

Getting Your Vehicle Ready For Winter

Mechanical failure is an inconvenience anytime it occurs, but here in Western New York it can be deadly in the winter. Preventive maintenance is the first step. Besides, a well maintained vehicle is more enjoyable to drive, lasts longer, and could command a higher resale price.

- **Engine Performance** – Does your vehicle have drivability problems? (Hard starts, rough idling, stalling, lack of power, etc.). Have the problem diagnosed and corrected at a quality auto repair shop. Cold weather makes existing problems worse. Have dirty filters-air, fuel, PCV, etc. replaced at manufacturer suggested intervals.
- **Fuel** - Put a bottle of Dry Gas in your tank once a month to help keep moisture from freezing in the fuel line. Note that if your gas tank is kept filled, it helps keep moisture from forming. You shouldn't let your tank get below ½ full. You never know when you'll be stranded and the fuel in your tank may be the deciding factor for your survival.
- **Oil** - Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your owner's manual. Consider changing it more frequently if your driving is mostly stop-and-go or consists of frequent short trips.
- **Cooling Systems** - The cooling system should be completely flushed and refilled about every 24 months. The level, condition, and concentration of the antifreeze should be checked periodically. Never remove the radiator cap until the engine has thoroughly cooled! Many vehicles require manufacturer specific coolants so it is unwise to assume that the antifreeze from one vehicle is correct for another. A professional should check the tension and condition of drive belts, clamps, and hoses.
- **Transmission** – It is recommended to have your transmission serviced at 30,000-mile intervals. Slip and slide driving is especially tough on your transmission. Sludge builds up in the valve body and torque converter restricting proper shifting.
- **Windshield Wipers** - Replace old wiper blades. Because the winters in Western New York are harsh it makes sense to purchase rubber-clad winter wiper blades to fight ice build-up. Be sure you have an ample supply of windshield washer solvent in your reservoir. You'd be surprised how much you use. A full service repair shop should refill your washer solvent as a service when they change your oil.
- **Heater/Defroster** - The heater and defroster must be in good working condition for passenger comfort and driver visibility.
- **Battery** - The only accurate way to detect a weak battery and/or charging system is with professional equipment. Have your charging system analyzed every 6000 miles. Routine care: Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all connections.
- **Lights** - Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs; periodically clean road grime from all lenses. To prevent scratching, never use a dry rag.
- **Exhaust System** - Your vehicle should be placed on a lift and the exhaust system examined for leaks. Road salt and corrosion wreak havoc on exhaust systems in Western New York. Your exhaust system components should be examined every time you have your oil changed. A professional can identify potential problems early and advise you as to the overall condition of your system.
- **Tires** - Worn tires are down right dangerous in winter weather. Examine tires for remaining tread life, uneven wearing, and cupping; check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. Check the tire pressures once a month. Let the tires "cool down" before checking the pressure. Rotate as recommended. Don't forget to check your spare, and be sure the jack is in good condition and know how to use it.
- **Carry emergency gear** - gloves, boots, blankets, flares, a small shovel, sand or kitty litter, tire chains, and a flashlight. Put a few "high-energy" snacks in your glove box. It's also a good idea to invest in a cell phone to summons help if necessary.