



Car Care Articles

Spring car care should involve more than just a quick shampoo

Canada's long, harsh winters not only add stress to our lives, but also to the systems that keep our vehicles safe and reliable and that means a spring makeover should include more than just cosmetics.

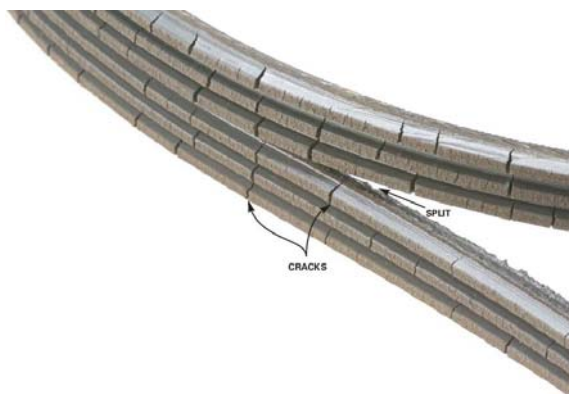
While your immediate focus will likely be on restoring your car, van, SUV or truck's exterior and interior to pristine condition, make sure you also give its mechanical systems a careful once-over to ensure they're ready to deal with the hot summer weather ahead, particularly if its an older or high mileage vehicle.

You can have your service technician do this for you – and many service shops offer spring service special deals - but by following some basic procedures you can spot potential problem areas yourself and then have them dealt with if necessary by a pro.

You should have been keeping your vehicle washed regularly to help keep rust at bay, but if you haven't you need to do so before checking it over as it will be easier to spot damage or problems.

A do-it-yourself spring cleaning process also allows you to flush out salt and sand deposits from areas that a quick run through the car wash often misses. Don't forget the radiator, which may have become partially clogged with debris. A fine spray and a fairly soft brush with long bristles can help here, but don't be too aggressive and damage the thin fins. Visually check it for corrosion or leaks.

With the engine stopped and cool you can clean the compartment with an engine specific spray cleaner, followed by a rinse (avoiding high pressure spray on electrical parts). This will not only make this area look good but often reveal problems.



Hoses should feel firm, not mushy, be free of obvious cracks and show no evidence of leaking at connections. Belts shouldn't be cracked, frayed, brittle or glazed looking and should be firmly, but not too tightly tensioned.

Make sure the engine is completely cool before you check coolant levels. This can usually be done by looking at the reservoir which is marked with maximum and minimum levels. Never remove the radiator cap of a hot engine. If your coolant level is low you can add a 50/50 mixture of anti-freeze and water, but make sure you check it again in a few days

and if it is down, or you notice fluid under the vehicle, you probably have a leak that will require attention. Car Care Canada recommends flushing your cooling system and refilling with fresh coolant every two years as the beneficial chemicals in the coolant break down with age.



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A look around underneath your vehicle - don't actually get under there unless you have the right equipment and knowledge - might reveal a muffler or a hidden part of the body that has been damaged by road debris. Also look for fluid leaks, particularly from the brakes, and under the engine and transmission.

Now, after checking tire pressures, take it for a short test drive. We tend to compensate for developing problems, so adopt an analytical approach when you do this. The brake pedal should feel firm and not move more than a centimeter or two. If travel is excessive, if you have to pump the pedal, or if the car pulls to one side have the vehicle inspected immediately.



Simply driving in a straight line while holding the wheel lightly can alert you to alignment problems. There shouldn't be any side-to-side wander, or pull under braking. If steering response isn't direct and linear and if body roll and reaction to bumps doesn't feel controlled, or if you hear any clunks or clonks, components may be worn or have been damaged by winter road conditions.

There's no sense in putting more dry-road kilometers on those winter tires that kept you safe than is necessary, as this can rapidly reduce their effectiveness. And you should never use winter tires all-year round as they won't provide the same level of traction as summer tires, particularly if they are part worn. Hot weather highway travel can cause their coarser treads and soft compounds to overheat possibly leading to failure.

If you're re-using last year's summer tires have the person installing them check them carefully for tread wear, damage and balance. If you've kept your summer tires mounted on your "good" alloy rims and are installing them yourself ensure they are inflated to the correct pressure and lug nuts tightened to the correct torque.

Check winter tires for damage before storing them, preferably in plastic bags and out of any direct sunshine, so they won't present you with any surprises next fall.



If you didn't replace your windshield wipers last fall, a hard winter will certainly have seriously reduced their effectiveness. If you replaced wipers with the winter type you'll want to switch back to the summer variety.

If you're not sure about any of the things you may have discovered on your spring inspection have them checked out by a properly trained service technician.

It's a good time to go and see him or her anyway, for that spring oil change and tune-up, or just for the peace of mind of having a pro check to make sure you didn't miss anything that will cause problems during the (hopefully) long hot summer. And speaking of that, an annual inspection of your air conditioning system is also recommended, certainly for older vehicles.
