving.
- Drowsy driving is a problem that can be prevented. But drivers must first recognize the threat that drowsy driving can pose.



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Tips before buying a car online

Car buying has come a long way since automobiles were first made available to the masses. Over time, drivers' options in regard to available vehicles have increased and the methods of paying for vehicles has changed. While many facets of the car buying process have slowly evolved over time, one relatively recent change has had a dramatic effect on how motorists shop for their vehicles.

The internet has changed much about how products are bought and sold, and cars are no exception. A 2017 study from Root & Associates/CDK found that 53 percent of consumers said they were "very" or "extremely" likely to conduct an entire car purchase online.

- Comparison shop in person. Comparison shopping is a savvy move for consumers regardless of what they're buying, and it can be especially beneficial to online car shoppers to begin doing so in person. According to the 2016 Beepi Consumer Automotive Index, 87 percent of Americans dislike something about car shopping at dealerships. In spite of that discomfort, visiting a dealership gives car buyers, even those who fully intend to buy online, a chance to test drive various vehicles and experience certain features for themselves. Buyers can then use these visits to inform their online buying decisions.

"Some consumers feel there are advantages to buying vehicles online, but those who have never done so should keep a few pointers in mind as they shop for their next car or truck."

- Focus your search on local dealerships. The internet has connected consumers to businesses on the other side of the globe and vice versa. While buyers might find great deals on cars being sold by dealerships hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away, it's often wiser to focus searches on local dealerships. Dealers often offer incentives like free loaner cars or service discounts, but those incentives only benefit buyers if they live in close proximity to the dealerships where they purchased their vehicles.

- See the car in person. Looks can be deceiving, and that applies to vehicles being sold online as much as anything else. If possible, buyers should see a car in person before buying it. Buyers who have found a car they're interested in should email the dealership that's selling the vehicle to arrange a test drive. Emailing tends to be the favored way to communicate, as buyers may find themselves inundated with calls if they contact dealers over the phone. Buyers who cannot see a car in person but want to buy it anyway should familiarize themselves with return policies if the car does not meet their expectations upon delivery.

Savvy consumers can employ various strategies to make online car buying work for them.

How to sell a car quickly

Used cars have become much more popular thanks to the affordability and reliability of certified-preowned vehicles. According to the financial resource Dave Ramsey, a brand-new car loses somewhere between 9 and 11 percent of its value the moment it is driven off of the lot. That's like throwing away \$3,000 on a \$30,000 vehicle in an instant.

The car research resource The Car Connection says there are more than 250 million used cars on the road in the United States, and every year roughly 40 million people sell and buy used cars compared to the 14 million new vehicles. People who are considering selling a vehicle to capitalize on the used-car boom can follow these guidelines to sell quickly.

Prepare the vehicle

It's hard not to judge a book by its cover. The same can be said for the way prospective buyers will view a car or truck, particularly if it is dirty. Cleaning the interior and exterior and removing any items from the trunk, cargo bed, glove compartment, and any other storage areas will give a positive impression. The level of cleanliness will give buyers the impression that the vehicle has been well-maintained.

Price it correctly

Use trusted resources to appraise the

value of the vehicle being sold. Kelley Blue Book is an industry standard for determining the value of a vehicle for sale. A vehicle that is priced at or slightly below other similar cars or trucks will sell more quickly.

Gather your documents

Put together a folder of receipts, maintenance schedules and any other paperwork that has been gathered through the years. Paperwork also should include the vehicle title and original sales paperwork. This will indicate to potential buyers that the car has been diligently maintained and that the previous owner was organized.

Make repairs

Depending on how much a person is willing to spend or concede in price negotiations, repair the vehicle accordingly. Types of repairs can include replacing burned out lights, fixing chips and cracks, replacing or repairing tires, repairing dings and scratches, and checking and replacing brakes.

Advertise in the right places

Major automobile listing sites are a good place to start, as are newspaper classifieds and local social media sales marketplaces. Include plenty of well-lit pictures of the interior and exterior, and include detailed information on the vehicle, including any special features. This will generate interest from serious buyers.

Taking certain steps to sell a used vehicle can make the process go quickly and smoothly.

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The very real benefits of wearing seat belts

The importance of wearing seat belts in vehicles has resonated with drivers and passengers across the globe. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the national seat belt use rate in passenger vehicles in 2019 was 90.7 percent. And despite their simplicity, particularly when compared to the various other technologies available in modern vehicles, seat belts remain an incredibly effective device against injury and even death, though only when drivers and their

passengers remember to engage them. For example, the NHTSA notes that seat belts saved an estimated 14,955 lives in 2017 alone. Unfortunately, the NHTSA also reports that 47 percent of the 37,133 people killed in motor vehicle crashes in 2017 were not wearing seat belts. Studies have indicated that front seat riders in cars who wear their seat belts can reduce their risk of fatal injury by 45 percent, while front seat riders in trucks can reduce their risk for fatal injury by 60 percent.

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Technology that can make driving safer

Technology plays such a significant role in modern life that it can sometimes prove hard to ignore, even when drivers are behind the wheel. In fact, data from the National Security Council indicates that more than 700 people are injured in distracted driving crashes every day, and many of those crashes involve drivers who were distracted by their devices.

While technology can distract drivers, indirectly making the roads more dangerous as a result, the following technological advancements also can make driving considerably safer.

- **Backup camera:** Seasoned drivers know that danger can arise at any time while driving, including when backing out of one's own driveway or even a parking spot. Backup camera technology feeds video directly to drivers' dashboards, allowing them to get a clear view of what is directly behind their vehicles. This reduces the risk of hitting anyone, including small children playing in the driveway and pedestrians on the sidewalk, when driving in reverse.

- **Automatic emergency braking:** These systems, sometimes referred to as "AEB" on dealership window stickers, alert drivers to imminent danger. AEB systems can independently brake when drivers are not responding to danger, preventing potentially deadly collisions. Systems may detect cars both near and far, making them valuable when driving on crowded city streets as well as on highways where cars may not be so close but are driving at high speeds. AEB systems may even detect pedestrians. Some vehicles can even be equipped with rear automatic emergency braking systems, or Rear AEB, which automatically apply the brakes if sensors detect objects behind the vehicle while it's in reverse.

- **LED headlights:** LED headlights may not inspire the awe of backup cameras or AEB systems, but they can be just as effective at making driving safer. LED headlights tend to produce greater light output than traditional headlamps, making it easier for drivers to see at night. LED headlights also last much longer than halogen bulbs, meaning they won't fade as quickly, keeping more light on the road for longer periods of time.

- **Autonomous cruise control:** Autonomous cruise control, or ACC, systems operate in similar fashion to traditional cruise control with a key distinction. When engaged, ACC systems adjust vehicle speeds so cars and trucks maintain a safe distance from vehicles ahead of them.

Technology has forever changed the way people drive. Modern vehicles are safer than ever before thanks to technological advancements that help drivers avoid accidents in myriad ways.

Tips to safely sell a car on your own

More and more auto buyers are considering and ultimately purchasing pre-owned vehicles. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, used vehicle sales in the United States have risen every year since 2013.

The increase in used car sales over the last decade reflects a growing confidence among consumers that preowned vehicles are reliable and worth buyers' investment. Though many dealerships now offer sizable inventories of preowned vehicles, private citizens can still sell vehicles on their own. Car owners hoping to do so can consider the following tips to ensure the process is safe and smooth.

- **Fix any issues with the vehicle.** The competition to attract buyers' attention will be steep. Private sellers will have to contend with the hesitation buyers naturally have about preowned vehicles as well as dealerships that specialize in used car sales. Dealerships typically offer preowned vehicle warranties that guarantee the life of certain components. To compete against such offerings, private sellers must make every effort to fix issues with their vehicles prior to putting them up for sale. Mechanical issues must be addressed, but cosmetic issues like cracks in the windshield, dents or scratches on the vehicle exterior and even aging tires should be fixed/replaced as well.

- **Prepare a maintenance portfolio.**

A portfolio of maintenance receipts can impress buyers and reassure them that the car has been well-maintained. Receipts for oil changes, annual tune-ups, repairs that were made, and even receipts for new tires can be included in the portfolio.

- **Screen prospective buyers.** The automotive experts at Kelley Blue Book recommend that sellers insist on speaking with serious buyers over the phone prior to scheduling a test drive. Such conversations give sellers a chance to vet buyers about what they're looking for and whether or not they've arranged financing. KBB advises sellers to be wary of buyers who offer to purchase vehicles sight unseen.

- **Contact your insurance provider.** Prospective buyers will want to test drive the vehicle, so contact your insurance provider to confirm that your coverage extends to other drivers. Some companies may request that you get a copy of prospective buyers' drivers licenses. If such a request is made by your provider, mention that to buyers when speaking with them on the phone.

- **Meet at a public location.** When scheduling a test drive, insist on meeting at a public location away from your home, such as a grocery store parking lot. The test drive can begin and end at this location. This measure is designed to keep sellers safe.



- **Insist buyers make financial arrangements on their own.** When a buyer agrees to purchase the vehicle, KBB recommends that sellers insist they make financial arrangements on their own. In addition, KBB suggests asking buyers to put down a deposit and get back in touch when they're ready to conclude the sale.

Private sellers can take various measures to ensure the process of selling their vehicles goes safely and smoothly.

How to effectively and safely sanitize a car

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way people live. One readily felt effect was spending more time at home. Vehicles sat idle in driveways and even some automotive insurance providers reduced rates because people were driving much less.

Even with stay-at-home measures in place, people still need to leave their homes to stock up on essentials, such as food or medicine. In other cases, people may have been essential workers who drive for a living, including delivery drivers or health care personnel who were incapable of working from home.

Any time a person goes out in public, he or she runs the risk of contracting viruses. Bacteria and germs may reside on various surfaces, including those inside vehicles.

People want to protect themselves and now are more aware of the importance of frequently cleaning and sanitizing their cars. Keeping a vehicle safe to drive without affecting its upholstery or electronic components

See **Sanitize your car**, Page 6B

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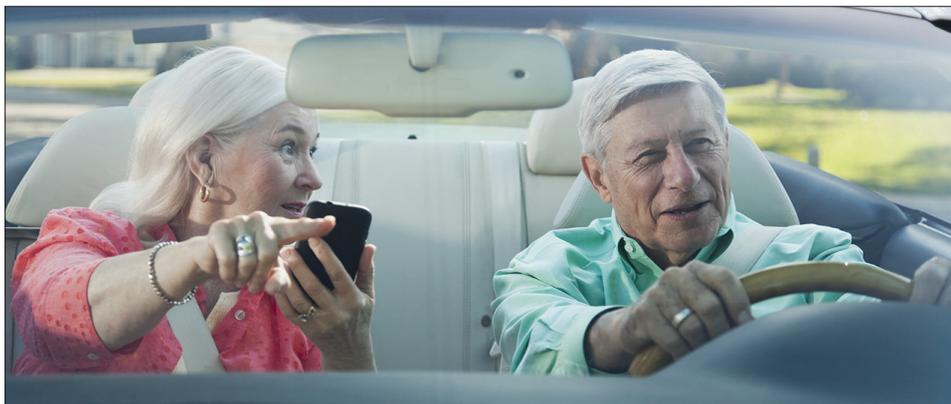
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Signs of unsafe driving in older drivers



A license to drive has long been symbolic of independence. Teenage drivers long for the day they earn their licenses and can take to the road without mom or dad riding shotgun, while aging drivers want to keep driving as long as possible so they can come and go as they please in their golden years.

There's no formula drivers and their families can employ to determine when it's time to take the car keys away from senior citizens. Thankfully, fatal collisions involving older drivers have declined considerably in recent decades. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, collision-related fatalities among drivers ages 70 and older declined by 15 percent between 1997 and 2018. A host of factors have no doubt contributed to that decline, including lane-assist technology and forward collision warning systems that have become standard offerings on many modern vehicles.

As much as technology has helped make driving safer for everyone, aging drivers should still keep an eye out for certain signs that may indicate their skills behind the wheel are diminishing and potentially compromising their ability to drive safely. According to AARP, the following are warning signs of unsafe driving.

- **Delayed response to unexpected situations:** Frequent close calls and narrowly avoiding collisions when other drivers stop suddenly indicate reduced response time that can put aging drivers at an elevated risk of being involved in an accident.
- **Becoming easily distracted while driv-**

ing: Distracted driving has become a significant concern in recent decades, but it's often associated with young drivers. However, aging drivers who are easily distracted also pose a safety risk to themselves and other motorists.

- **Decrease in confidence while driving:** Only drivers will know if they feel confident enough to drive safely, and it's vital that aging drivers be honest with themselves when assessing how they feel when driving.

- **Having difficulty moving into or maintaining the correct lane of traffic:** Lane-assist technology can help drivers recognize how often they're staying in the correct lane of traffic. When the warning bell goes off frequently, it might be time for older drivers to reconsider if it's safe for them to be behind the wheel.

- **Hitting curbs when making right turns or backing up:** Hitting curbs when turning or backing up indicates drivers may be having difficulty controlling their vehicles and/or seeing the road, both of which indicate it's no longer safe for drivers to get behind the wheel.

- **Getting scrapes or dents on car, garage or mailbox:** These signs also indicate drivers are having trouble controlling their vehicles.

- **Driving too fast or too slow for road conditions:** This indicates drivers are not as alert to their surroundings as they need to be to stay safe on the road.

It's not easy for aging drivers to relinquish their drivers' licenses. Learning to recognize potential warning signs of unsafe driving can help aging drivers make the safest decisions for themselves, their passengers and their fellow motorists.

Car trouble? Check the fuse box

Modern automobiles are technological marvels that rely on electrical components more than ever before. According to The Family Handyman, vehicles have 40 or more fuses grouped in two or more places.

Just like fuses in a home's electrical panel, automotive fuses stop excessive current flow that can overheat circuits, damage equipment or cause fires. Any electrical component in a vehicle, such as the radio or headlights, are tied to a fuse.

When something goes awry with automotive electrical components, drivers may be quick to believe the components themselves or even the car's battery or alternator are to blame. Mechanics say that it's entirely possible that a blown fuse is the cause of the problem. Simply checking and/or replacing the fuse can alleviate the issue.

Finding the fuses

The location of the fuse box depends on the make and model of the vehicle. Drivers should consult their owner's manual to learn where the fuse boxes are located. Some vehicles have two fuse boxes that serve different purposes. Engine compartment fuse boxes protect certain engine components, including the anti-lock brake pump. Fuses inside or beneath the dashboard may protect dome lights or the air conditioning system.

According to How a Car Works, the individual fuses in the box are typically numbered. That makes it easier for drivers to determine which vehicle components

aren't working. If the fuses are not numbered, then it's a matter of removing fuses to see which circuits stop working to help narrow down the issue.

Replacing fuses

Vehicles may have different types of fuses. It's important to know which ones are in the car so you can get the right replacement.

"Blade" fuses are common and have a conductive horseshoe-shaped metal strip that runs through an outer plastic housing. If the metal strip appears broken, the fuse is no good.

Cylindrical glass fuses are found in some cars. They're also known as "Buss" fuses. If the metal strip that runs down the center is broken, the fuse needs to be replaced.

Older European cars have ceramic fuses built with an outer copper conductive surface. The narrow part of the copper piece breaks in the middle when the fuse blows.

Regardless of their design, fuses will be clearly labeled with their ampere ratings, according to CarID. Physically remove the fuse using a small, specially shaped fuse puller tool that may be included inside the fuse box. Replace the fuse with one of the same amperage by gently pushing it into place.

If the new fuse blows relatively quickly after replacement, or multiple fuses blow at one time, a larger current issue may be the problem. Consult a mechanic in this instance.

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The top distractions behind the wheel

Did you know that a vehicle driven at 55 miles per hour or faster can traverse the length of an entire football field in a matter of seconds?

Driving requires not only knowledge of the rules of the road and skill behind the wheel, but also concentration on the task at hand. Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration indicates distracted driving has been a significant factor in fatal car crashes. NHTSA says as many as one in 10 deaths are now attributed to driver distraction.

Distractions can come in many forms but fall into one of three categories: manual, visual and cognitive. Any distraction has the potential for serious consequences, including deadly accidents. Here's a look at some of the common distractions and how to avoid them.

- **Mobile phone use:** Texting while driving is one of the most dangerous forms of distracted driving. Texting combines cognitive, manual and visual distractions. Turn off phones while behind the wheel to help reduce the temptation to grab the phone.

- **Daydreaming:** Being lost in one's thoughts can be a big distraction. Driving with something heavy on one's mind can cause a person to lose track of the road. This may occur when experiencing intense emotions, particularly anger or stress. There's also a condition called "highway hypnosis" that causes drivers to "zone out" while driving. It often occurs while driving on open highways for extended periods of time. Taking breaks and pulling over if you notice your mind wandering can help.

- **Pets and children:** Young children or unsecured pets can be very distracting in the car. As a child calls out, begins to cry or wants his or her needs met, drivers may turn to address those needs and take their eyes off the road. Pets that are moving around the vehicle also may distract a driver. All pets and children should be secure in the vehicle at all times.

- **Adjusting the GPS:** Recalibrating the GPS or entering an address while driving can be a distraction. It's best not to touch the GPS unless the car is in park and at a complete stop.

- **Eating or drinking:** Taking hands off the wheel to enjoy that drive-thru meal can be a mistake. Looking down at food and removing hands from the wheel reduces one's ability to steer and react immediately to sudden traffic hazards.

If drivers become knowledgeable of the significant hazards of distracted driving, they can make changes to improve overall safety. Completing certain tasks before leaving home or while the vehicle is parked can reduce the need to multitask while driving.

Sanitize your Car

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is paramount.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention makes a distinction between cleaning and disinfecting. Cleaning refers to the removal of germs, dirt and impurities from surfaces. It does not kill germs, but can lower their numbers. Disinfecting refers to using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. The following are some ways to deeply clean and sanitize a car.

- **Wash hands.** First and foremost, it is crucial to wash your hands before and after using the car. This can reduce the likelihood of growing ill because of transferred viruses or bacteria.

- **Use rubbing alcohol.** Solutions that contain 70 percent alcohol are effective against many viruses and bacteria, including coronaviruses, says the CDC. Furthermore, Jeff Stout, Executive Director of Global Innovation at Yanfeng Automotive Interiors, says that, for the most part, nearly every interior surface of a vehicle can be cleaned with isopropyl alcohol. Plastic to painted chrome to imitation leather have been tested

to ensure they don't degrade when exposed to pure isopropyl alcohol.

- **Avoid bleach or hydrogen peroxide.** While bleach and peroxide are very effective cleaners and sanitizers, they are likely to damage a car's upholstery, according to Consumer Reports.

- **Use soap and water:** Experts say that vigorous washing with a soap-and-water solution can be effective against many contaminants because it breaks down the protective envelope that surrounds coronaviruses and other germs to disarm them. Friction also can help to break down germ cells during cleaning.

"You want to do the best with what you have, so even soap and water can chip away at the risk," says Stephen Thomas, M.D., Chief of Infectious Diseases and Director of Global Health at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, NY.

- **Address frequently touched surfaces.** Pay attention to the steering wheel, door handles, buttons, touch-screen displays, shift lever, and more when sanitizing. Each of these items can harbor germs.

Deep-cleaning a vehicle has become a necessity since COVID-19 emerged. Frequently cleaning and sanitizing can help make vehicles safer to operate.

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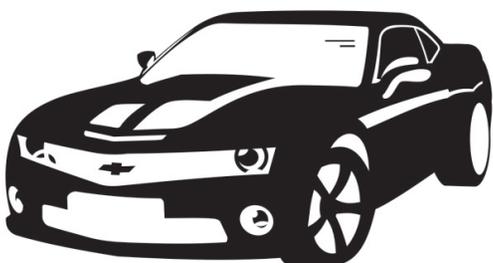
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The importance of enrolling teens in driving school

As teenagers eagerly await the arrival of the birthday that makes them eligible to get their drivers' licenses, they may be anticipating the freedom that being able to drive alone provides. But that excitement can overshadow the immense responsibility of operating a motor vehicle.

According to Geico, 25 percent of 16-year-old drivers are involved in a car accident during their first year of driving. Expertise behind the wheel comes with practice, and starting teen driving journeys with a good foundation of information and instruction is key. Enrolling in a driver's education program can be a wise investment, and one that reduces the number of collisions on the road.

The following are some ways driving school can benefit young drivers.

- **Pass your test the first time:** Though requirements are different depending on where drivers live, they typically must pass both a written and a road test to earn their licenses. Driver's education courses go over the rules of the road and the laws governing safe driving. A road instructor will go over driving basics and help you put them into practice while behind the wheel.

- **Access to an expert:** While Mom,

Dad or another trusted adult may have the best intentions when teaching teens how to drive, they may be rusty with some of the rules. Furthermore, they may have adopted habits or shortcuts that, while they work for them, may not be the proper way to instruct new drivers. A driving school helps teens learn how to drive well and safely.

- **Specially equipped vehicles:** The vehicles that driving schools have in their fleets have been modified to be especially safe. Most feature a rearview mirror and an additional brake pedal on the passenger side. This enables the driving instructor to have a clear view and also to act, if necessary, to avoid a collision while the student is still learning.

- **Meet requirements:** Most states in the United States require driver training courses in some shape or form before a teen is able to get his or her license. In New Jersey, for example, obtaining a license is a multi-stage process. At age 16, teens may apply for a learner's permit with proof of enrollment in a behind-the-wheel driver training course and a passing grade on the written test. At age 17, the student must then pass the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission road test. A probationary license will



ENROLLING IN a driver's education program can be a wise investment, and one that reduces the number of collisions on the road.

then be issued. If rules are followed during the probationary one-year period, a basic license is issued at age 18.

Driving schools also may facilitate contact between teen drivers and a local motor vehicle department, such as

setting up road and written test appointments and enabling teens to use their vehicles for the road test. Such factors only underscore the ways families can benefit from enrolling young drivers in driving school.

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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 bells 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.

Did you know?

A flashlight is an invaluable part of any disaster preparedness kit, and it's a handy tool to have on hand in a car, at home or when traveling. You never know when you might need a flashlight, and it's helpful to have many on hand. When stocking up on flashlights for emergency kits, choose

ones with light-emitting diode, or LED, technology. According to Popular Mechanics, LED flashlights are 70 percent more efficient than incandescent models. That means the batteries powering the light have the potential to last 10 times longer. Furthermore, LEDs do not have any fragile parts like incandescent bulbs. That makes them more likely to withstand shock or even endure being dropped.

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Stock up on vehicle breakdown supplies

Unforeseen situations can crop up at any time. Anyone who has had a roadside breakdown in their car understands this. A flat tire or an engine malfunction is something no driver wants to experience, but those with a well-stocked vehicle emergency kit and breakdown strategy can get through most situations rather easily.

A 2017 survey from AAA found that 40 percent of drivers in the United States are not ready to handle a typical roadside emergency breakdown. The organization estimates it helps some seven million motorists get back on the road each summer. A well-equipped roadside emergency kit may help drivers get their vehicles back on the road on their own.

• **First aid kit:** The first aid kit will celebrate its 133rd birthday in 2021. The Johnson & Johnson company began commercializing first aid kits in 1888. Having a first aid kit in the car to treat minor injuries can be helpful in the event of an accident or even after injuring oneself during a breakdown.

• **Fire extinguisher:** Cars are full of various mechanical parts and are susceptible to catching on fire. The National Fire Protection Association says vehicle fire extinguishers need to be rated for Class B and C fires.

• **Jumper cables:** A weak or dead battery is often the culprit in breakdowns. Jumper cables enable drivers to get a charge from another motorist, and may help get a person back on the road quickly. If possible, get a set of cables that also comes with safety gloves

and heavy duty clamps, offers Defensive Driving Online, a defensive driving course.

• **Mobile phone/charger:** A mobile phone is essential for calling for assistance, but the phone is only useful if it's charged.

• **Blanket:** Keep a blanket in the trunk or another storage area. Should the vehicle die in cold weather, that blanket can help keep passengers warm until assistance arrives.

• **Basic tools:** Tools like a screwdriver, ratchet set and wrench may enable drivers to complete minor repairs. Tools also should include tire-changing gear, such as a jack and lug nut remover.

• **Traction aid:** Non-clumping kitty litter or sand can provide the traction needed to get off of a slippery area of roadway.

• **Flashlight:** A flashlight can help keep you visible and able to see your surroundings in dark conditions.

• **Flares:** Should a breakdown occur in the dark, flares can alert other drivers.

• **Snacks and water:** Water and food that stores well, such as emergency rations, granola bars or trail mix, can quell hunger pangs and provide an energy boost while waiting for help.

• **Rope/bungee cords/tarp:** These items can be used in various situations to secure a vehicle.

While drivers can gather these items separately, many companies offer all-in-one vehicle emergency kits. A safety kit is essential for all drivers.

Signs headlights may need to be replaced

Automobiles require a little TLC to stay on the road and operate efficiently. When vehicle maintenance is ignored, vehicles operate less efficiently and, in many instances, less safely as well.

Jerking and stalling is a telltale sign of engine trouble, but some vehicle problems are more subtle. One such problem is fading headlights. Fading headlights can pose a significant threat to drivers and their passengers as well as fellow motorists. According to the National Safety Council, drivers do only one-quarter of their driving at night. However, the NSC notes that 50 percent of traffic deaths occur at night. Such figures highlight the potential dangers of nighttime driving, which only becomes more dangerous if headlights are not operating at optimal capacity.

Since drivers do most of their driving during the daytime, it's easy to overlook headlight performance. However, it's important that drivers learn to recognize the signs that headlights need to be replaced.

Dimming

Dimming headlights do not necessarily require replacement. In some instances dimming headlights are a byproduct of a dirty car. The buildup of dirt and grime

can reduce light output even when the headlights are otherwise fine. If your car is dirty, take it to the car wash and make sure the headlights are scrubbed clean of dirt and grime. Then drive at night to see if the light output of your headlights is still dim. If so, the headlight bulbs need to be replaced.

Flickering

Flickering headlights can indicate anything from worn out headlight bulbs to a weak car battery to loose connections. Flickering is one of the more dangerous headlight issues, as it can lead to headlights suddenly going dark while drivers are on the road at night. If headlights are flickering, take the car to a mechanic as soon as possible to have the issue resolved.

One light out

When one headlight goes dark, chances are the other is not far behind. Automotive experts recommend replacing headlight bulbs in pairs, even if only one bulb has gone dark, because this ensures equal light output.

Headlight maintenance tends to be overlooked. But recognizing the signs of fading headlights can help drivers avoid accidents and vastly improve the safety of nighttime driving.

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Why is tire rotation so important?

Vehicle owners need to keep maintenance on the mind to ensure their cars and trucks are operating at peak capacity. Various components should be checked and serviced at key intervals. Oil changes and fluid top-offs are part of routine maintenance, but it can be easy to forget about other important parts of the vehicle, including tires.

Rotating tires is vital to their upkeep. Bridgestone Tires advises that tire rotation involves routinely repositioning a vehicle's tires in specific patterns from front to back and side to side. According to Big O Tires, the front tires tend to wear on the outside edges because the tire leans over when a driver turns a corner. The rear tires just follow the front ones, so they usually wear more evenly. By leaving tires in place, the outside edges on the front tires will wear down much faster than the rest and those tires will need to be replaced sooner. Rotation may be required by tire warranties. Rotation also keeps the tires working properly.

Experts generally advise tire rotation every 6,000 to 8,000 miles, even if they do not show any signs of wear. It is challenging to determine if weather treads are uneven or how much wear has been sustained just by looking at them. Rotating tires can prolong

the life of tires and decrease how frequently they need to be replaced.

Rotating tires keeps the tread depth uniform and helps maintain traction and consistent handling across all four tires. Bridgestone says the tire rotation pattern that is best for a particular vehicle depends on the type of tire being used. Patterns are recommended by the standardizing body of the tire industry, called The Tire and Rim Association, Inc. Individuals can consult with professional mechanics about the proper way to rotate tires. Many tire manufacturers or automotive stores that have sold customers tires also will do tire rotations — some free of charge.

In addition to proper traction, minimizing uneven tire treads causes the vehicle to be more balanced, advises Wrench, a mobile auto repair and maintenance company. This enables the driver to have more control even when roads are slippery. Many auto service centers will then align and balance tires after they have been rotated. At this time the mechanic will likely check brakes as well, since it is easy to see and reach them when the tires are off.

Tire rotation is an important component of vehicle maintenance. Check with a qualified automotive professional to see if it's time to have your vehicle's tires rotated.



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Gas in a car won't stay fresh forever

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 in 2019-20 had a significant impact on drivers. In an effort to stop the spread of the virus, many countries issued stay-at-home orders that mandated businesses close their doors and allow employees to work from home. In addition, restaurants and popular tourist destinations were closed for a period of time, giving people few reasons to drive. As a result, drivers ended up spending less time on the road and less money at the gas station. But what about the gas they did purchase? Can gas go bad? Yes it can, according to Consumer Reports,

which notes that the lighter, more volatile components of gasoline evaporate over time. Old gas can compromise engine performance, potentially causing a car to hesitate or stall. Gas that has gone bad can begin to smell like varnish and will darken over time, though discoloration often occurs only in the most extreme situations. To determine if gas smells differently, drivers should avoid putting their nose into their vehicle's gas tanks. Instead, remove the gas cap and stand next to the car where you would normally put the gas pump. If you detect an aroma of varnish coming from the car, then the gas

has likely gone bad. An easier way to determine if gas has gone bad is to consider how long it's been since you refilled the tank. Gas can begin to go bad in as little as three months, so drivers who haven't driven much over that period may have bad gas in their tanks. One way drivers can combat bad gas, even if they aren't driving much, is to add fuel stabilizer when filling up the tank. Fuel stabilizer keeps gas from degrading, but it's only effective if it is mixed with good gasoline, hence the reason to add it when filling up and not when you detect the gas already in the car has gone bad.

Did you know?

Large school buses are not equipped with seat belts, but that doesn't compromise their ability to transport students safely to and from school. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says that school buses are designed differently than passenger cars and light trucks. As a result of their unique design, as well as their size and weight, school buses distribute crash forces differently from other vehicles, utilizing a different kind of safety restraint system that is effective at keeping passengers safe. This system is known as "compartmentalization." The NHTSA says the interiors of large buses protect children without seat belts because of closely spaced seats that have energy-absorbing seat backs. This compartmentalization will keep children from being forced out of their seats during an impact. However, in the United States, small school buses, or those with a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less, must be equipped with lap or lap/shoulder belts in all seating positions.

Safety features that may help you save money on auto insurance

Vehicles with high safety ratings may not only save drivers' lives in the event of collisions, but they also may save them money. As an incentive for buying cars with various safety features, many insurance companies offer deep discounts to drivers. Although insurance companies may vary in what they consider safety features, the following are generalized options that may qualify drivers for discounted insurance rates.

- Antilock braking system: These systems have been standard equipment on vehicles manufactured since 2012.
- Air bags: These safety features help cushion the blow for people during a crash and include front and side-protection. Discounts increase with the number of air bags.

- Adaptive cruise control: This feature monitors traffic conditions and adjusts speed by controlling the throttle and brakes to maintain distance from other vehicles.

- Daytime running lights: Daytime running lights may make drivers eligible for small discounts.

- Electronic stability control: This prevents vehicles from skidding out or rolling over during hard turns.

- Lane departure warnings: These systems alert drivers if they get too close to the edge of a lane.

- Blind spot sensors: These sensors light up or make a sound when a vehicle is in drivers' blind spots, potentially preventing collisions during lane changes.

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The 5 most expensive vehicles to insure

Buyers must consider a host of factors before purchasing a new vehicle. While the make, model and color of the vehicle may garner the bulk of buyers' attention, the cost of the vehicle bears consideration as well. The sticker price is important, but the cost of insuring a vehicle also can determine just how much a vehicle will cost buyers each month.

Insurance premiums are determined after providers consider various factors, including the age of the driver, his or her accident history and how much he or she drives. The make and model of the vehicle also goes a long way toward determining just how much drivers will have to pay to insure their cars and trucks. The insurance comparison site The Zebra (www.thezebra.com) notes that the following were the five most expensive vehicles to insure in 2020.

1. BMW i8: Getting behind the wheel of this high-performance sports car cost drivers an average of \$4,303 in insurance premiums. That's a relatively small price to pay for a vehicle with a manufacturer-suggested retail price (MSRP) of \$147,500.

2. Maserati Quattroporte: A luxury sports sedan with an MSRP just under \$100,000, the sleek Maserati Quattroporte cost drivers an average of \$4,062 in annual insurance premiums.

3. Nissan GT-R: As a manufacturer, Nissan might not be associated with the world's most expensive automakers. But its GT-R, a high-performance sports luxury vehicle with an MSRP of \$113,540, will cost drivers a luxury-like \$3,864 in annual insurance premiums.

4. Maserati GranTurismo: With the highest MSRP (\$150,380) of any car in the top five, the Maserati GranTurismo might be seen as a relative bargain to insure, costing drivers an annual average of \$3,735.

5. Mercedes-Benz S-Class: The S-Class is a classic Mercedes-Benz luxury sedan with an MSRP of \$94,250. Drivers can expect to pay an annual premium of \$3,684 to insure this sleek and stylish example of classic luxury.



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