



Do-it-yourself maintenance Part 1

HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR VEHICLE AT HOME

Geoff Gwilym VACC CEO



It's true, cars these days are not at all easy to maintain at home like they may have been back in the day, but there are still some basic checks you can conduct that may save you a lot of money and hassle.

ENGINE OIL It's best to check engine oil levels after your car has had a run, when the oil is warm. Simply locate the dipstick in the engine bay and lift it out, wipe off the oil that's already there and then, with a clean dipstick, check the level. If it is indicating low, it's time for a top up using the correct oil, or perhaps a service.

TYRES Again, do this check after a run so the tyres can reach optimum temperatures. Check the sticker inside the drivers' side B-pillar or in the car's handbook for recommended inflation figures, then follow the directions at the service station air filling station. A lot of servos have a 'set and forget' feature on their equipment that makes it easy and safe to operate. Of course, if any tyre tread is worn, have your tyres checked by a specialist.

LIGHTS With the assistance of another person, systematically check all lights — headlamps (including low and full beam), taillights, and front and rear indicators. While you're at it, check the interior lights too — one day you'll need them. Lighting is a roadworthy item, so if any lights are not functioning have them repaired.

If you need help, take your car to your local VACC repairer.

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

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ceo@vacc.com.au



IAN CURRY GETS ANSWERS

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

I need to upgrade my ancient Holden but am limited with choice as I'm 205cm tall and struggle to fit in most things. I'm looking for a manual 4x4 as I like to get off-road, but most are utes and I find my knees still touch the dash when the seat's fully back and steering columns have limited adjustments. I've so far found three vehicles I fit. A VW Amarok, just, but I'm wary of the company's history; a RAM pick-up but it's way beyond my budget, and an LDV SUV, but I'm reluctant to buy Chinese. Any suggestions?

Mick Campbell, email

I can't speak from personal experience as I'm only 182cm, so I consulted my 200cm motoring journalist mate. He says a 4x4 with manual gearbox makes your choice very limited. A Suzuki Jimny and Jeep Wrangler can be had with a manual, but both are pretty poor for tall folk. He recommends the Ranger-based Ford Everest SUV if you can live with an automatic gearbox — good for tall drivers and excellent off-road. If not, go with the VW Amarok. It's still an excellent ute and VW's five-year warranty should give solid peace of mind.

TOURING DE FRANCE

Re Size Matters you recommended a Skoda wagon and said there are "no Japanese large wagon rivals." No, but there is the Peugeot 508 Touring, while I have a 308 Touring. I compared mine to Volkswagen's, Skoda's and



Mazda's wagons and none get near the space, comfort or economy of the Peugeot diesel.

Gil May, email

Fair shout. I love the new Peugeot 508 Wagon but its \$60,000 starting price puts it out of reach to most. The diesel 308 Touring's a fuel miser and has clever flat-folding rear seats, but alas, it's a bit too small for our letter writer needing a car for three young kids.

KEEP IT COOL

Re John Carey's Nissan Leaf e+ review, he omitted the vital aspect that the updated Leaf still has no liquid-cooled battery pack. Was he writing an ad for Nissan or am I too cynical?

Joe Boehm, email

You're right, the Leaf e+ still doesn't have liquid-cooled batteries, unlike, say, a Tesla. Hot batteries mean reduced range, slower recharging and potential damage. In his review, John also wrote of the Leaf: "Quality isn't great, considering the high price." To that end, Nissan probably won't ask him back if they paid him to write an ad.

LEAF IT ALONE

Re John Carey's Leaf e+ review, Nissan are surely having a laugh, aren't they? What sane person is going to stump up an eye-watering \$62,000 for a small hatch with numb steering, rubbery suspension and "rhino scrotum" interior plastics?

Tony Watkins, email

It would be remiss of me not to mention Nissan's sold 500,000 Leafs globally. But you're right, they're a lot of money.

ENDLESS CHOICE

When asked to recommend a small SUV you didn't include the Suzuki Vitara. Is this because it's substandard and a poor choice?

Alan Fraser, email

Not at all. I recommend after learning what I can about an individual's planned use, needs and budget. There are some 40 small new SUVs for sale in Australia, so competition is fierce. The Vitara is a solid, good looking and good value offering but lacking the latest safety kit.



SIZE GUIDE

I'm a tall driver with three tall children and I'm looking for a mid-size SUV with lots of rear passenger leg space. I keep my cars a long time so reliability is important too. My top four are the Honda CR-V, Subaru Forester, Holden Equinox and Skoda Karoq. Which would you choose, what grade and any others I should look at?

Mark Doyle, email

All on your list are good, but from our family tests the Forester and CR-V (the five-seater, not the seven) stood out as offering best rear space. The Subaru's reclining rear seats were excellent, while the Honda has giant rear doors for easy access. Which grade to choose? You need the higher-grade (pricier) CR-Vs for the best safety kit, so I'd favour the Forester — a spacious, reliable and safe all-rounder — and even the base model is chockers with standard gear.

TURNED ON

I'm astonished by the number of people driving at night without headlights. I can only put it down to people thinking daytime running lights (DRLs) are the actual headlights. Most appear to be older drivers. They don't realise they have no tail lights on which is very dangerous. A solution may be to make the "auto on" headlights a default setting on new cars.

Phill Dawson, email

Fair point, but auto headlights have been criticised for not detecting low light soon enough and staying off. Sweden has made full headlights mandatory during daytime on many roads — with fines for those not doing so — and when you get a rental car there its lights are permanently set on. Perhaps that's the way we need to go.

STICKY SOLUTION

I have a 2014 Hyundai Elantra Trophy and it's a great car. The key fob button that locks the doors fell out and I've had to hold it in place with sticky tape. Hyundai quoted me \$480 to replace and reprogram it. That represents nearly five per cent of the cost of the car. What a joke. An independent locksmith quoted me \$150, but the sticky tape is still working.

John Patterson, email

Hyundai really should be quoting you for a simple repair rather than the lazy (but more profitable) replacement route. Sadly, that \$480 is par for the course for a replacement smart key these days. In fact, many brands charge a lot more. If you can tolerate the sticky tape, save your money.

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TIGHT SQUEEZE

ROADSIDE ASSIST



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