



## Car Care Articles

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### You Go Girl... Right to the Repair Shop

If you're one of the more than 80% of women who say they're responsible for getting the family vehicle serviced or repaired, you go girl – right to the repair shop with your clanking, clunking or hot under the hood ride.



But if you want to avoid getting steamed under your own hood at the reception you get there it will help if you familiarize yourself with a few useful trouble-shooting tips first.

Lack of automotive knowledge has been an issue for many women since they first took to the roads a century ago, but in truth, most males don't know much about what really makes vehicles tick either. They are usually more familiar with the basics though and so can sound more knowledgeable and more importantly often make themselves

understood better at the repair shop. As with many aspects of modern life it all comes down to communication and with a U.S. study showing that five percent of all accidents are related to poor maintenance, getting the correct message across to your mechanic can be a life saver for you and your family.

Following the maintenance schedules in your owners manual will help to keep problems from developing, but when they do, providing a service technician as accurate a description of what your vehicle is, or isn't, doing is critical to a speedy diagnosis. Like CSI's crime investigators they need a few forensic pointers to lead the way to a mechanical culprit.

Fortunately your vehicle usually provides them, if you know what to look for, listen to, feel and even smell.

Often your first indication of a problem is a physical sensation: engine continues to run after ignition is switched off; a hesitation in response when you step on the gas, or stalling; misfiring, a pulsation often accompanied by matching exhaust noise; engine cuts out completely for a moment or two at irregular intervals; lack of power, sluggish acceleration; a rough and uneven idle; surging while driving at a steady speed.

Also a good indicator of imminent mechanical issues are unusual sounds: squeaks, grinding or metal-to-metal sounds can mean brake problems; sharp metallic sounds when you hit a bump can mean worn shocks or struts or other faulty suspension components; a heavy knocking or rattle that increased in frequency as engine speed

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rises or when it's under load is often bad news indicating internal problems; squeaky or chattering wipers mean they need replacing; a whine from any of the wheels while cornering can be from a faulty wheel bearing; a shrill screech from under the hood can mean a loose or worn fan belt, or a power steering pump problem; a whistle can be a faulty door seal; a faulty exhaust can produce anything from a slight hiss to a very noticeable racket.

Visual clues are often found on the surface of your usual parking spot: a large pool of black engine oil is obviously a bad sign; as is a pool of yellow, green, orange or pink coolant; a puddle of oily pink, red or clear fluid might be from the transmission or power steering; clear liquid can also be brake fluid; if it's summer and you notice clear liquid dripping from near the front of the car it could just be water from the air conditioner's condenser. If you're not sure the liquids are yours, slide a piece of cardboard under where they seem to be coming from on your vehicle.



The easiest visual tell-tale is, of course, an instrument panel warning light. If it's not obvious what it is indicating your manual will inform you.

Your nose is also a sensitive problem finder: a hot, sweet-ish odor can be the first hint of a cooling system problem; a pool of clear liquid with a sharp smell might be brake fluid; a heavy, burnt, rather sickening smell, often accompanied by blue smoke from under the hood or the exhaust pipe can be burning engine oil; a failing transmission can also produce smoke; acrid, burnt-toast odors (sometimes with smoke accompaniment) can be caused by burning wiring; a sulfurous, rotten-egg smell often relates to the emission system and may or may not be a problem.

Change can be another trouble indicator: is fuel or oil consumption higher; does it handle, ride or stop differently; doesn't it like cold or wet weather any more?

The technician not only needs to know what the vehicle is doing but where the problem is emanating from, when it occurs and its frequency.

Is it from outside or inside; the front or rear; right or left side; when the engine is cold, or hot; when you're accelerating or braking; during a turn; when you're using the heater, air conditioning, starter, wipers or other electrical accessories; does the problem come and go or is it constant?

Communicating what's occurring to the best of your ability to the technician who will actually be doing the work is best, but this isn't always possible. Often you'll be describing the problem to a service writer who then passes it on to the mechanic, so good advice is, don't rely on your memory or anybody else's, write a clear description of the problem and circumstances down on paper for the mechanic to read.

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