

This is the time of year when people vacation and take summer road trips. Getting to your destination and back safely is priority number one.

So take a few minutes now to focus on what matters most. By following the 3 steps below, you can map out a strategy to avoid road trouble and ensure your entire trip is as safe and worry-free as possible.

1. BEFORE YOU GO

Regular maintenance such as tune-ups, oil changes, battery checks, tire rotations, go a long way toward preventing breakdowns before they happen. If your vehicle has been serviced according to the manufacturer's recommendations, it should be in good shape and nearly ready to travel. Providing your vehicle is well maintained, getting it ready for a road trip is relatively quick and easy. If not—schedule a preventive maintenance check-up with your mechanic now. Perform the following basic safety checks before you go:

Vehicle Safety Checklist

- **Tires** — Air pressure, tread wear, spare
Check the air pressure in all your tires, especially the neglected spare. To get an accurate reading, check pressure when tires are cold, meaning they haven't been driven on for at least three hours. You can find the correct pressure for your tires listed on a label inside the driver's doorframe or in the vehicle's owner's manual — the correct pressure is not the number listed on the tire itself.
Also, take five minutes to inspect your tires for signs of excessive or irregular wear. If the tread is worn down to 1/16 of an inch, it's time to replace your tires. If you find irregular tread wear patterns, it means your tires need rotation and/or

your wheels need to be realigned before you leave.

- **Belts and Hoses** — Condition and fittings
Look under the hood and inspect all belts and hoses to make sure they are in good shape with no signs of blisters, cracks, or cuts in the rubber. High summer temperatures accelerate the rate at which rubber belts and hoses degrade, so it's best to replace them now if they show signs of obvious wear. While you're at it, check all hose connections to make sure they're secure.

- **Wiper Blades** — Wear and tear on both sides
After the heavy duty imposed by winter storms and spring rains, it's likely that your windshield wipers are ragged from use and ready to be replaced. Moreover, like rubber belts and hoses, wiper blades are susceptible to the summer heat. Examine your blades for signs of wear and tear. If they aren't in tip-top condition, invest in new ones before you go.
- **Cooling System** — Needed servicing and coolant level
Carefully check your coolant level to make sure it's adequate. In addition, if it's time to have your cooling system flushed and refilled (or even nearly time), have it done now. On a long road trip in summer heat, you'll want your cooling system functioning at peak performance to avoid the possibility of your engine overheating.
- **Fluid Levels** — Oil, brake, transmission, power steering, coolant, and windshield
Obviously, you'll want to check your vehicle's oil level. And as with coolant, if it's time or even nearly time to have the oil

changed, now would be a good time to do it. In addition, check the following fluid levels: brake, automatic transmission, power steering, windshield washer, and coolant. Make sure each reservoir is full and if you see any sign of fluid leakage, take your vehicle in to be serviced.

- **Lights** — Headlights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers, interior lights, and trailer lights
See and be seen! Ensure all the lights on your vehicle are in working order. Check your headlights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers and interior lights. Towing a trailer? Be sure to check your trailer lights too. Failure of trailer light connections is a common problem and a serious safety hazard.
- **Air Conditioning** — Sensitive to heat? Check AC performance before traveling
If you're traveling with someone sensitive to heat, you may also want to ensure that your air conditioning system is functioning properly. Lack of air conditioning on a hot summer day can adversely affect people who are in poor health or are sensitive to heat, such as children and seniors. If the air is not blowing cold, it's a good idea to have the system repaired before you go.

Knowing the route to your destination and being well informed about weather and road conditions as well as unusual traffic activity ahead: crashes, road closures, work zones, or heavier than usual congestion will help you to head off traffic nightmares before they materialize.

Plan Your Route

- Obtain information on the latest tie-ups, traffic jams, roadway

conditions and visibility before you get behind the wheel. Then you can plan your route to avoid some delays or allow yourself extra drive time. Whether it's TV or the Internet before you depart or drive time radio on route, keep yourself informed.

- Plan your route ahead of time. Getting lost is embarrassing, frustrating and exasperating, but knowing where you're going ahead of time can reduce your stress and ensure that you arrive safely and on time.

Summer Safety Alert!

Remember: Never leave children unattended in parked vehicles especially during warmer weather. Even on a relatively cool summer day, with windows partially cracked open, temperatures inside a vehicle can soar, rapidly causing occupants to suffer from heat illness or even die from heatstroke.

2. WHAT TO TAKE

Some take-along items make your trip more pleasant, such as favorite CDs to listen to or snacks to tide you over until the next rest stop. Others help keep you and your passengers safer. While you don't want to ever overload your vehicle, you will want to make room for basic safety equipment.

Child Safety Seats

If you'll be traveling with children, you'll need to make room in your back seat for appropriate child safety and/or booster seats. Guidelines for proper child safety and booster seat use can be found at www.boosterseat.gov under "Which seat is right for my child?"

Emergency Roadside Kit

Even a well-maintained vehicle can break down, so it's advisable

to put together an Emergency Roadside Kit to carry with you. A cell phone tops the list of suggested emergency kit contents since it allows you to call for help when and where you need it.

A suggested Emergency Roadside Kit contains:

- Cell phone
- First aid kit
- Flashlight
- Flares and a white flag
- Jumper cables
- Jack (and ground mat) for changing a tire
- Basic repair tools and some duct tape (for temporarily repairing a hose leak!)
- A jug of water and paper towels for cleaning up
- Nonperishable food, drinking water, and medicines
- Extra windshield washer fluid
- Maps

3. ON THE ROAD

Getting there is half the fun of a road trip vacation. Plenty of distractions both inside and outside your vehicle can take your attention from the road. Cranky fellow travelers, traffic congestion, road construction and detours, ringing cell phones, unfamiliar roads, and loud music are just a few you might encounter. While you can expect some distractions, you can also counter them with safe driving techniques to keep you focused.

Tips for Staying Focused

The best way to stay focused while driving is to avoid fatigue

So schedule your trip to allow for frequent breaks. Stopping for food or beverages, taking time to pull over at a rest stop just to stretch your legs, staying overnight at a motel and sharing the driving are all good strategies for avoiding fatigue and staying alert behind the wheel.

Traveling with Children

Remember that long trips can be especially tough on children.

Stopping along the way makes the trip easier and less tiring for them as well- and more of an adventure too! Also, bring along a few favorite books or soft toys to keep the little ones occupied. The trip will seem to go faster for them, perhaps lessen the number of times they ask, "Are we there yet?" and better enable you to keep your attention on driving.

Buckle Up America. Every Trip. Every Time.

Along with staying focused, make sure everyone in your vehicle is buckled up properly at all times. In fact, buckling up is the single most effective thing you can do to keep yourself and your passengers safe while on the road.