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This fall's featured vehicle is Robbie Nielsen's
1931 Ford Model A (sort of).



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Republican

One piece at a time

BY ROXIE MURPHY
ADVOCATE STAFF WRITER
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BLAND — Robbie Nielsen cruises town in a 1931 Ford Model A, according to his license plates and title. But the car tells a different story.

Like the hit song “One Piece At a Time” by Johnny Cash, Nielsen’s version of a Cadillac has always been a Ford Model A. Around four or five years ago when his mother passed away, he was looking for something to take his mind off things. A month later, a Ford Model A popped up on for sale on Craigslist in Kansas. He didn’t think twice.

“The guy I got it from bought a farm from a real old man,” Nielsen said. “This car was in one of the barns on the farm.”

The Kansas owner tinkered with the car until he had it running, and when Nielsen picked it up, the bare bones

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Rat Rod • From page 2B

were there, along with a wicked pinstripe design on the top of the rear end, and a back seat full of Kansas license plates. It was perfect.

It was going to take some work to get it going, but with his mom's recent passing, Nielsen welcomed the distraction.

"This kinda took my mind off of things. If I wasn't working, I was playing with my car," he said. "It's kinda mama's car."

For a while, he kept a yellow rose on the dash for his mom.

"I didn't really have money — or want to spend money — on it at the time," Nielsen said. "And with a rat rod, that is kinda the thing — throw it together with whatchya got. That's what makes it kinda cool."

He decorated the inside, with its broken, original wood trim, with pictures of beer boxes on the headliner, and the old license plates covered the holes.

He Built It One Piece At A Time

"Every piece we put into this car to make it work came out of a junkyard. I didn't buy anything new for it," Nielsen said. "Except for the spark plug wires. I might have bought those new."

This was going to be a rat rod at its best. Rat Rods were born to imitate the early hot rods of the 1940s, 50s, and early 60s. Compared to the street-rods, where car enthusiasts might spend thousands of dollars on original parts and chrome, rat rods are built from scrap pieces lying around and are

rarely more than \$5,000 total to build. Fabrication, junk parts, and sometimes nothing that should ever be located in a car shows up in a rat rod.

While Nielsen didn't sneak the pieces of the car out of General Motors assembly line in a lunch box over 20 years, it probably had a similar result in appearance.

"The rear-end came out of an old Chevy pickup. The front-end came out of an old Ford Mustang. The motor — we

and little stuff — like barbed wire to hold my dipstick in place. I didn't have a bracket, so I used barbed wire."

A decorative "diamond piece at the front of the hood is a doorknob from his grandma's house.

He wasn't sure what the car was going to turn out like, and didn't really have a picture in his head when he started.

We tried to put it all together one night...

The 1990s fuel-injected, stock 350 engine fits the car well. They took the top of the engine off and added a bigger carburetor.

"We wanted to go back to old-school, one piece at a time, like the old Johnny Cash song goes," Nielsen said, pointing to a small teal painting on the carburetor that read "one piece at a time" with a stencil drawing of an acoustic guitar. "That is one of my favorite songs, and I am a guitar player. It only seemed right that it be on there."

He calls the car a "coffee can" with a 350 cu (5.7 L) small block engine.

"The car don't weigh as much as a go-kart," he said. "It actually rides pretty good for what it is. I mean, you would think it would be real rough. The back-end is a little rough, but it's got real high tech racing suspension on the front out of that old Mustang, so it smooths it out real good. It's not

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STEVE DARNELL from Vegas Rat Rods signed the dash board at a car show in Arkansas.

got it out of an old '95 Suburban. The air cleaner we found off an old Cadillac. The grill we found on an old Mercedes Benz. The headlights are off an old tractor," Nielsen said.

He doesn't stop there. Those are just the fabricated parts used to make the Ford go.

"Little stuff like this -- we made a reservoir out of an old Jack Daniels bottle," Nielsen said, pointing to a clear fifth of whisky bottle housing coolant. "All the different pieces

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Rat Rod • From page 3B

hard to drive. It's fun to drive."

They left the motor stock for reliability purposes.

"I get in it, It starts up cold, hot — this is one of the most — probably the most reliable vehicles I own and it will run all day long," Nielsen said.

It didn't come with a gas tank. The Ford has a seven gallon gas tank made from an old barrel.

"It don't have any gages that work inside the car — no speedometer or anything like that. So this is my gas gage," Nielsen said, holding up a four-foot pole with faded black markings to show quarter, half, three-quarter and full tank. He checks the fuel by opening the gas cap on top of the car and sticking the pole all the way down a line to an old, seven gallon metal barrel strapped down with motorcycle chain inside the car.

"Gas mileage isn't any worse than a normal vehicle, but I have to fill up pretty often and have to check it alot," he said. "I had to build a tank to go in here — it didn't have a fuel tank when I got it. We found that old barrel in the junkyard. I took the barrel to the shop, had it steam cleaned and welded up."

But he makes sure to change things up as he notices problems or ways to make it better. The newest addition? Metal knuckles painted on the back to match the steering wheel.

We noticed something was definitely wrong

When Nielsen first started the build on the '31, he didn't know what was going to happen.

"Pretty much, I thought, let's just see what happens," he said. "This is, like, the third interior I have built for it."

When he first started the build, he had some old beer kegs.

"We cut out into seats, but they were so uncomfortable, I couldn't ride in them for very long," he said. "They looked really cool, sitting in beer kegs, but I had to take them out."

His current interior consists of a wooden console and seats made from an old road sign.

"A buddy of mine has a metal shop and he made me these side brackets," Nielsen

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NELSON POINTS out the World War II hand grenade — brought home from the war by his grandfather — that sits on the top of the Mercedes Benz grill on his rat rod.



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NELSON'S '31 Ford rat rod includes a clear Jack Daniels whiskey bottle as an overflow container for his coolant. The back of the car continues a theme of brass knuckles from the steering wheel. The pin stripping above the window was already present when he purchased the car from its previous owner in Kansas.





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Rat Rod • From page 4B

said. “The backs are made out of an old road sign. I found these pillows and threw them in there.

The car boasts the “original paint job” that has been weathered down to bare metal with one exception -- the number “46” faded on the driver’s side back door.

“I thought about repainting it, but I like that you can kinda see it, even though you don’t know what it is,” Nielsen said. “What we were thinking is this car was a dirt track racer back in the 1960s, cause somebody had already chopped a bunch of stuff out of it and it already had the numbers on the side. Somebody at one time has raced it.”

You’ll know it’s me when I come through your town...

The car has never been washed as long as he has owned it, but he said they do keep the red wheels clean. A hood ornament made from a grenade his grandfather brought home from World War II sits proudly on the front.

“I like it because we pull into a car show and we can let all the kids climb in it, honk the horns,” he said. “The kids love it, and they can’t hurt nothing.”

On each side of the back doors, which are welded shut, are old drive-in speakers that are hooked to a newer radio Nielsen installed.

“They actually have a warning on the back in case you get caught with them — about stealing,” he said. “They are actually from an old 1950s drive-in.”

The front-end has a window, but no windshield wipers.

“A little Rainex is all,” Nielsen said.

A tag hanging on the “tree” shift warns drivers “Unsafe to Use,” but it doesn’t stop his kids and wife, Leslie from loving the vehicle.

“I call it my Little Rat,” Nielsen said. A fitting name.

Ugh!, what model is it?

Well, it’s not a ‘49 through ‘70 model, Mr. Cash.

Luckily for Nielsen, the Ford came with the original 1931 Model A title and does not weigh 60 pounds. It’s a 1931 Ford Model A according to the title.

“That is what it is licensed and titled as. It has one title and that’s cool, ‘cause since we have historic tags on it, there are on there for life,” Nielsen said. “It doesn’t have to have seat belts or anything like that, don’t have to



THE HEADLINER on Nielsen’s rat rod is decorated with old cardboard beer boxes.

worry about it passing inspection. As long as the VIN number on the car matches the one on the title, they will give you plates for it.”

The family takes it to “Rockabilly” car shows and even once met Steve Darnell from Vegas Rat Rods at a car show in Arkansas.

“He actually sat in that car, and signed my

dashboard,” Nielsen said. “He sat in there and played with Hot Wheels with my kids on the floor of that car.”

It’s not unusual to see Nielsen driving through town, doing burnouts and or taking his wife out to dinner. His “psycho-billy Cadillac” turns heads, and he’s fine with that.

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Is there a “best time” to buy or sell a vehicle?

The automotive industry is big business. According to the Statista Research Department, roughly 79 million cars and light trucks are expected to be sold worldwide by the end of 2019.

When buying or selling a vehicle, many people wonder if there is a particularly advantageous time to buy or sell. The best time to sell is not necessarily the best time to buy, which can present problems for vehicle owners who need to sell their current cars in order to afford new ones. Industry insiders offer their input on key times to move vehicles.

When to sell

Cars depreciate quite a bit the moment they move off of the lot. Most lose upwards of 20 percent of their value within the first year, according to Edmunds, a leading automotive information company and pricing index. Certain things contribute to depreciation, including mileage, type of driving and whether the car was maintained or not.

Sometimes the best times for a person to sell are when it no longer is financially prudent to keep the vehicle. For some, this may mean when the bumper-to-bumper warranty expires or if mileage starts to tick up, adversely affecting resale value.

The time of year to sell that is most favorable is between the months of March through August, offers U.S. News and World Report. When temperatures start to climb, people begin thinking about warm-weather and getting outdoors. This is a time of year when tax refunds are issued, and it is far



enough away from the holidays to make big purchases more affordable.

When to buy

Kelley Blue Book® says that most dealerships do their biggest “wheeling and dealing” toward the end of the calendar year. November and December are some of their most profitable months, and consumers who are able to budget for a new vehicle at this time of year can get great prices. Dealers want to carry over as little inventory as possible into the new year, so some are motivated to negotiate more on the current year models, enabling them to make room for new inventory and meet existing sales projections.

The financial resource Bankrate says the day of the week one chooses to buy also may be something to consider. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are slow days at many dealerships, which may make negotiating a

deal easier. Shopping holiday sales, such as those on Black Friday or New Year’s Eve, also can help consumers earn better deals.

Timing is everything in the vehicle market. Learn the best times to buy or sell a vehicle and reap the rewards.

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Three unique ways to save money on the day you buy a car

Short of buying a home, many consumers will never spend more money than they do when purchasing a new vehicle. According to the automotive resource Kelley Blue Book®, new-vehicle prices increased by 2 percent between April 2018 and April 2019, rising to slightly less than \$37,000 in that period.

With so much money at stake, car buyers' decisions in regard to which car to buy and how to finance the purchase are significant. Some financial variables, including sales tax, may be set in stone. However, buyers can make the process of buying new cars more affordable.

1. Pay the taxes upfront.

When buying a new car, buyers will receive a rundown of all of the costs from the dealership that's selling them the vehicle. Sales taxes will be included in that rundown. Buyers who are financing their vehicles can save money over the long haul by including the sales taxes in their initial down payment. Doing so means buyers will only pay interest on the vehicle and not the vehicle as well as the taxes going forward.

2. Use a cash back credit card when making your down payment and paying taxes on the vehicle.

Some lenders may not allow down payments to be made in anything but cash, while others accept credit card payments. Car buyers who have cash back credit cards can use those cards when making down payments and/or paying the taxes on the vehicle to reduce the initial costs of buying the car. For example, if a credit card rewards card holders with 2 percent cash back on every charged purchase, buyers can then lower the cost of that down payment by 2 percent by simply using their cards when making the payment. Just be sure to pay the balance in full when the bill is due, as credit card interest charges can negate any savings you might earn.

3. Carefully read the service contract.

Many dealerships now offer service contracts that can be rolled into monthly payments. These contracts may cover certain maintenance costs as defined in the agreement. Each auto service contract is different, and some may just be offering duplicate coverage already provided by the manufacturers' warranty. Buyers always have the option to decline the service contract and should never agree to it without first reading the entire contract. Requesting to do so can be difficult, as service contracts are often proposed as buyers finalize their financing agreements, and many packages must be accepted on-site before the loan is finalized. But buyers have the right to take their time and read the contracts.

New cars are expensive, but buyers can employ various strategies to save money before signing on the dotted line.

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How to make driving in inclement weather more safe

Impaired visibility can be a safety hazard while driving. Everything from sun glare to hail can affect a driver's ability to see the road and navigate it effectively. Before drivers get behind the wheel, they should make note of their local forecast and make a plan for what to do if rain, snow or other conditions make it challenging to drive.

The International Association of Traffic and Safety Sciences indicates that, based on an examination of crash test data conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the "likelihood of a crash increases during periods of low visibility, despite the tendency for less traffic and for lower speeds to prevail during these times."

Drivers can take several steps to improve their visibility when driving in poor weather conditions.

- Inspect and change windshield wiper blades. Wipers are instrumental in clearing precipitation away from the windshield. If they're not functioning properly, wipers cannot do their jobs. Drivers should replace their wipers at the first indication that they are no longer effective. In some conditions, wipers can freeze or stick. Drivers should

then pull over and clean the wipers manually.

- Clear obstructions. Always make sure the windshield is clear before driving. This can include removing ice and snow in the winter and cleaning off mud or bug splatter in the spring and summer. Use the front and rear defrost if condensation fogs up windshields and windows.

- Slow down. Foul weather can reduce drivers' ability to see far into the distance. Drivers should always drive slower in inclement weather in order to improve reaction time.

- Top off fluids. Always keep the windshield washer reservoir full and keep extra fluid in the trunk. In addition, look for a fluid that does not freeze in very cold temperatures.

- Learn how to drive in fog. Each year, more than 38,700 vehicle crashes occur in fog, states the Federal Highway Administration. Travelers Insurance recommends slowing down, staying focused and using regular headlights and not high beams when driving in fog.

- Go out only if necessary. In snowy or icy conditions, drive only if it's absolutely

necessary, as snow and ice can impair visibility and make roads slick, says AAA.

- Avoid driving at dusk and dawn. The human eye can have trouble adjusting to rapidly changing light and darkness conditions, which are common at dusk and dawn. If possible, drivers should make trips during

the heart of the day, especially if poor lighting conditions typically make it difficult for them to drive.

Drivers can take steps to improve visibility when inclement weather makes roadways hard to navigate.

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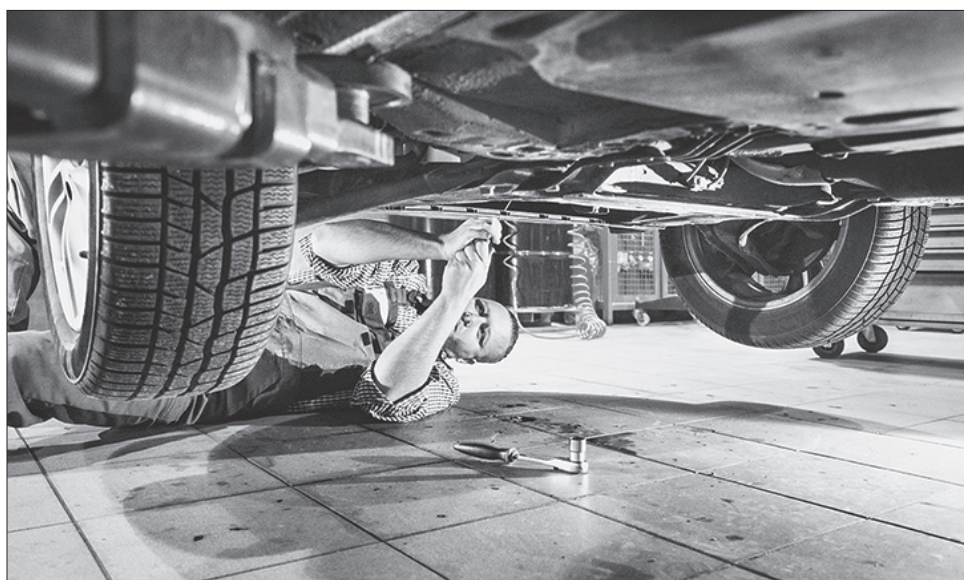
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The importance of routine vehicle maintenance

Owning a car is a big responsibility. Drivers who plan to keep their vehicles for the long haul must emphasize maintenance if they want to keep adding miles to their odometers. In fact, the automotive information site CarAdvice says that routine maintenance may be the most important thing drivers can do for their vehicles.

A vehicle needs consistent care if it is to run efficiently. Maintenance also reduces the risk of roadside breakdowns and costly repairs. Here's a look at some of the benefits of staying on top of maintenance.

- **Saves money:** Even though maintenance costs money, sticking to a consistent maintenance schedule can save big bucks in the long run. For example, the cost of rotating and aligning tires is considerably less than repairing a car after a major blowout and paying for a tow and tire replacement.

- **Improves performance and efficiency:** Routine maintenance includes oil changes, filter changes and fluid top-offs. Such tasks keep engines running smoothly. Ignoring this routine maintenance can put engines in jeopardy of breaking down and adversely affect vehicle performance, diminishing fuel economy and leading to a sluggish ride.

- **Identifies safety issues:** Routine inspections and work performed by reputable service stations help drivers stay abreast of recalls or issues that can affect the safety of the vehicle.

- **Maintains a maintenance record:** When the time comes to sell the vehicle, having a log of routine maintenance indicates to potential buyers that the vehicle was well cared for.

- **Keeps compliance:** Vehicles covered under manufacturer's warranties typically need to be maintained in adherence to factory-recommended maintenance schedules. This ensures that the vehicle is in compliance and will be covered in the event of a warranty claim.

Routine vehicle maintenance is important for a variety of reasons. Drivers can work with a trusted and reliable mechanic to develop a schedule that keeps their cars and trucks on the road.

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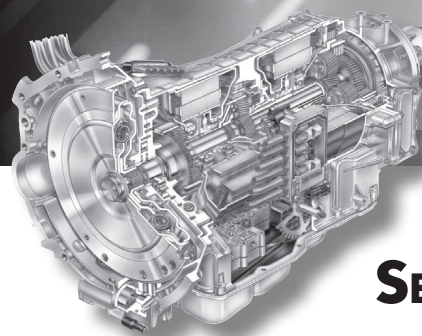
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The safest place for kids in the car

Riding in a vehicle can be an exciting prospect for children. Such rides provide a chance to see the world outside of the house, and the speed with which scenery is flying by can be exhilarating for young minds.

Children are first introduced to riding in cars as babies, when child safety seats will keep them secure. Although laws vary depending on where people are driving, the American Academy of Pediatrics advises that children remain in a rear-facing car seat until age 2 or older. As they get older and gain weight, children who have outgrown the rear-facing weight or height limit for their seats should use a forward-facing seat with a harness for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by their car seat manufacturer, says the AAP.

When children are old enough to graduate from car seat to booster seat to sitting in the car with only a seat belt, parents may wonder about where their youngsters can sit when riding in a vehicle. One area of the car tends to be safer than others for children. Researchers from the University of Buffalo who studied crash-related fatalities in relation to seat location discovered that the backseat is 59 to 86 percent safer than the

front seat. What's more, the middle seat in the back of the car is 25 percent safer than the window seats.

The science behind the study is that the middle seat offers the most distance from impact during a collision, or what the industry calls "the crumple zone." The outer seats will be more affected, while the middle seat remains more insulated. However, the middle seat is only the safest when used with a full seat belt, rather than just a lap harness; otherwise, children should sit in the back where a full three-point seat belt is available, advises the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

In addition, it can be tempting to cave under pressure and allow tweens to ride in the front of the car when they ask to do so or say that it is embarrassing to ride in back — since all of their friends are riding up front. The organization Safe Ride 4 Kids says studies show the safest place in the car for tweens is the back, until they are at least 13 years of age.

Riding in the middle seat in the back of the car is the safest place for passengers, including children. Parents and caregivers should keep safety in mind when kids are in the car.



STUDIES HAVE shown that the rear middle seat is the safest in the vehicle if a 3-point seat belt is available.

Did you know?

In 2012, the U.S. Department of the Treasury studied the effect that getting stuck in traffic has on fuel consumption. Researchers discovered that Americans were wasting 1.9 billion gallons of gas each year due to congested roads and inadequate transportation infrastructure. Although that study was conducted in 2012, it's reasonable to conclude that wasted fuel remains a big and potentially dangerous issue. One way to cut down on the environmental and financial toll of traffic is to find different routes that help drivers avoid traffic jams. Even if such routes are more circuitous, they may end up helping commuters save time and money in the long run. Popular GPS-based traffic apps can guide drivers to less congested roadways by allowing users to set filters to avoid traffic.



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Questions older drivers can ask themselves to see if it's still safe to drive

Men and women know that adjustments must be made as they get older. Athletes nearing their golden years may not be able to push themselves as hard at the gym as they once did. Professionals nearing retirement age might not be able to pull long hours at the office like they used to.

But aging affects more than just work and play. As men and women age, their ability to perform everyday tasks, including driving, may diminish as well.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration notes that, as people age, certain changes they experience can affect their ability to safely operate an automobile. Changes in eyesight, physical fitness and reflexes may require aging drivers to reassess their skills behind the wheel. The NHTSA notes that drivers can ask themselves the following questions as they try to assess their driving abilities.

How is my eyesight?

The American Optometric Association notes that vision changes naturally occur as a person ages. Such changes do not necessarily mean drivers have to give up the keys to their vehicles. In fact, they may just require more routine eye examinations. The NHTSA says having trouble reading signs easily, recognizing someone from across the street, seeing street signs and pedestrians, and handling headlight glare are common signs of age-related eye problems.

Can I control my vehicle?

Age-related loss of strength, coordination and flexibility can make it hard for aging men and women to control their vehicles. Some signs that drivers might be having trouble controlling their vehicles include

trouble looking over shoulders to change lanes, difficulty moving foot from the gas pedal to the brake pedal and difficulty turning the steering wheel. Pain in the knees, legs or ankles also can make it difficult for drivers to control their vehicles.

Does driving make me nervous, scared or overwhelmed?

Drivers who feel confused by traffic signs and traffic (including pedestrian traffic) should stop driving until they can discuss the issue with their physicians. Medication can sometimes make drivers feel sleepy or confused, and some aging drivers even find themselves overwhelmed in otherwise normal driving situations.

Are my loved ones concerned about my driving?

Aging drivers may feel offended when family members question their ability to drive. However, the NHTSA notes that sometimes other people notice things about a person's driving that the person does not. The concern expressed by loved ones should not be taken lightly.

Do I drive with passengers?

Drivers who routinely drive with passengers, especially young children, carry extra responsibility. As a result, such drivers owe it to themselves and their passengers to honestly assess their driving abilities.

Various remedies can address age-related driving issues, and drivers should discuss them with their doctors the moment they feel as though their skills behind the wheel are starting to diminish.



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Tire maintenance keeps drivers safe

Maintaining tires is an important component of safe driving. Tires are some of the hardest working parts on a car or truck and are subjected to wear and tear every time rubber meets the road.

Tires affect many components of driving, including handling, braking and the comfort of the ride. Maintaining tires makes driving safe not only for drivers and their passengers, but also for fellow motorists.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says that, in 2017, 738 fatalities occurred because of tire-related crashes. Many of those crashes were no doubt preventable, and that only highlights the importance of maintaining tires and monitoring their performance.

Poor tire maintenance can lead to premature wear and potentially result in a blowout. The automotive group AAA notes it is important to visually inspect tires as often as possible. Drivers should look for overall tread wear. Pay special attention to tread wear on one edge of the tires, which could indicate poor alignment. Erratic tread wear may mean tires are out of balance.

Drivers also should pay attention to how their cars drive and sounds. Unusual vibration or thumping noises suggest issues with the tires. A car that pulls in one direction also may be experiencing tire problems.

Vehicle owners should be aware of the routine maintenance

steps that can keep them safe and improve the life expectancy of tires.

- **Tire pressure:** The NHTSA says only 19 percent of consumers properly check and inflate their tires. Keeping tires properly inflated is one of the most important steps to maintaining them. Tires lose around 1 psi per month, and underinflated or overinflated tires can contribute to unusual wear, blowouts and even excessive fuel consumption.

- **Rotation:** Check the owner's manual or recommendations from the tire manufacturer, but know that most mechanics advise having tires rotated every 5,000 to 8,000 miles. Rotation helps distribute wear more evenly on tires.

- **Balancing:** AAA says balancing also helps minimize uneven wear and tear. Balanced tires are achieved by using small weights attached to the wheels to limit vibration of the tire and wheels as they turn. New tires should be balanced, and tires also should be balanced after one or more is removed to repair a puncture.

- **Alignment:** Vehicles have wheel alignment measurements that pertain to manufacturers' specifications. Alignment that falls outside of the range can impact handling, fuel economy and tread wear. A drift or pull suggests alignment problems and should be addressed.

Vehicle owners should keep tire inspection and maintenance in mind as part of their overall car care plan.



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Handle a breakdown with ease

Drivers expect their vehicles to safely transport them from point A to point B. But sometimes drivers find themselves stranded on the side of the road due to a breakdown. That can be an especially precarious position to be in, but knowing what to do during a breakdown can help drivers and their passengers get through such situations unscathed.

1. Find a safe spot to pull over. Whenever possible, guide the car to a shoulder or area out of the line of traffic but still visible to oncoming traffic. If the car is not drivable, enlist the help of someone to push it into a safe zone.

2. Turn on hazard lights. Esurance advises to put on hazard lights, which will warn other drivers that something is wrong. Hazard lights also may alert other motorists who might offer assistance. Once your hazard lights are on, pop the hood, which can serve as an additional alert to other drivers.

3. Engage the emergency brake. Turn the wheel away from the road and put on

the emergency brake to help prevent the car from rolling.

4. Set up other warning signals. Prepared drivers keep cones, reflective triangles or flares in their cars. AARP suggests placing three warning signals. The first should be 50 feet away and directly behind the vehicle. The other two can then be placed nearer to the vehicle.

5. Remain in the vehicle. It is safer to stay in the vehicle and call for help than to get out and stand on the side of a busy roadway.

6. Call for assistance. Use a mobile phone to dial a roadside assistance service or tow truck. Drivers also may want to contact the nearest police station to ask for help.

Roadside assistance programs are available for a fee from private companies and sometimes through vehicle dealerships or insurance companies. Such services can provide peace of mind if and when breakdowns occur.

Did you know?

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says car crashes are the leading cause of death among teenagers. Roughly one-quarter of those involve underage drivers who had been drinking. In fact, the NHTSA says that, in 2017, young drivers between the ages of 16 and 24 made up 42 percent of drivers involved in fatal drunk-driving crashes. While the NHTSA estimates that laws that adopted a minimum legal drinking age of 21 have saved nearly 32,000 lives since 1975, the group also notes that young drivers who are legally able to drink still pose a significant threat. In 2017, 27 percent of drunk drivers were between the ages of 21 and 24 while 26 percent of drunk drivers were between the ages of 25 and 34.

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