



## 4 signs it's time to replace your tires

Inflation has been a hot topic for several years, as the cost of everything from groceries to gas to housing has increased considerably since 2019. Cars are no exception to that phenomenon, and anyone who has purchased a new car over the last half decade likely experienced some sticker shock when they started their search for a new vehicle. Data from Kelley Blue Book indicates the average cost of a new car was \$37,590 in 2019. By 2023, the average cost had risen to \$47,899. That marks an increase of more than 27 percent in a four-year period.

Cars are indeed a significant investment, which underscores the importance of vehicle maintenance. Maintenance is more than just tending to what's under the hood. Tires also require drivers' attention, as aging, damaged tires pose a safety risk that also compromise vehicle performance. Tires are easily overlooked, but the following are four signs tires need to be replaced.

1. Worn tread: The automotive experts at AutoZone® note that tread depth is the most prevalent indicator that a tire needs to be replaced. AutoZone® notes that tread depth should always be at least 2/32 of an inch throughout the tire. Depth should be measured across the tread and around the circumference. If the tread is at or below 2/32 of an inch, the tire should be replaced.

2. Bulges, gouges or cracks: Geico® notes that a deflated tire bulges at the sides, and that can compromise the safety of everyone in the vehicle. AutoZone® says bulges occur when air gets between the inner liner and outer rubber layers, which can happen after hitting a curb or driving over a sizable pothole. A gouge or cut that is deeper than the outer layer of the tire also necessitates replacement.

3. Poor grip: Drivers may be able to feel certain tire problems, including poor grip, while driving. In such instances, tires may feel as though they are slipping. The tire experts at Firestone note that low tread can reduce tire traction and cause wheels to slip, which may be more noticeable when accelerating from a stop or driving on wet roads. Drivers who feel their tires are slipping can test the tread and replace tires that are low.

4. Vibration: Vibration is another issue drivers may feel rather than see. And identifying the cause requires noting where the vibrations are felt. Geico® notes that a feeling of vibration or thumping that feels like it's coming from under the seats may indicate the tires are not balanced. A suspension issue could be to blame if the steering wheel feels like it's vibrating. Either feeling should be brought to the attention of a mechanic immediately.

Tire issues affect vehicle performance and compromise the safety of drivers, their passengers and fellow motorists. When vehicles are not performing at peak capacity, drivers should not overlook various tire issues as a potential cause of such troubles. SC243721

## Tips to conserve fuel on road trips

Road trips remind drivers of just how thrilling the open road can be. For millions of individuals, nothing provides a sense of escapism as effectively as the open road.

Though road trips can be liberating, they do not allow a complete escape from reality, something drivers realize when the time comes to fill up the gas tank. Gas prices fell considerably by mid-December 2023, dipping to an average of \$3.12 per gallon of regular by the middle of that month according to data from AAA. That marked a significant decline from just a month earlier, when prices for a gallon of regular gas averaged \$3.36. But drivers know prices can spike just as quickly as they drop, so it pays dividends to recognize strategies to conserve fuel. Such strategies can be especially beneficial for drivers about to embark on a road trip.

- Slow down. Pushing the pedal to the medal might be a romantic, if unsafe, notion of how to drive on a road trip. But that approach can be costly at the pump. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, every five miles per hour motorists drive over 50 miles per hour is the equivalent of paying \$0.30 more per gallon of gas. That estimate is based on a gallon of gas costing \$4.32, but drivers can still conserve a considerable amount of fuel by slowing down.

- Steer clear of city driving. The stop-and-go traffic that is a hallmark of city driving can compromise fuel efficiency. The Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy notes that rapid acceleration and braking, which is hard to avoid when driving through cities with lots of stoplights and pedestrians, can lower gas mileage by as much as 40 percent.

- Avoid rooftop cargo. Rooftop cargo boxes might be a necessity when a car is packed with passengers. But these luxuries come at a steep cost. A study from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory found that rooftop cargo boxes can reduce fuel efficiency by as much as 17 percent on the highway and as much as 25 percent on interstates where drivers drive at speeds between 65 and 75 miles per hour. The DOE reports that rear-mount cargo boxes are much more efficient, so drivers looking to conserve fuel may want to pack light and/or opt for rear-mount cargo boxes instead of rooftop boxes.

- Utilize cruise control. The auto manufacturer Kia estimates that utilizing the cruise control function on a vehicle can save drivers as much as 14 percent on fuel. Cruise control is not advisable when driving in cities or on roads with stoplights. However, when driving on interstates, driving at the same continuous speed helps drivers avoid constant accelerations and decelerations, which compromise fuel efficiency.

When the open road beckons, drivers can make their road trips more affordable by implementing various strategies to conserve fuel. SC243726at peak capacity, drivers should not overlook various tire issues as a potential cause of such troubles. SC243721



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# How to protect your vehicle’s paint job

Drivers go to great lengths to ensure what’s under the hood of their vehicles is well taken care of. But it’s equally beneficial to tend to the exterior of a vehicle, including its paint job.

According to Popular Mechanics, oxidation can adversely affect iron-based metals. That can put vehicles in jeopardy and take significant time off their life expectancy. The good news is that rust and other issues that can affect a vehicle’s paint job and appearance are typically avoidable. That should be music to the ears of new vehicle owners, who likely need no reminder of the sizable financial investment required to drive off the lot with a fresh set of wheels. Drivers who want their cars and trucks to maintain their looks over the long haul can consider these simple strategies to protect their paint jobs.

- Make car washes part of your vehicle maintenance routine. Seasoned drivers are undoubtedly familiar with the conventional wisdom surrounding oil change intervals, but those same motorists may not recognize the importance of routine car washes. Over time, contaminants such as pollen, dust and pollution can settle on a vehicle’s exterior, potentially jeopardizing the paint job. Routine car washes can prevent such damage and help a car look like it was just driven off the lot.

- Wax the exterior of the vehicle. The automotive experts at Carfax® report that waxing

is a significant and simple way to protect vehicle paint. Carfax® notes that certain paste waxes contain mild abrasives that help remove fine scratches from painted surfaces. Wax also can protect paint jobs from fading related to exposure to ultraviolet rays. That’s especially noteworthy for drivers who do not routinely park their cars in a garage.

- Use a car cover. Car covers may or may not be practical for cars drivers use every day, but they are an effective way to protect a paint job from the elements. Drivers who have a spare car they rarely drive or even those who do not drive their primary vehicle a lot each day can purchase a universal-fit car cover or a premium cover designed specifically for their vehicles. Car covers protect paint jobs from ultraviolet rays and the elements and may reduce the need for more frequent trips to the car wash.

- Park in the shade, but choose spots wisely. Parking in the shade may protect vehicles

from the ultraviolet rays of the sun, but it’s important that drivers pick the right shady spot to park their cars and trucks. A shade tree might seem like a great ally to vehicle owners, but if birds nest or rest in the tree, drivers could be exposing their cars to bird droppings. That’s no small threat, as bird droppings are high in uric acid, which quickly damage a vehicle’s exterior. Parking directly beneath a tree also might expose the paint job to sap or fallen leaves or berries, each of which can adversely affect vehicle exteriors. If you plan to park in the shade to protect the paint job, ideally choose a spot that is not directly beneath the tree.

A well-maintained paint job can improve the appearance and life expectancy of a vehicle, which is something drivers should keep in mind as they hope to get the most out of their automotive investment. SC243723



## Did you know?

Sport utility vehicles (SUVs) may never be as fuel-efficient as more traditional cars, but one segment of the SUV market has made great strides in relation to fuel efficiency since the turn of the century. Data from the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2020 EPA Automotive Trends Report indicated the small SUV segment had the greatest improvement of fuel economy among all vehicle segments between 2000 and 2020. Average fuel economy among small SUVs increased by 65 percent during that period, which began with such vehicles getting 17.9 miles per gallon of gas and ended with them averaging 29.5 miles per gallon. The Chevrolet Equinox FWD, the Ford Edge FWD, the Hyundai Kona FWD, the Jeep Cherokee FWD, and the Mazda CX-30 2WD are among the vehicles that are categorized as small SUVs. SC243727



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