

Today's Auto Repair with Chip Stewart

- Preventative Maintenance -

There is no doubt that the single most important thing an owner can do for his vehicle is to insure its proper maintenance. And, when it comes to maintenance, preventative maintenance is at the top of the list. We've already discussed the price of vehicle repairs and found they can, at times, be very costly. The best way to prevent high repair bills is through regular preventative maintenance or "P.M.". Preventative maintenance is not difficult and it's reasonably inexpensive, especially compared to the alternative. It *does* require a time and mileage schedule and some good record keeping. Most vehicle owner's manuals have a section set aside for just that or you could use a small notebook - keep it in your car.

Most owner's manuals have two maintenance schedules - one for normal driving and one for "other" or severe driving conditions. If you read the qualifications for both, you'll find that almost everyone (especially in this area) drives under severe conditions. That is the schedule I recommend following under *all* conditions simply because that will keep your car in better shape over a longer period of time.

The P.M. most people have done most often (I hope) is the engine oil change. This should be done every three to four thousand miles or three months. After that time, the breakdown process and the contamination of the oil increases rapidly. So, let's keep clean. Fast lube facilities are an excellent place to have your car's oil changed when you're in a hurry and you're at your mileage limit. However, I recommend that twice a year you take your car to a fully qualified garage for a complete lube, oil and filter service. It will cost a little more and take more time but will include a bumper to bumper "going-over" and inspection by a certified technician. He'll alleviate potential problems and advise you on the overall condition of your vehicle. That can really help to avoid major repairs.

P.M. tune-ups are required about every two years and can prevent a traveling breakdown. A lot of people think that since today's cars are computerized a tune-up is no longer necessary. Nothing could be further from the truth. Items like spark plugs, plug wires and filters need regular replacement and a scoping or scanning of computer components and sensors should be made to insure proper operation. A bad component such as a spark plug wire or an oxygen sensor can destroy other components costing ten times as much. Getting them checked during a P.M. tune-up by a tune-up specialist is your best bet.

Automatic transmissions are among the most expensive items to repair yet when it comes to preventative maintenance they are the most neglected. Owners that *do* pay attention to them often think that a simple fluid and filter change is all they need. In fact, that is only about half of a transmission service. Retorquing internal components to specifications, adjusting bands, linkages and indicators, and repairing accessible leaks and other minor problems are also required and these actions are major factors in the transmission's longevity. Once again, a specialist is the one to see. After all, would you let your foot doctor do a heart operation?

There are many other systems on your car that require periodic P.M.s to keep them operating at peak efficiency. Your owner's manual along with your automotive technician

or service writer can tell you about them. Good preventative maintenance will keep your driving experience pleasurable and trouble free.