



On the **ROAD**

A publication of ROCK VALLEY PUBLISHING • Spring/Summer 2025

- CONSERVING FUEL • SIGNS NEW TIRES ARE NEEDED
- BUYING PRE-OWNED • MODERN VEHICLE FEATURES

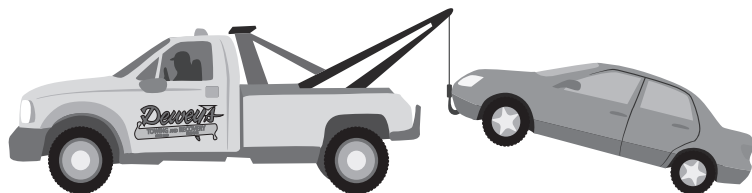


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Tips to conserve fuel on road trips

Road trips remind drivers of just how thrilling the open road can be. For millions of individuals, nothing provides a sense of escapism as effectively as the open road.

Though road trips can be liberating, they do not allow a complete escape from reality, something drivers realize when the time comes to fill up the gas tank. Gas prices fell considerably by mid-December 2023, dipping to an average of \$3.12 per gallon of regular by the middle of that month according to data from AAA.

That marked a significant decline from just a month earlier, when prices for a gallon of regular gas averaged \$3.36.

But drivers know prices can spike just as quickly as they drop, so it pays dividends to recognize strategies to conserve fuel. Such strategies can be especially beneficial for drivers about to embark on a road trip.

• **Slow down.** Pushing the pedal to the medal might be a romantic, if unsafe, notion of how to drive on a road trip. But that approach can be costly at the pump.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, every five miles per hour motorists drive over 50 miles per hour is the equivalent of paying \$0.30 more per gallon of gas. That estimate is based on a gallon of gas costing \$4.32, but drivers can still conserve a considerable amount of

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Four signs it's time to replace your tires

Drivers who feel their tires are slipping can test the tread and replace them if needed.
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Inflation has been a hot topic for several years, as the cost of everything from groceries to gas to housing has increased considerably since 2019.

Cars are no exception to that phenomenon, and anyone who has purchased a new car over the last half decade likely experienced some sticker shock when they started their search for a new vehicle.

Data from Kelley Blue Book indicates the average cost of a new car was \$37,590 in 2019. By 2023, the average cost had risen to \$47,899. That marks an increase of more than 27 percent in a four-year period.

Cars are indeed a significant investment, which underscores the importance of vehicle maintenance. Maintenance is more than just tending to what's under the hood.

Tires also require drivers' attention, as aging, damaged tires pose a safety risk that also compromise vehicle performance. Tires are easily overlooked, but the following are four signs tires need to be replaced.

1. WORN TREAD

The automotive experts at AutoZone

note that tread depth is the most prevalent indicator that a tire needs to be replaced. AutoZone notes that tread depth should always be at least 2/32 of an inch throughout the tire. Depth should be measured across the tread and around the circumference. If it's at or below 2/32 of an inch, the tire should be replaced.

2. BULGES, GOUGES OR CRACKS

Geico notes that a deflated tire bulges at the sides, and that can compromise the safety of everyone in the vehicle. AutoZone says bulges occur when air gets between the inner liner and outer rubber layers, which can happen after hitting a curb or driving over a sizable pothole. A gouge or cut that is deeper than the outer layer of the tire also necessitates replacement.

3. POOR GRIP

Drivers may be able to feel certain tire problems, including poor grip, while driving. In such instances, tires may feel as though they are slipping. The tire experts at Firestone note that low tread can

reduce tire traction and cause wheels to slip, which may be more noticeable when accelerating from a stop or driving on wet roads. Drivers who feel their tires are slipping can test the tread and replace tires that are low.

4. VIBRATION

Vibration is another issue drivers may feel rather than see. And identifying the cause requires noting where the vibrations are felt. Geico notes that a feeling of vibration or thumping that feels like it's coming from under the seats may indicate the tires are not balanced.

A suspension issue could be to blame if the steering wheel feels like it's vibrating. Either feeling should be brought to the attention of a mechanic immediately.

Tire issues affect vehicle performance and compromise the safety of drivers, their passengers and fellow motorists. When vehicles are not performing at peak capacity, drivers should not overlook various tire issues as a potential cause of such troubles.

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On the ROAD


2025 SPRING/SUMMER AUTOMOTIVE CARE GUIDE

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1102 Ann St., Delavan, WI 53115
(262) 728-3411

EDITOR:Melanie Bradley
CREATIVE DIRECTOR:Heidi Schulz
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR:
..... Vicki Vanderwerff
SECTION DESIGNER:Jen DeGroot

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Tips for buying a pre-owned vehicle

Car buyers looking to save money can turn to pre-owned when they first start shopping around. Pre-owned vehicles aren't what they were a few generations ago. Many are backed by similar warranties as new vehicles, and can be very reliable and affordable options.

According to U.S. News and World Report, the average transaction price for a new vehicle is around \$50,000. For many, that kind of expense is simply out of reach. The average price for a pre-owned vehicle is about \$27,000, marking a considerable difference. The majority of used vehicles available at dealerships are lease turn-ins. Car and Driver says the average lease term for a vehicle is 36 months. And most lease terms limit the number of miles a driver can put on the vehicle to anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 per year. Buyers who are purchasing pre-owned vehicles that are lease turn-ins may find young vehicles that have low mileage for relatively affordable prices.

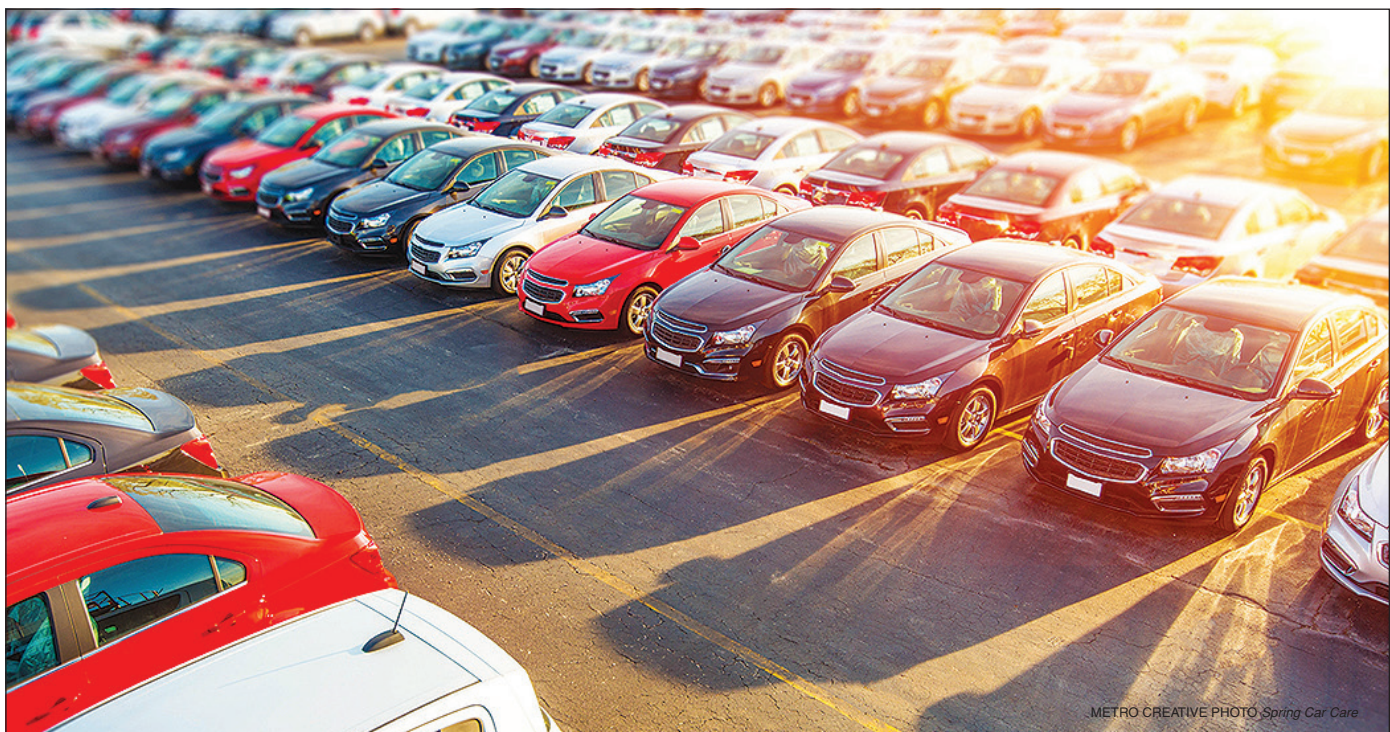
It is important to have a strategy in place when buying a pre-owned vehicle. These tips can help customers navigate the ins and outs of the pre-owned market.

ESTABLISH YOUR BUDGET

As with any other major purchase, determine just how much you can afford to spend. Edmunds says it's a good idea to cap your car payment at 10 percent of your take-home pay. If you are on a tighter budget and anticipate extra work to get the used vehicle road-ready, reduce that percentage even more.

CONSIDER MORE THAN ONE BRAND

Although you may have a brand



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preference, be flexible. Certain brands like Honda, Toyota and Subaru may cost more because they are fan favorites. Expand the possibilities to find a vehicle with the features you desire that also comes in on budget.

COMPARE PRICES

Prices may be affected by where the vehicle is located. Typically you'll spend the least if you buy from a private seller. Dealerships who offer certified pre-owned vehicles often command the most money, but these vehicles tend to be backed by

certifications and limited warranties.

GET A COPY OF THE VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT

A vehicle history report can tell you a lot about the vehicle. Kelley Blue Book says a VHR can list how many people owned the vehicle; indicate if the vehicle has been involved in an accident; reveal if the mileage on the odometer is accurate; if the vehicle has been kept up-to-date with inspections; and if it's considered a lemon. A VHR will not indicate the overall condition or wear-and-tear level.

TEST DRIVE WITH A MECHANIC

If possible, bring a mechanic along on a test drive or when you first check out the vehicle. He or she can provide expertise and help you avoid a potential misstep when buying.

GAUGE COMFORT AND LOOKS

Just as you would before purchasing a new vehicle, determine if a pre-owned car or truck fits your style, needs and comfort levels.

(METRO CREATIVE)

DAILY STEPS TO MAKE A VEHICLE LAST LONGER

Modern cars have longer life expectancies than their predecessors. Consumer Reports indicates it's not unheard of for modern vehicles to endure for 200,000 miles or more. For many, that equates to 12 to 15 years of usage.

Even though many vehicles are built to have increased longevity, it often is up to the driver to do his or her part to ensure cars and trucks can last for years and years. Here are some daily steps vehicle owners can take to achieve longer life spans for their cars or trucks.

TAKE IT SLOW AND STEADY

Athletes do not hit the ground running at top speed, and neither should a vehicle. Let the car gradually acclimate to being on the move each day after sitting overnight. Gently accelerate and afford the engine time to warm up and all of the components to get the fluids they require before you jump on the highway or require the vehicle to go all out. Most automotive experts warn against idling a car in the driveway to warm it up, but starting out at a slow and steady pace is key.

DON'T BE EXTREME

Jerky turns, gunning the gas and braking hard lead to unnecessary wear and tear on a vehicle. By smoothing out your driving, you'll put less stress on mechanical components and help prevent them from



Vehicle owners can take steps each day to improve the longevity of their cars and trucks.

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wearing out prematurely.

CLEAN IT OUT DAILY

Accumulated debris often builds up inside a vehicle that is used all of the time. Taking a few minutes to clear out trash or to wipe down the interior each day

will prolong the interior components, not to mention make it easier to do a more thorough detailing when the time comes.

FIND A TRUSTY FUEL STATION

Bad gas can wreak havoc on a vehicle. Find a station that you trust, particularly

one that takes care of their pumps and regularly changes their pump filters. It's worth it to spend a little more for good gas.

READ YOUR OIL LEVEL

Oil is essential to maintain a properly operating engine and vehicle. AARP suggests routine reading of a car's oil level so that you can add lubricant as necessary. While this might not be a daily task, doing it regularly enough means you will keep on top of this important step.

PARK IN THE SHADE OR A GARAGE

The sun may feel good on a warm day, but the UV rays from the sun can take their toll on a vehicle's paint. Whenever possible, park out of direct sunlight so that the paint will not fade and the interior upholstery will not bleach. Those who need to park their vehicles for an extended period of time should choose a clean, dry, well-ventilated location, advises Wawanesa Insurance.

BE ATTENTIVE

Listen to the sounds your vehicle is making and give it a visual inspection each time you get in or out of the car. The sooner you catch something that is out of the ordinary, the easier it becomes to fix problems before they become costly and damaging.

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Keeping up with interior cleaning and maintenance by doing small jobs regularly will reduce the need for routine deep cleaning.

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Auto interior maintenance and cleaning suggestions

A number of factors are involved in keeping a vehicle functioning and looking good. Ensuring a vehicle interior is clean and tidy is easily overlooked, but such efforts can improve the driving experience.

Drivers who want their cars and trucks to look their best should not forget their vehicle interiors. Drivers unsure where to start can spruce up their vehicle interiors in the following ways.

- Remove any trash. Wrappers, receipts, empty water bottles, and other items can quickly pile up inside a car, especially for drivers who have young children. Routinely go through the vehicle to gather and remove debris.
- Vacuum the interior. Start off with a can of compressed air and blow out dust and any other dirt that has accumulated in tight crevices. Then use a high-powered vacuum to conduct a thorough cleaning. Pay attention to the seams of car seats, door handles, armrests, floor mats (and under them), underneath child safety seats, and the trunk or cargo area. If you don't have a vacuum with a lot of suction, utilize one at a do-it-yourself car wash location.
- Scrub floor mats. Drivers with rubber mats can remove them and make a mild cleaning solution of a few drops of dish soap and warm

water. Use a soft-bristled brush to clean the mats. Upholstered mats can be shampooed using a carpet cleaner. Then rinse and hang to dry. All mats should be completely dry before being returned to the vehicle.

- Clean the upholstery. Seats can get dirty and dingy over time. For cloth vehicle seats, use a proper spray or foam upholstery cleaner. All-purpose cleaner can work on vinyl seats, but leather seats require a special leather soap and conditioner. Avoid products with silicone, which can stain your clothes and may make interior surfaces too slippery.

- Address glass surfaces. Turn your attention to the windshield, windows and mirrors. You can use a store-bought glass cleaner on these surfaces and a lint-free cloth. Avoid products containing ammonia, which may damage tinting on windows.

- Consider lingering odors. If the interior of the car has an odor, the cabin air filter may need to be changed, or there may be water entering somewhere and creating a musty smell. Seek out any problems and address. A car air freshener can further improve the interior smell.

A thorough deep cleaning can be done at least once a month to keep a vehicle's interior fresh and clean.

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Common car noises and what they might be indicating

Although there are many drivers who understand what goes on under the hood of a vehicle and the inner workings of car mechanics, there are plenty of others who might not know a spark plug from a dipstick. For the latter group, random noises when driving can be a cause for immediate alarm.

Certain noises can be innocuous and easily fixed, while others may be indicative of something more complex. Pinpointing where a noise is coming from can help vehicle owners identify the problem. Here's a list of some common sounds and what the causes might be, courtesy of Firestone, Geico and Nationwide.

HIGH-PITCHED SQUEALING

Screeching or squealing coming from the tires when stepping on the brakes likely means that brake pads are wearing down and the indicator is rubbing against the rotor. Although this is not an emergency situation, it does mean that brakes will need to be replaced sooner than later.

RATTLING IN THE WHEEL

If you hear rattling inside of a wheel at low speeds which stops as you drive faster, it could mean there is a loose lug nut inside of the hub cap. That wheel wasn't tightened properly the last time it was removed and replaced. Bring the car to a mechanic as soon as possible.

CLICKING

If you try to start the car and only hear a clicking sound instead of the car turning over, a dead battery is likely the cause. Such a noise also may indicate corroded battery terminals that are preventing the current from flowing. Terminals need to be cleaned. The battery should be checked and jumped, if necessary. If a battery is not holding a charge, a new one is needed.

SQUEAKY OR SCRAPING WINDSHIELD WIPERS

Squeaking and scraping means the windshield wipers are wearing down or the windshield is dirty. Clean the windshield and inspect the wiper blades to make sure they are in working order. A bad wiper and dirty windshield can reduce visibility and make driving dangerous.

CLUNKING SOUNDS

Clunking sounds may indicate a few different



Figuring out the issue when something is awry can prevent further damage.

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issues. A clunking sound might indicate worn out shock absorbers, which absorb vibrations from the wheels. Damaged struts also can cause clunking. Worn out leaf spring shackles that help in off-roading conditions also can cause clunking when they bend or break.

HUMMING, WHINING OR WHIRRING

These strange noises might have different origins. Check if the differential needs to be lubricated. A wheel bearing also could be worn out and produce a noise. In more severe cases, the transmission could be failing. The best course of action is to get a professional opinion from a mechanic.

FLAPPING NOISE

A broken belt typically is the culprit when a vehicle makes a flapping or slapping noise. Something also may be interfering with the fan. Driving with a broken belt may cause severe engine damage, so it's important to address.

SQUEALING UNDER THE HOOD

Squealing can indicate worn or loose accessory belts. In newer cars it might be the serpentine belt. Belts are relatively inexpensive and easy fixes.

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MODERN CAR FEATURES DRIVERS LOVE

Modern vehicles are technological marvels, which has had a profound effect not only on how much drivers enjoy driving, but also how much they're spending to get behind the wheel.

Recent data from Cox Automotive indicates that the average transaction price of a new vehicle is just over \$48,000. That can raise the eyebrows of any budget-conscious car enthusiast, but it's also worth noting that modern vehicles have become more economical in other ways. For instance, the Environmental Protection Agency indicated that the average fuel efficiency for new cars recently improved to a record 25.4 miles per gallon. More fuel-efficient cars and trucks can lower the costs of vehicle ownership.

Many drivers feel that, in addition to being more fuel-efficient, modern vehicles are more fun. That's because modern vehicles boast a number of popular creature comforts that have changed the way people drive. Drivers who haven't shopped for a new car in recent years can look for any number of fun features as they begin their search for a new vehicle.

• **Electronic door handles:** Though not as common as some features, electronic door handles provide a futuristic, if not entirely necessary, feel. These door handles automatically extend out when drivers approach their cars and then retract when



Modern vehicles are loaded with futuristic features that can make driving more fun.

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not in use. This feature is mainly about style, but it also reduces aerodynamic drag, which can help save fuel or, in electric vehicles, improve driving range.

• **Touchscreens:** Screens feature prominently in many parts of the average person's day, so why not when they're in their vehicles as well? Though vehicle

touchscreens have been around for years, auto manufacturers are increasingly switching controls for other components, including windshield wipers, to touchscreens, making for a more sleek interior design that is largely button- and knob-free. In addition, many are offering larger touchscreens, which can simplify driving in cars that no longer feature physical controls.

• **Keyless entry:** Keyless entry systems, though not new, are another component that can provide a futuristic feel. Keyless entry systems once enabled drivers to keep their key fobs in their pocket and simply unlock their vehicles by pressing a button on the door handle. Though some manufacturers still offer button keyless entry systems, more modern systems automatically unlock as drivers reach for the handle or pull it open.

• **Head-up display:** Arguably as futuristic a feature as car buyers may encounter, the head-up display feature puts information directly in drivers' line of sight so they are never looking anywhere but toward the road. Information such as vehicle speed and navigation instructions are projected onto the interior of the windshield, not unlike similar systems that have long been utilized in military planes.

(METRO CREATIVE)

ISSUES THAT MAY ARISE AT CERTAIN VEHICLE MILEAGE INTERVALS

Modern automobiles are technological marvels. As advancements in automotive technology have made cars more reliable than ever, drivers may feel as though vehicle ownership also is more hands-off than ever before. Though it's true built-in diagnostic technology is designed to alert drivers when issues arise, it can still benefit motorists to recognize when certain issues may arise.

Cars and the people who drive them are different, so mileage intervals are not always the best measuring stick for maintenance issues. However, the following rundown can serve as a guidebook for drivers who want to know what to expect at various mileage intervals.

• **30,000 miles:** The experts at Auto Trader note that disposable engine air filters usually last between 15,000 and 30,000 miles. If it's been around 30,000 miles since the engine air filter has been replaced, now is a good time to replace this important part, which prevents components like dirt and debris from getting into the engine. This also might be a good time to replace the fuel filter, which prevents debris from clogging fuel injectors.

• **50,000 to 60,000 miles:** It's around this time that drivers may need to replace their vehicle batteries. Little-used vehicles may need a new battery much earlier, as lengthy periods of little or no use adversely affect the life expectancy of vehicle batteries.

Brakes also may need to be replaced around this time, as the experts at AutoZone note that most drivers get between two and five years out of a set of brake pads. If that sounds like a significant disparity, it is, and that's because driver behavior is a significant variable affecting the life of the pads. Drivers who brake hard will likely need to replace



Drivers also are urged to discuss any additional changes that might be necessary with their mechanics during routine maintenance appointments.

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their brake pads with greater frequency than drivers who brake slowly.

• **50,000 to 90,000 miles:** As noted, there is no uniform guideline governing when vehicle components will need to be replaced. Hoses are a good example of that, as recommendations regarding when to replace hoses range from 50,000 to 90,000 miles. That's a significant gap, but drivers can be on the safe side and start discussing the status of their hoses with their mechanics around the 50,000 mile marker. It's unlikely the hoses will make it all the way to 90,000

miles before they need to be replaced, but drivers can keep that mileage marker in mind and aim to replace the hoses before that point even if no issue has arisen.

Timing belts also tend to fail between 80,000 and 100,000 miles, so this is another part to consider replacing as a vehicle reaches this point.

These mileage markers are not set in stone, and should only serve as a guideline for drivers who want to stay ahead of vehicle repairs.

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CONSERVE FUEL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

fuel by slowing down.

• **Steer clear of city driving.** The stop-and-go traffic that is a hallmark of city driving can compromise fuel efficiency. The Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy notes that rapid acceleration and braking, which is hard to avoid when driving through cities with lots of stoplights and pedestrians, can lower gas mileage by as much as 40 percent.

• **Avoid rooftop cargo.** Rooftop cargo boxes might be a necessity when a car is packed with passengers. But these luxuries come at a steep cost.

A study from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory found that rooftop cargo boxes can reduce fuel efficiency by as much as 17 percent on the highway and as much as 25 percent on interstates where drivers drive at speeds 65-75 miles per hour.

The DOE reports that rear-mount cargo boxes are much more efficient, so drivers looking to conserve fuel may want to pack light and/or opt for rear-mount cargo boxes instead of rooftop boxes.

• **Utilize cruise control.** The auto manufacturer Kia estimates that utilizing the cruise control function on a vehicle can save drivers as much as 14 percent on fuel. Cruise control is not advisable when driving in cities or on roads with stoplights. However, when driving on interstates, driving at the same continuous speed helps drivers avoid constant accelerations and decelerations, which compromise fuel efficiency.

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