



Do-it-yourself maintenance Part 2

PLAYING YOUR PART IN ROAD SAFETY

Geoff Gwilym VACC CEO



If you lift the bonnet on any modern car you may be daunted by its complexity. Vehicles are not as easy to maintain at home these days like they may have been in years past. However, there are still numerous basic checks you can conduct that may save you a lot of money and hassle, and keep you safer during your commute.

WIPERS Being caught in a storm with non-optimum wipers is seriously dangerous. So, check the function of your windscreen wipers, including any variable speed settings available. Replace the rubber blades if they are hard or worn.

SEATBELTS Seatbelts are lifesavers and should be in optimum condition. Conduct a visual check of seatbelts for any fraying, and that they withdraw and retract as they should. Next, ensure all seatbelts click in securely. If not, have a specialist check and repair or replace them immediately.

ENGINE COOLANT Regular check-ups of coolant levels are essential for the health of your vehicle. Without a sufficient amount of coolant, it's possible your car could overheat and cause significant engine damage.

If topping-up is necessary, wait until the engine is cold. Slowly unscrew the expansion tank cap to release any pressure present in the cooling system and remove it. Check your owner's manual to select the correct coolant for your vehicle, and top up until the level reaches the maximum mark on the expansion tank.

Conducting these simple checks at home will help keep you and other road users safe. If you need assistance, take your car to your local VACC repairer.

Prepared by Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce in the interest of better motoring.

Share your thoughts
ceo@vacc.com.au



IAIN CURRY GETS ANSWERS

WRITE TO MOTORING AT
CARS@NEWS.COM.AU OR
PO BOX 2808, GPO SYDNEY, 2001

My daughter's looking for a new or near-new SUV. She'd like four-wheel-drive as they like to do a bit of sand driving, but nothing major. It needs good space as they're a family of five, and ideally leather seats for easier cleaning. Budget's about \$35,000.

Franco Gentile, email

I reckon Subaru makes the best all-wheel-drive SUVs for those needing a decent amount of off-road ability without going the more hardcore 4WD route. The Forester should be large enough, has excellent ground clearance and clever X-Mode with a specific off-road driving setting. Look for a 2018 or 2019 model, but the budget won't stretch to leather seats I'm afraid.

AROUND THE CLOCK

Last week you mentioned high-mileage vehicles were okay as long as they were well serviced and Toyotas. You should have included Holden Commodores. I've had several that have done over 300,000km before any engine or transmission problems. My mechanic believes services every 10,000km – not the recommended 15,000km – are key.

Garry McCaskill, email

Great to hear. If any Holden Cruze, Malibu or Barina owners would like to share similar 300,000km stories, I'm all ears.

MOUNTAIN DESCENT

Re using brakes or gears to slow a vehicle, I usually adhere to the principle that brakes are cheaper to replace than gearboxes. But I will use the manual function on my six-speed auto when descending (NSW) Brown and Talbingo Mountains. Locking in a lower gear means less reliance on brakes.

Darrell Henderson, email

Ah, the familiar smell of cooking brakes on a mountain descent. You're right, dropping gears to allow some engine braking on gradients is (most agree) good practice.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

I love reading Roadside Assist but am amazed at people's complete lack of knowledge of cars and their absurd expectations of car companies; demanding free repairs on cars with huge kilometres and years out of warranty. I do concede cost of maintenance can be difficult to understand. Oil and filter changes on my 2007 Range Rover Sport TDV8 are super easy and inexpensive, and day-to-day running costs are low. In contrast, it needed two new turbos at nearly \$4000 each and repair was a full body-off process.

Stephen Vecchiet, email

Body off? Not a great design from Range Rover there. We all know turbos have a shelf life. That said, with a cynical hat on, it's a nice guaranteed high earner for service departments.

KEEP ROLLING

Re Good Practice, there should be no need for a service centre to turn off things like a dashcam. I don't know of any service centre or mechanic who'd do software updates without having a battery charger attached. The amount of power a dash camera draws would not make an ounce of difference.

Laurence Rucker, email

Maybe so, but privacy laws remain around filming without consent on private property, such as a car workshop.

BLUE SKIES

Re dashcams, unbeknown to me my Mazda service centre adjusted my dashcam so it pointed skywards. Several months later, after an incident on the road, when I referred to the footage all I had was blue sky.

Joe Brkic, email

Frustrating. As said last week, good practice is returning a customer's settings after service. Seats, radio, dashcam, everything.

EMPTY CELLS

As electric cars are quite new to market, I wonder about their range in the future. My new mobile phone's battery lasts about three days, but in two year's time I'll need to charge it



BABY BENZ

I'm looking at buying a used Mercedes-Benz A-Class from 2013 to 2017. Anything to be wary about?

Zoran Vasiljevic, email

For a prestige brand, an A-Class of this vintage is one of the safer bets as they've generally proved reliable. They're not cheap, so seek one with impeccable service history (ideally through Benz) and get a pre-purchase inspection. Look for an A200 petrol as it's the range sweet spot of style, performance and features. Real driving joy (but harsher ride) comes with the beautiful A250.



every day. Will a new electric car with 300km range only have 100km range in two years? Do manufacturers offer range guarantees?

Jeff Mason, email

Excellent question. Yes, electric car batteries wear out, but the cells are more durable than ones in phones and technology is used to reduce their stress levels. Tesla has an eight-year battery warranty with guarantee of 70 per cent capacity retained; Nissan has eight years and 75 per cent, while Mercedes and Jaguar are eight years and 80 per cent.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Re: Feeling Blue from July when I reported my 2015 Audi Q5's "check emissions" light came on and I was charged \$1000 by Audi for a new AdBlue line, I have good news. On one of my regular phone calls to Audi they agreed to credit me the money I spent on repairs. My car was serviced this week and the money was taken off the bill. I'm disappointed it took so long to resolve, but am happy with the outcome, will keep getting it serviced with Audi and will consider buying another in future.

Todd Palmer, email

I recall your Q5 had travelled only 41,000km, was always serviced with Audi but a goodwill repair was rejected as you were more than a year out of warranty. Seems you being a squeaky wheel got through to them in the end. Goodwill repairs should never be expected, but it is a test of how much a brand or dealership values customers making reasonable requests. You make the point you'll now consider buying another Audi. That reimbursed \$1000 looks a savvy business move by Audi.

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