

Kyle Busch is the author of Drive the Best for the Price: How to Buy a Used Automobile, Sport-Utility Vehicle, or Minivan and Save Money. In 1991, the book's author purchased a used 1986 vehicle for \$2,600 that a private owner had driven 82,000 miles. He has driven the vehicle for over nine years and the odometer has now logged over 292,000 miles. The vehicle continues to provide for his daily transportation needs.

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Tips to Make Your Vehicle Go the Distance

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If you are living on a budget, or even on an unlimited budget, you know how important it is to make the most of what you have.

Getting More Miles Out of Your Car

The following are some tips that will help you to get more miles out of your vehicle.

- First, consider, does your vehicle actually have the ability to run many miles without incurring costly repairs? An easy way to find out is to visit a public library to consult the frequency-of-repair information in the April magazine issue of Consumer Reports. If the vehicle that you are driving has a reasonable repair history, it is worthwhile to drive it until your heart is content. However, if it has a very poor repair history, it might be time to consider buying a vehicle that has better ratings and fuel efficiency.

- Assuming that you want to extend the life of your vehicle, at the beginning of each month, have the engine oil level checked to make certain that it is at the full-level mark on the dipstick. Buy two quarts of oil that are on sale and keep them in the trunk. Then, if the engine needs oil, you will not get stuck paying three times what the oil should cost.

Be certain to only use the type of oil and other fluids as specified in the vehicle owner's manual.

- Every three months (more often, however, if specified by your vehicle owner's manual) and prior to leaving for and upon returning from a trip, check (or have a service station attendant check) the tire pressure and the other fluids that include:

Transmission fluid

Brake Fluid

Power Steering Fluid

Radiator Coolant (check the clear plastic bottle)

Windshield washer fluid

Be certain to observe what the service station attendant does and ask questions, because you can likely check these items.

Why is it so important to keep the fluids at their full-level marks? Because the fluids lubricate moving parts to reduce friction, heat, and wear-the single most important factor for extending the life of a vehicle.

- If you drive 10,000 or more miles per year, have the engine oil and oil filter changed every 3,000 to 3,500 miles or about every four months. If you drive 6,000 miles or less per year, have the engine oil and oil filter changed at the beginning of spring and near the end of fall. An easy way to remember oil changes is to mark a new calendar at the beginning of a year with "oil change" reminders (i.e., March, July, and November or May and November).

Service stations run specials in the newspaper for oil changes (i.e., \$10.99 - \$13.99). However, make certain that the station is reputable. Some stations have been known to skip changing the oil or to do part of the job by changing the oil but not the oil filter. Consider using a black marker to put an X on the oil filter after an oil change. When the next oil change has been completed, a newly installed filter should not include an X.

- Before the cold of winter sets in, have a service station attendant check the antifreeze in the clear plastic coolant bottle with a hydrometer (a device that takes a sample of antifreeze and specifies how cold the temperature can become before the antifreeze freezes). The antifreeze in your vehicle should be able to withstand (i.e., not freeze) temperatures of at least 30 degrees "below the coldest" winter temperature. If the antifreeze in your vehicle is too weak, have additional antifreeze added to the coolant bottle. Purchase the type of antifreeze as specified in the vehicle owner's manual (i.e., usually a type that is suitable for "aluminum and all types of metals" that are used today's engines).

Why is it important for the antifreeze not to freeze during the winter? Because frozen antifreeze can crack an engine's block which could result in possibly thousands of dollars for the repair.

- If you drive over 10,000 miles per year, have the engine air filter changed once a year in the spring. If you drive about 6,000 miles or less per year, have the engine air filter changed once every two years. Many discount stores have sales on air filters.

- In the spring and the fall give the vehicle a thorough wash, tar removal, and wax. When washing the vehicle in-between the seasonal waxes, use a car wash product that is safe for clear coat and waxed finishes.

- Basic vehicle maintenance is an ongoing process. The secret to making it "easy" and keeping a vehicle "looking great" involves two components. First, maintaining regular vehicle involvement and second, only doing a little at a time.

Each week throughout the year (in addition to the maintenance suggested above) take only about 10-15 minutes to focus on a small aspect of the vehicle. For example, one week wash the windows. The next week, vacuum the carpet, and the following week, Armor All the dash and the door panels etc., etc. After about three months, one of the "small jobs" will be ready to be repeated. However, the vehicle will never be in rough shape. Doing a "small but thorough" job on one specific aspect of the vehicle each week, requires very little time or energy. Having a vehicle that continually "looks great" makes it worthwhile.

The tips provided above are the most basic maintenance requirements that will help your vehicle to run longer. Remember to reference the vehicle owner's manual for any additional maintenance required on your vehicle.

Basic vehicle maintenance involves a minimal investment of time and money, but it can provide major benefits in vehicle performance and lower repair costs. Additionally, your vehicle will be in better condition when it becomes time to sell.

In addition to the points covered in this article, the successful purchase of a used vehicle involves many other details. Being attentive to details and knowing what to look for when inspecting and test-driving a used vehicle will translate into significant savings. Additional information about the exterior and interior inspections, the test-drive, saving money, and selling a used vehicle are explained in the book: Drive the Best for the Price: How to Buy a Used Automobile, Sport-Utility Vehicle, or Minivan and Save Money.