

Increase Your Car's Resale Value

By Julie Lindsey

Investing extra time and effort in regular maintenance of your vehicle's interior and exterior can pay off handsomely when it comes time to trade it in or put it up for sale.

Your Vehicle's Maintenance. One of the easiest ways to plan a maintenance schedule is by reading the owner's manual that came with your car. Manufacturers usually recommend a specified period for taking your car in for tune-ups, oil changes, etc. Regular tune-ups not only extend the life of your car and help maintain fuel efficiency; a well-documented maintenance record looks impressive when you're ready to sell.

Most manufacturers recommend an oil change every 3000 miles but other fluids including brake fluid, antifreeze, and windshield washer fluid should be checked periodically to keep your car running efficiently. Check your tire pressure or have a service station attendant do it for you on a regular basis. Driving on over or under-inflated tires increases fuel consumption and can be dangerous. Inspect your tires weekly for gravel or stones that get stuck in the treads and remove any debris.

Take the time to check your car or truck's vital signs including fluids, tire pressure, tire treads, hoses, belts, lights, etc. Clean battery terminals periodically and make sure all cable connections and wiring are tight. Watch for puddles of liquid that form under the car or on the driveway. Pay attention to the way your car normally handles and sounds. Don't ignore unusual noises, which could be a signal that brake pads need to be replaced. Taking your car in at the first sign of a problem can help you avoid a major repair bill later on. Describe in detail to your mechanic any sounds or handling problems so that he can get a better feel for what the problem may be.

Don't forget to replace air filters, fuel filters, spark plugs, hoses and other parts on a regular basis. A restricted fuel filter can result in poor gas mileage. Make sure your gas cap fits properly to avoid fuel vapors escaping into the atmosphere.

Your Vehicle's Appearance. Preserving the exterior and interior appearance of your car or truck can also enhance its value. Washing and waxing on a regular schedule will keep your vehicle looking new and help protect it from environmental pollution and sun damage. Check for scratches frequently and touch them up before they become larger rust spots. Most car dealers and auto supply stores have paint and touch up techniques that can eliminate most small scratches or dents. If a rock makes a small crack in your windshield, have it sealed as soon as possible. Depending on the severity of the crack, the whole windshield may need to be replaced.

Whether you take your vehicle to a car wash or clean it yourself, it is important to vacuum the floor and upholstery regularly. Clean and protect the dash and leather seats with products specifically made for car interiors.

If you avoid eating in your vehicle you can cut down on spills and stains. When you or

your children must eat in the car, wipe away spills and apply stain remover as soon as possible. If you live in an area where mud, salt, sand and dirt take a toll on your vehicle's floor, it's a good idea to have the carpet shampooed periodically to keep the dirt and grime from settling in permanently. Place an old towel or blanket in the back seat to protect upholstery when pets ride in the car.

Your Own Driving. Simple steps like avoiding heavy acceleration takeoffs and keeping unnecessary weight out of the car can also help keep your vehicle running better. Roll your windows up when driving through heavily polluted areas, don't allow smoking in your car, and dispose of trash daily to keep the interior looking and smelling fresh and clean.

According to a recent Valvoline/ASE Poll of the American Mechanic, most mechanics surveyed believe their customers do not treat their vehicles with the same care they did 20 years ago. Taking good care of your car can improve its gas mileage, prevent breakdowns, and increase its resale value. Providing good maintenance inside and out will also enhance the safety of your vehicle and help reduce exhaust emissions, which can improve air quality.

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