

Care tips ensure working car-driver relationship

By Paul Shavlik

Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

So there you are, sitting up late on a sub-zero winter night, warm and cozy in a big easy chair, holding a cup of hot chocolate and curled up with a good book.

You may find yourself spending a great deal of your time indoors this winter, but your car won't have it that easy.

What steps can be taken to ensure a favorable working relationship between you and your car or pickup this winter?

Here are a number of common tips from local car dealers that can help you — and especially your vehicle — get through the coming cold season:

Weather deteriorates a vehicle's finish year-round, but mostly during the winter. A good wax job before winter's arrival is recommended — an amount of work, granted, but well worth it. Most brands of auto wax offer very good protection. Prices for car wax average around \$4 to \$5, with some brands \$8 and higher.

The salting of winter streets and highways greatly increases the chance of premature body rusting. Therefore, it is a good idea to continue washing your vehicle during the winter to remove road grime and salts, especially inside the fenderwells. Also wash the underside.

Undercoating is a process that can help any car, especially a new or relatively new one. A coating is sprayed onto the underside of the vehicle, protecting against many external factors. An undercoating costs anywhere from \$75 to \$200. A word of caution: Price around a bit, and if possible, view some examples of a business' work. Don't let your money be sprayed into thin air.

You'll find driving through slush and wet snow more pleasant with clear view of the road, and this view can depend on the vehicle's windshield wiper blades. If the windshield wiper blades are brittle or cracked, they should be replaced. Depending on brands and sizes, wiper blades cost between \$3 and \$6 per set. You also should have a good windshield ice scraper. These are available at most service stations and many stores, and are inexpensive.

The radiator fluid should be checked at a service station or with an inexpensive tester available at many stores. A rating of minus-40 degrees Fahrenheit is good. If you need to add antifreeze, follow the directions on the can, and run the engine for several minutes to allow circulation before re-testing.

Obviously, mud and snow tires are advised for winter driving. But if your vehicle has rear-wheel drive and radial tires on the front, you should put on radial tires on the rear. Because of the differences in flexing during operation, radial tires can cause dangerous steering if bias-ply tires are on the rear. Radial tires, however, are safe on the rear of a vehicle with front bias-ply tires. Today, there is some disagreement in the industry regarding this, but generally, the rule still holds.

How about the life-blood of your vehicle? (No, not the stereo!) The important link that makes it all happen: Yes, the motor and all its belongings. What kind of belongings? Electrical/ignition and carburetion systems, primarily. Assuming the engine is in good operating condition, it depends on these two systems to transport you to your destination.

Winter is the season that sees the failure of most vehicles that

are in need of a tune-up or carburetor and automatic choke adjustments. Such adjustments can be made inexpensively at most service stations and garages.

The big item, and perhaps the most important, is your vehicle's battery. If the battery is marginal in performance now, then you have two options: Leave it as it is and hope it will not fail you during the winter, or set your mind at ease by replacing it with a fresh, new battery. If ignition and carburetion are not in perfect turn, then the battery will have to work harder every time it turns over and starts a cold, stiff engine.

If the battery spins the engine a few seconds and then begins losing power, trouble is ahead, because the engine must start immediately or the battery will not be able to spin it fast enough to start.

Service stations can test the performance of batteries, but you can usually sense — through normal usage — if a change is warranted. Batteries typically cost between \$35 and \$80, and, excluding one or two overrated brands, you get what you pay for. Don't skimp on this vital component, unless you plan on trading the vehicle soon. Batteries are rated in cold cranking amps (CCA),

and the higher the figure, the better. Mid- and full-size vehicles need a minimum of 500 CCA, and compacts require the highest rating available.

For many, the purchase of a new battery can be a major financial burden, but being stranded on some deserted road on a dark, cold night because of a dead battery is, to say the least, undesirable.

If shopping for jumper cables, again do not put price ahead of quality. If you have an emergency, you need and depend on them. They must be large enough to fully transmit all the power the jumper battery can put out. Look for a numerical gauge of 6 or lower. The jumper cables I have are four-gauge, and cost \$32.95. They have been used numerous times and have never failed.

There are numerous other routine maintenance tips one could bring up. It would be beneficial to move into winter with a fresh oil change. For periods of prolonged near- or sub-zero weather, adding gasoline antifreeze is advisable, and keeping the tires properly inflated is always recommended.

One last suggestion to help make winter driving safer: Carry some extra clothing in your vehicle during the winter. Coveralls, sweatshirts, mittens, old coats and boots are all good choices. It doesn't matter how new or old they are, or how good or bad they look: If you should get stranded extra clothing can be the difference between getting somewhere for help and becoming another "statistic" of winter weather.

Dangers hinder helpers

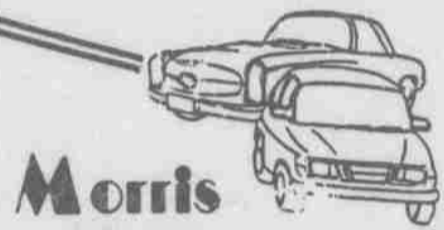
Helping a fellow driver who is stuck or whose car will not start may be a good gesture, but there are hidden dangers that you should be aware of and precautions that you should follow.

When jump-starting a dead battery, always attach the jumper cables to the car to be started first, then the running car. Never lean over the engine when jump-starting. If either battery is leaking gases, a spark can cause the battery to ex-

plode. When the car starts, remove the cables immediately.

A car stuck in snow or on ice with free spinning tires should be approached with caution. Although it is rare, a tire in this situation can explode. Usually this occurs when the tire is extremely worn.

When stuck on ice, putting the car in drive and reverse to rock the car back and forth will help gain traction. Traction mats, salt, sand or any abrasive sprinkled around the tires also will help.



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