

Car Repairs That Can Waste Your Money

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Windshield replacement

When a flying rock shatters your windshield, you're likely to want to repair or replace it right away. If the break is small, you don't need to spend money on a replacement. Instead, you can repair small chips and cracks yourself.

Replace cabin air filter (and other filters)

Your car has a lot of filters. Some are more important than others, but every filter is an opportunity to save money by replacing it yourself. A great example is the cabin air filter.

You usually access it through the glove compartment. Its main purpose is to improve the air quality inside your car. Most maintenance manuals recommend annual replacement. An auto repair shop will charge you up to \$70. Don't waste your money—do it yourself. Just make sure you buy the right filter for your make and model of car.

Regular engine tune-up

If your car was made in the last ten or 20 years, it doesn't need tune-ups as often as it did decades ago. Modern onboard computers adjust gear ratios and settings to optimize your engine's performance. If your engine seems to be running poorly, a tune-up may fix it, but it's likely to be a specific problem that you can fix yourself, like changing spark plugs.

Lubrication work

The chassis of a modern vehicle, including the ball joints, is almost always lubricated in a closed system. Some heavy vehicles, such as full-size pickup trucks, may still require occasional undercarriage lubrication. Check your owner's manual before you spend money on an unnecessary lubrication job.



Drain coolant (antifreeze)

Flushing the coolant with a cleaning product, flushing can cause more problems than it prevents by removing any contaminants that are at normal levels in the coolant system. Gaskets can be damaged, leaks can occur.

So unless you drive in unusually dusty or dirty conditions, simply draining and replacing the coolant yourself should be sufficient. Even with newer coolant products that have a 100,000-mile lifespan, most vehicles will need to have their coolant replaced from time to time.

Change oil every 3,000 miles

Whether you do it yourself or take your car in for service, most experts agree that we change our engine oil more often than we should.

If you check your owner's manual, you may find that it recommends changing the oil every 5,000 or even 10,000 miles, not the 3,000 miles sticker on the windshield at the service station or dealership.

Fuel injector cleaning

Carbon and dirt buildup on fuel injectors is a problem that needs to be addressed, but these days it is a rare situation that requires professional cleaning.

Fuel injectors in newer cars have improved and are less likely to jam than they were a few years ago. Additionally, the nature and amount of detergents required in gasoline have increased at the same time, providing better protection for fuel injectors. If your car is stalling or sluggish, try upgrading to a top-of-the-line gasoline with better detergents for a few full tanks.

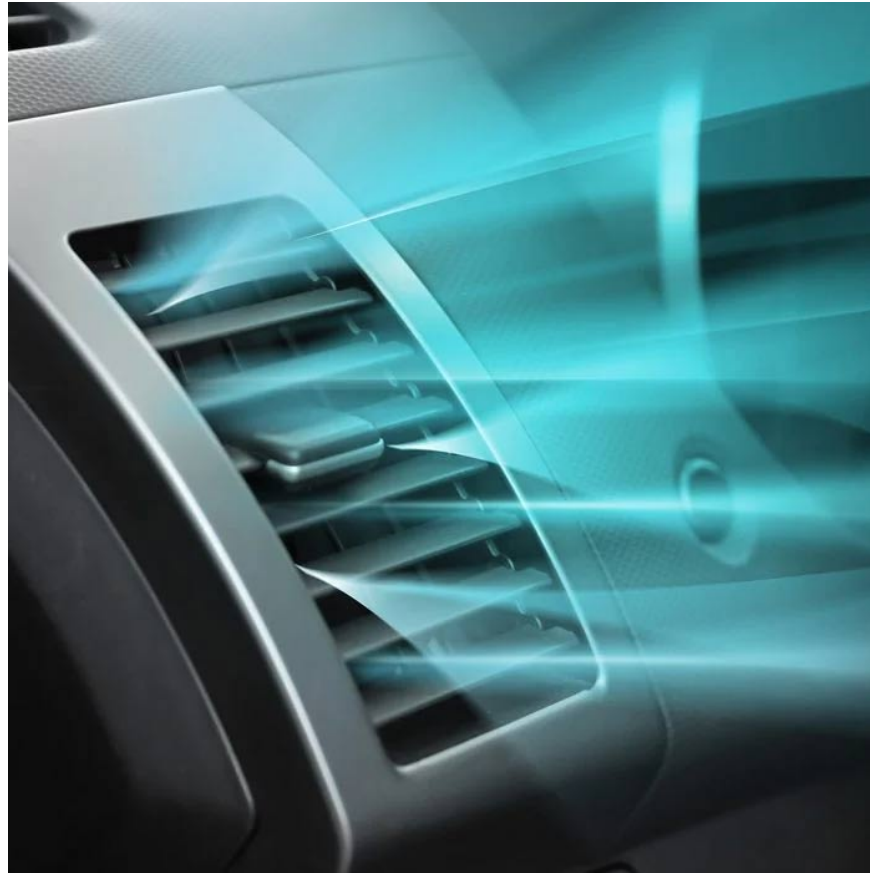
Changing a single tire is fine.

Tires don't usually come in pairs, but the tire salesman will tell you that you need to buy them that way. Or maybe even all four! You'll be told that there can be dire consequences if you get a single new tire out of balance. Not true.

But if the other tire on the opposite side of the tire being replaced has less than 75 percent tread, consider replacing both (either both front tires or both rear tires). It's best to have four tires of the same brand and size.

Front end alignment

You don't have to pull your car in for a front-end alignment every time you hit a pothole. If your steering wheel is pulling significantly, get it checked. If you really need a front-end alignment, you'll know. An uneven alignment can cause uneven tire wear. But understand that the adjustment will only last until the next pothole.



Air conditioner gas charging

If your car's air conditioning isn't as cold as it used to be, it may be time to top up the gas. Or not. Modern car AC systems are sealed and most never lose gas. The cause could be a fan or a leak in the air-circulation system. Check those before you spend money on a top-up.

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