

# CAR CARE CORNER

## Regular Car Maintenance Saves Gas, Future Repairs

(NAPSA)—Now that good driving weather is here, there's no better time to make sure your vehicle is operating at peak efficiency. If performed regularly, the following tips may save you money at the pump and help to avoid a costly trip to the repair shop, while extending the life of one of your biggest investments.

• **Get a "Tune-Up"**—A tune-up used to mean replacing spark plugs and tuning a car engine's ignition timing, but modern automobiles have self-correcting, computer-controlled ignitions, so tuning is very rarely required. These days, the term "tune-up" usually refers to multiple component checks—like a physical for your car. Have a technician check the following systems: battery, charging and starting systems, engine mechanicals, powertrain controls (including onboard diagnostics check), and the fuel, ignition and emissions systems. Proper maintenance of these systems can help maximize your vehicle's performance and fuel economy while minimizing emissions. Your vehicle owner's guide has recommendations for when to get a tune-up.

• **Change the Oil/Check All Fluid Levels**—Your engine works harder in cold weather, depleting fluid levels quicker than in the spring and summer. Make sure your oil and filter are changed on a regular basis. Changing both can also help you achieve maximum fuel economy and peak engine performance. Ensure that all the fluid levels in your car are topped off, including coolant, power steering, transmission and washer solvent. Your owner's guide has recommended service intervals for your vehicle's fluids.

One important thing to remem-



ber when changing any type of fluid or lubricant is to always follow the recommendations of your vehicle's manufacturer. Failure to follow the recommendations can lead to damage that may not be covered by the manufacturer's warranty.

• **Tire Inflation and Rotation/Check for Wheel Damage**—Colder-weather driving can be hard on your tires and wheels. Check to make sure your tires are properly inflated to the tire pressure recommended by your vehicle manufacturer—the numbers can usually be found on the driver's side doorjamb and should not be taken from the tire itself. Properly inflated tires help deliver a safe ride, wear longer and help maintain maximum fuel economy. Remember, the recommended tire pressure for the front and rear tires may vary.

In addition, have your tires rotated on a regular basis—at every other oil change is a good rule of thumb. This will help improve tread wear while maintaining optimum braking and steering capabilities.

Tires and wheels are a part of your vehicle's integrated safety system. Wheels should be checked for any dents, holes or change in shape, which can affect tire pressure and increase the risk of losing vehicle control. Damaged wheels should be replaced (not repaired) with wheels of the same size and type from the vehicle manufacturer.

• **Inspect Your Brakes**—Your brakes are one of the most important safety features on your automobile. Any noise, including squealing, grinding or rattling, coming from your car's brakes is a warning that something could be wrong. Have them inspected by a competent mechanic—the service department of the dealership where you purchased your car is a good place to start.

• **Replace Damaged Belts and Hoses**—A broken belt can affect several systems in your car, including the electrical, power steering, cooling and air conditioning. When choosing new belts, those made with polyester versus rayon cords are preferred because they resist stretching and minimize slippage.

Hoses, especially for the cooling system, can deteriorate from the inside out. Any hoses that look worn should be replaced promptly to reduce the risk of damage to your car's internal components and to prevent you from becoming stranded.

• **Check Your Wiper Blades**—Wiper blades wear out faster in colder months because of the salt and debris they clear from your windshield. There are all types of blades available at your local auto parts store, including brands that offer wear indicator strips that change color from black to yellow when the blade needs replacement.

Following these simple suggestions—all of which can be performed by your local dealership's service department if not by you—can help you get the best performance and gas mileage from your car and might eliminate the need for some costly repairs sometime down the road.