The effects of infrequent driving on vehicle performance

Driving puts a certain measure of wear and tear on a vehicle. Whether a vehicle is used primarily for commuting or as a vessel to take travelers to parts unknown, wear and tear is inevitable.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, individuals may not realize that failing to drive their vehicles regularly also can affect performance. Here's a closer look at what can happen when vehicles sit idle for lengthy periods of time.

• Battery loses its charge. The battery in a vehicle is still being used even if the car isn't running. Batteries power various components in a car, such as the vehicle computer, phone chargers and more. If the engine does not turn over and help to recharge the battery, the battery will eventually die. People who drive infrequently may want to consider a trickle charger that's plugged in during periods of non-use.
• Tire rot can set in. Dry tire rot is deterioration that sets into the rubber. The material dries out and becomes brittle, causing splits and cracks to form. Driving with tire rot can cause tires to deflate.
• Rust and corrosion can occur. There is still plenty of metal in modern vehicles. A vehicle that has been exposed to salt or rain or one that is stored in a moist climate can be susceptible to undercarriage or engine rust. This may cause damage that's not easily repaired.
• Damage from sap or droppings. A vehicle parked in one location for a long time could be a target for bird droppings, fallen berries, sap, and other substances that are potentially harmful to the paint job. Leaving the car or truck out in the sun also means UV rays can cause clear coat over the paint to oxidize and begin to fail, which can produce blotchy or peeling spots.
• Poor brake performance. When vehicles are left to sit, corrosion could build up on the rotors and the brake pads may become less flexible. Moisture also may seep into brake lines, causing issues with pressurization of brake fluid. Each of these factors adds up to brakes that do not work properly — which is a big safety hazard.
• Formation of tire flat spots. When tires are not used frequently, the weight of the car can continually put pressure on the same parts of the tires, leading to flat spots. Tires also can lose pressure if they sit too long.
• Oil and other fluids may lose efficacy. Various fluids can go stale in a vehicle if it isn't regularly driven. Gasoline also may develop condensation, which can reduce efficiency and performance. Taking short trips helps avoid this issue.

Infrequent driving can cause damage to a car or truck. But many potential issues can be avoided by driving vehicles more often. FC229279

3 simple maintenance strategies that can keep cars running longer

3 simple maintenance strategies that can keep cars running longerThe last few years have not proven the most advantageous times for new car buyers. According to the Consumer Price Index Summary from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, buyers paid 12.2 percent more for new vehicles in January 2022 than they had in January 2021. Faced with such a significant increase in price, many drivers understandably want to keep their current cars longer than they might have initially planned.

Data released by S&P Global Mobility in early 2022 indicated that the average vehicle on the road is 12 years and two months old, which marked the highest number in the 20-plus years such information was tracked. A host of variables affect how long drivers keep their cars, but the rising cost of new vehicles has undoubtedly compelled many drivers to aspire to keep their cars for longer periods of time.

Aging cars may require a little more TLC than vehicles that are right off the dealership lot. But the following are three simple tips that can help drivers keep their cars running longer.

1. Become a more careful driver. A careful approach when behind the wheel is safer than aggressive driving and beneficial for your vehicle. When starting, avoid revving the engine, which needlessly wears it down. When out on the road, avoid rapid accelerations, which also contributes to needless wear and tear. Even excessive idling can adversely affect the engine, so keep winter warm-ups to around 30 seconds to prevent damage to engine components.
2. Know when and how to fill up. Every driver has likely visited a filling station when an oil tanker is busily filling the tanks. That's traditionally been considered a less than ideal time to fill up, as the theory is that filling the tanks stirs up sediment that could then find its way into consumers' gas tanks, adversely affecting their vehicles. However, that's often dependent on the station itself and how much its owners prioritize maintenance of the tank and filtration systems. Drivers who trust their local station owners can likely fill up when the tankers are present without worry. In addition, avoid topping off once the nozzle clicks when filling up. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes that topping off is harmful to the planet and the vehicle, as gasoline needs room to expand. When you top off, the extra gas may damage the vapor collection system and cause the vehicle to run less efficiently.
3. Change oil more frequently as the vehicle ages. It's true that modern vehicles no longer require oil changes for every 3,000 miles driven. However, as vehicles age, drivers and their vehicles' engines may benefit from more frequent oil changes than the owner's manual necessarily recommends. Oil changes remove dirt and metal particles from the engine, potentially contributing to a longer life expectancy. More frequent changes can be especially beneficial for vehicles that are routinely driven in stop-and-go traffic.

Rising vehicle costs have compelled many drivers to keep their cars longer than they initially planned. Some simple strategies can help drivers achieve that goal. SC233724

Maintenance intervals drivers should know

Vehicles are among the most costly expenses individuals have. According to data from Kelley Blue Book, the average price paid for a new vehicle in the United States in September 2022 was $48,094. Canadian car buyers face an equally expensive reality in their country, where the average MSRP for a new car is more than $45,000.

Since vehicles are such sizable investments, it behooves motorists to do as much as they can to keep their cars and trucks running smoothly. Vehicle owner's manuals typically recommend maintenance intervals and should be drivers' first resource for information regarding how to take care of their cars and trucks. But the following are some standard maintenance intervals drivers can keep in mind.

3,000 miles

The 3,000-mile marker used to be the benchmark for changing oil, but modern vehicles can now go longer between oil changes. However, it's still a good idea to check other fluid levels every 3,000 miles. Windshield washer fluid, coolant, brake fluid, transmission fluid, and power steering fluid should all be checked every 3,000 miles and topped off if levels are low.

It's wise for drivers to perform some additional maintenance checkups every 3,000 miles. Check tire pressure, inspect hoses (which should not be leaking or bulging) and clean the interior of the vehicle every 3,000 miles.

5,000 miles

Many vehicle manufacturers now recommend oil changes every 5,000 miles. Tire rotations also can be part of service visits at this interval, and drivers can ask their mechanic to check their fuel filters and batteries every 5,000 miles as well. Many may already do this as part of their comprehensive maintenance packages, but it's still good to confirm if they do and request they do so if it's not part of the plan.

Drivers also can request that cabin air filters are inspected at this point, though they can generally last a year before they need to be replaced.

Around the 5,000-mile mark, wiper blades also may begin to show signs of wear and tear, including streaking on the windshield or scratching noises when in use. Each of those signs indicates the wipers need to be replaced. However, drivers should take note of these signs regardless of when they appear. Some may not make it 5,000 miles before they begin to wear down. In such instances, they should be replaced immediately regardless of how many miles it's been since they were installed.

10,000 miles

Some vehicles may only require oil changes every 10,000 miles. That's not uncommon in vehicles that use synthetic oil, though drivers are urged to consult their owner's manuals.

Brake pads also may need to be replaced around this time, and one telltale sign of that is a squeaking noise whenever the brakes are applied.

Drivers can ask their mechanics to check the alignment of their vehicles around this interval as well. Though many vehicles won't develop alignment issues, it's best to check for such issues every 10,000 miles or whenever a vehicle feels as though it's pulling in one specific direction.

Maintenance intervals are created to serve as a guideline for drivers. Any issues that arise should still be brought to the attention of a mechanic regardless of how many miles have been added to the odometer since the most recent trip to the garage. SC233733

Why is tire rotation so important?

Vehicle owners need to keep maintenance on the mind to ensure their cars and trucks are operating at peak capacity. Various components should be checked and serviced at key intervals. Oil changes and fluid top-offs are part of routine maintenance, but it can be easy to forget about other important parts of the vehicle, including tires.

Rotating tires is vital to their upkeep. Bridgestone Tires advises that tire rotation involves routinely repositioning a vehicle's tires in specific patterns from front to back and side to side. According to Big O Tires, the front tires tend to wear on the outside edges because the tire leans over when a driver turns a corner. The rear tires just follow the front ones, so they usually wear more evenly. By leaving tires in place, the outside edges on the front tires will wear down much faster than the rest and those tires will need to be replaced sooner. Rotation may be required by tire warranties. Rotation also keeps the tires working properly.

Experts generally advise tire rotation every 6,000 to 8,000 miles, even if they do not show any signs of wear. It is challenging to determine if weather treads are uneven or how much wear has been sustained just by looking at them. Rotating tires can prolong the life of tires and decrease how frequently they need to be replaced.

Rotating tires keeps the tread depth uniform and helps maintain traction and consistent handling across all four tires. Bridgestone says the tire rotation pattern that is best for a particular vehicle depends on the type of tire being used. Patterns are recommended by the standardizing body of the tire industry, called The Tire and Rim Association, Inc. Individuals can consult with professional mechanics about the proper way to rotate tires. Many tire manufacturers or automotive stores that have sold customers tires also will do tire rotations - some free of charge.

In addition to proper traction, minimizing uneven tire treads causes the vehicle to be more balanced, advises Wrench, a mobile auto repair and maintenance company. This enables the driver to have more control even when roads are slippery. Many auto service centers will then align and balance tires after they have been rotated. At this time the mechanic will likely check brakes as well, since it is easy to see and reach them when the tires are off.

Tire rotation is an important component of vehicle maintenance. Check with a qualified automotive professional to see if it's time to have your vehicle's tires rotated. SC213763

Did you know?

Anything that takes a driver's attention away from the road is considered a distraction. That includes adjusting the radio station, looking ahead at the route on a navigation system, reaching into the fast-food bag for a French fry, and answering a phone or responding to a text. Distractions can be visual (taking eyes off the road), manual (taking hands off the wheel), and cognitive (taking your mind off driving). Whether it is good for people or not, multitasking is now commonplace. That means individuals are juggling two or more different tasks at one time, even while driving. This propensity to try to fit more into a day may seem like it is improving efficiency, but certain studies show that multitasking often means the focus and attention to detail supplied to tasks isn't as great when doing two things at once as opposed to focusing on one task at a time. In terms of driving while distracted by something else, the consequences can be great. There is still work to be done to encourage drivers to be more attentive behind the wheel. TF234891