A PLAIN-ENGLISH PRACTICAL GUIDE

Car Care Basics

Keep It Running, Catch Problems Early, Pay Only for What You Need



Fluids, Tires, Batteries, Warning Lights and Dealing With Repair Shops

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

Car Care Basics

Fluids, Tires, Batteries, Warning Lights and Dealing With Repair Shops

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

Car Care Basics: Fluids, Tires, Batteries, Warning Lights and Dealing With Repair Shops

Copyright 2026 by Andrew Dominguez.

Free to download. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews. You are welcome to download this book and read it for free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Independently published. First edition, 2026.

Trinfinity Enterprises, Dayton, Nevada.

Questions and corrections: andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com

Please read before you use this book. This book is for general information and education only. It is not legal, medical, financial, tax, or other professional advice, and reading it does not create a professional relationship of any kind. Laws, rules, prices, and research change, and every situation is different. Before you act on anything in this book, check it against current sources and talk with a lawyer, doctor, licensed professional, or other qualified expert as your situation calls for. I worked hard to get the facts right, but I can't promise that every detail is complete, correct, or current. You use this information at your own risk. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no responsibility or liability for any loss, injury, or damage of any kind that comes from using or relying on this book.

Repair and electrical notice. Home repair, auto work, and electrical work can cause serious injury, fire, electrocution, property damage, and death. Many jobs need a permit, an inspection, or a licensed contractor or electrician under your local code. Follow your local building and electrical codes and the maker's instructions, turn off and test the power before you touch any wiring, wear proper safety gear, and hire a licensed professional for any job beyond your skill. Doing your own work may also affect a warranty or your insurance.

Contents

Before You Begin....1
Chapter 1: Know Your Car....2
Chapter 2: Checking the Fluids....4
Chapter 3: Tires....7
Chapter 4: The Battery....10
Chapter 5: Warning Lights....12
Chapter 6: Brakes, Wipers and Lights....14
Chapter 7: Following the Maintenance Schedule....16
Chapter 8: Repair Shops and Avoiding Overcharges....19
Chapter 9: Safety Recalls....22
Chapter 10: Ready for the Road....24
Chapter 11: Records and Budget....26
Monthly Car Check....28
Car Log....29
My Car's Numbers....31
Glossary....32
Acronyms....33
Sources....34
About This Book....35

Before You Begin

A car is the second biggest purchase most people make, and for most of us it is how we get to work, the doctor and the store. Keeping it running is mostly about a few simple habits: check the tires, check the fluids, follow the maintenance schedule, pay attention to warning lights, and know how to deal with a repair shop.

You do not need to be a mechanic for any of this. This book is written for drivers who want to understand their car well enough to catch problems early, avoid unneeded repairs, and talk to a shop with confidence.

Your Owner's Manual Comes First

Every car is different. Your owner's manual gives the right oil, the right tire pressure, the right maintenance schedule and the meaning of every warning light for your car. Where this book and your manual differ, follow the manual. If you lost the manual, most automakers post them online by year and model.

How to Use This Book

Read Chapters 1 and 2 first, then use the monthly checklist in the appendix. The later chapters cover tires, batteries, warning lights, brakes, maintenance schedules, repair shops, recalls and being ready for a breakdown.

What This Book Is and Is Not

This is general information. It is not a repair manual. If a car feels unsafe to drive, pull over, stop and get help.

Chapter 1: Know Your Car

Spend twenty minutes with your owner's manual and your car in the driveway. You will learn more than you expect.

Find These in the Manual

- ☐ The maintenance schedule, and whether your driving counts as "normal" or "severe" service
- ☐ The recommended oil type and viscosity (for example, 0W-20)
- ☐ The tire pressure, also printed on a label usually on the driver's door jamb
- ☐ The page that explains each warning light
- ☐ How to open the hood, and where the jack, spare tire or inflator kit are
- ☐ What fuel octane the engine needs

Find These Under the Hood

With the engine off and cool, open the hood and find:

- **Engine oil dipstick**, usually with a yellow or orange handle, and the oil fill cap
- **Coolant reservoir**, a plastic tank with MIN and MAX marks
- **Brake fluid reservoir**, usually near the driver's side at the back of the engine bay
- **Windshield washer fluid reservoir**, usually with a windshield symbol on the cap
- **Battery**, unless your car has it in the trunk or under a seat
- **Engine air filter box**, a large plastic box connected to the air intake

Some cars also have a power steering reservoir and a transmission dipstick. Many newer cars do not, or the transmission is sealed and checked only by a shop.

Write Down Your Car's Numbers

- Year, make, model and trim
- Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), found on the dashboard at the bottom of the windshield, on the driver's door jamb, and on your registration and insurance card
- Tire size, printed on the tire sidewall (for example, 225/65R17)
- Oil type and capacity
- Wiper blade sizes

Your Next Step

Find the tire pressure label on your door jamb and write the number on the inside cover of this book.

Chapter 2: Checking the Fluids

Fluids are your car's lifeblood. Checking them takes a few minutes, and low fluid is often the first sign of a leak or a worn part. Check with the car parked on level ground. For oil, the engine should be off; your manual says whether to check hot or cold.

Engine Oil

1. Pull out the dipstick and wipe it clean with a paper towel.
2. Push it all the way back in, then pull it out again.
3. Look at where the oil line falls between the two marks (low and full).
4. If it is at or near the low mark, add a small amount of the oil your manual specifies through the fill cap, wait a minute, and check again. Do not overfill.
5. Look at the color. New oil is amber. Very dark, gritty oil means a change is due. Milky or foamy oil can mean coolant is getting into the oil, which needs a mechanic right away.

Some newer cars have no dipstick and show the oil level on the dashboard screen. Your manual explains how.

Oil Changes

Change the oil on the schedule in your owner's manual, or when the car's oil life monitor says to. Many newer cars go well beyond the old "every 3,000 miles" rule. Dusty roads, short trips, towing and extreme heat can count as severe service and call for more frequent changes. Check your manual.

Coolant

> **Never open a hot radiator** Coolant is under pressure when the engine is hot and can spray out and scald you. Check the coolant only when the engine is cold, and check the level in the plastic reservoir, not by opening the radiator cap.

The level should be between the MIN and MAX marks on the reservoir. If it is low, top it up with the type of coolant your manual specifies, usually mixed 50/50 with water unless it is premixed. If you have to add coolant often, there is a leak.

Brake Fluid

The level should be between the marks on the reservoir. Brake fluid goes down slowly as the brake pads wear. A sudden drop, or a level below MIN, can mean a leak; have it checked right away. Use only the type printed on the cap, and keep the cap closed; brake fluid absorbs moisture from the air.

Windshield Washer Fluid

Fill it whenever it is low. In freezing weather, use a washer fluid rated for winter so it does not freeze in the lines.

Other Fluids

Transmission fluid and power steering fluid, where they can be checked, are covered in your manual. Many newer cars have sealed transmissions and electric power steering.

Spots Under the Car

A few drops of clear water under the front of the car on a hot day is usually condensation from the air conditioner. Other leaks are worth a look:

Color	Often means
Dark brown or black, slick	Engine oil
Green, orange, pink or yellow, sweet smell	Coolant (toxic to pets and children; clean it up)
Red or pinkish	Transmission fluid or some power steering fluids
Clear to light brown, slick	Brake fluid (have it checked right away)
Blue	Windshield washer fluid

Slide a piece of cardboard under the car overnight to see where a drip comes from and what color it is.

Your Next Step

Check your oil and coolant levels this weekend.

Chapter 3: Tires

Tires are the only part of the car that touches the road. Under-inflated or worn tires stop longer, grip less in rain and snow, wear out faster, cost you fuel, and are more likely to fail. Checking them takes five minutes a month.

Tire Pressure

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) says to check the pressure in all tires, including the spare, at least once a month, when the tires are cold. Cold means the car has not been driven for at least three hours.

- **Use the number on the door label,** on the driver's door edge or door post, or in the owner's manual. The number molded on the tire sidewall is the tire's maximum, not the right pressure for your car.
- **Keep a tire pressure gauge in the car.** An inexpensive pencil or digital gauge works fine.
- **Check in the morning** or after the car has sat.
- **Add air** at a gas station or with a small home compressor, a little at a time, checking as you go.

Pressure changes with temperature. On a cold Nevada winter morning, tires read lower than they did on a hot afternoon. Check again when the seasons change.

NHTSA says properly inflated tires can save as much as 11 cents per gallon on fuel.

The Tire Pressure Warning Light

Cars from the 2008 model year on have a tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS). NHTSA notes that the light comes on only when a tire is significantly under-inflated, so it is not a substitute for

monthly checks. If the light flashes for a while and then stays on, the system itself has a problem; have it checked.

Tread Depth

NHTSA says to replace tires when the tread is worn down to 2/32 of an inch.

- **Wear bars:** small raised bars molded into the bottom of the tread grooves. When the tread is level with them, the tire is worn out.
- **Penny test:** put a penny into a groove with Lincoln's head upside down and facing you. If you can see the top of Lincoln's head, replace the tire.
- Check several spots on each tire, inside and outside edges too.

Uneven Wear

What you see	Likely cause
Worn in the center	Over-inflation
Worn on both edges	Under-inflation
Worn on one edge	Alignment problem
Cupped or scalloped spots	Worn suspension parts or balance

Have an alignment and suspension check if you see wear on one edge or cupping.

Rotation

If your automaker recommends it, NHTSA suggests rotating tires every 5,000 to 8,000 miles, or sooner if you see uneven wear. Many people have it done with every oil change.

Tire Age

Rubber ages even when tread looks fine. The last four digits of the DOT code on the sidewall give the week and year the tire was made;

“2321” means the 23rd week of 2021. NHTSA notes that some vehicle makers recommend replacing tires at six to 10 years old regardless of tread. Hot desert sun is hard on rubber; look for cracks in the sidewalls.

The Spare

Check the spare’s pressure too. NHTSA says a spare should not replace a worn tire except in an emergency. Many smaller “donut” spares are for short distances and low speeds; the limits are printed on the tire or in your manual. Some newer cars have no spare at all, only an inflator kit; learn how yours works before you need it.

Your Next Step

Buy a tire gauge, keep it in the glove box, and check all four tires and the spare this week.

Chapter 4: The Battery

Batteries usually fail without much warning, often on the first cold morning or after a long hot summer. Heat in particular wears batteries out, so desert drivers should pay attention.

Signs a Battery Is Weak

- The engine cranks slowly when you start it
- The battery warning light comes on
- Headlights dim at idle and brighten when you rev the engine
- You have needed a jump start
- The battery is several years old (look for a date sticker on the battery)

Simple Care

- Have the battery tested before winter. Many auto parts stores test batteries at no charge.
- Keep the terminals clean and tight. White or green crust can be cleaned off with a wire brush and a baking soda and water mix, with the engine off. Wear gloves and eye protection; battery acid burns.
- Make sure the battery is held down firmly. A loose battery can be damaged by vibration.
- If the car will sit for weeks, a battery maintainer (trickle charger) keeps it charged.

Jump-Starting Safely

Follow your owner's manual, which may have special steps or connection points. The usual order is:

1. Park the cars close but not touching. Turn both off.
2. Red clamp to the dead battery's positive (+) terminal.
3. Other red clamp to the good battery's positive (+) terminal.

4. Black clamp to the good battery's negative (-) terminal.
5. Last black clamp to bare, unpainted metal on the dead car's engine, away from the battery, not to the dead battery itself.
6. Start the good car and let it run a few minutes, then start the dead car.
7. Remove the clamps in reverse order.

A portable jump starter pack is a good thing to keep in the car. It lets you start the car without a second vehicle.

Your Next Step

Find the date on your battery and, if it is a few years old, have it tested this fall.

Chapter 5: Warning Lights

Dashboard warning lights are the car's way of telling you something is wrong. Your owner's manual has a page that shows every light on your car and what it means. Read it once now, before a light comes on.

Red, Yellow and Green

Most automakers use a color code:

Color	Generally means	What to do
Red	A serious problem or safety issue	Stop as soon as it is safe and check the manual. Do not keep driving if the manual says to stop.
Yellow or amber	Something needs attention soon	Check the manual and have it looked at soon.
Green or blue	A system is on (lights, cruise control)	No action needed.

Lights That Mean Stop Now

Check your manual, but on most cars these mean pull over safely and turn off the engine:

- **Oil pressure** (an oil can symbol): the engine may not be getting oil. Driving on can destroy the engine in minutes.
- **Engine temperature** (a thermometer in liquid): the engine is overheating. Pull over, turn the engine off, and let it cool. Do not open the radiator cap.
- **Brake system** (often "BRAKE" or a circle with an exclamation point): if the parking brake is off and this stays on, the brake system may have a problem.
- **Charging system** (a battery symbol): the car is running on battery alone and may soon stop. Head for a safe place or a shop.

The Check Engine Light

The check engine light (an engine outline) means the engine computer has found a problem and stored a code.

- **Steady light:** have it checked soon. A loose gas cap is a common cause; tighten it until it clicks and see whether the light goes out after a few days of driving.
- **Flashing light:** on most cars this means a severe engine misfire that can damage the catalytic converter. Slow down and get the car checked right away. Your manual tells you what yours means.

Many auto parts stores will read the code for free, which gives you a starting point. A code points to a system, not always to a specific part, so a good mechanic still needs to diagnose it.

Other Common Lights

- Tire pressure (an exclamation point in a horseshoe shape): see Chapter 3.
- Anti-lock brakes (ABS): the regular brakes still work, but anti-lock does not. Have it checked.
- Airbag: the airbag system may not work in a crash. Have it checked soon.
- Low fuel and low washer fluid: fill up.

Your Next Step

Open your owner's manual to the warning light page and read it through once.

Chapter 6: Brakes, Wipers and Lights

These are the parts that let you stop and see and be seen. They are worth a regular look.

Brakes

Have the brakes checked whenever the tires are rotated or at least once a year. Get them checked right away if you notice:

- Squealing or squeaking when you brake (many pads have a built-in squealer that signals wear)
- Grinding or metal-on-metal sounds
- The pedal feels soft, spongy, or sinks toward the floor
- The car pulls to one side when you brake
- Shaking or pulsing in the pedal or steering wheel when braking
- The brake warning light stays on

Wipers

Sun and heat crack wiper blades quickly in the desert. Replace them when they streak, chatter or leave unwiped areas, and at least once a year. Blade sizes are in the owner's manual or at the parts store; most blades snap on without tools.

Lights

Once a month, turn on the headlights and flashers and walk around the car. Have someone press the brake while you check the brake lights, or back up to a garage door or window and look for the glow. Replace burned-out bulbs promptly. Foggy, yellowed headlight lenses can be restored with a kit or replaced.

Belts and Hoses

At oil change time, ask the shop to look at the belts and hoses. Cracked, frayed or glazed belts and soft, swollen or cracked hoses should be replaced before they fail on the road.

Your Next Step

Walk around your car with the lights and flashers on.

Chapter 7: Following the Maintenance Schedule

The maintenance schedule in your owner's manual is written by the people who designed the engine. Following it is the best way to keep the car reliable and protect the warranty.

Normal or Severe Service

Most manuals give two schedules. Severe service often includes:

- Mostly short trips, especially in cold weather
- Lots of stop-and-go driving
- Driving on dusty, dirt or gravel roads
- Towing or carrying heavy loads
- Very hot weather

Many Northern Nevada drivers, with dusty roads and hot summers, fall under severe service for some items, such as air filters. Read the definitions in your manual and decide honestly.

Typical Maintenance Items

These vary by car. Your manual has the actual intervals.

Item	What it involves
Engine oil and filter	Change on the manual's schedule or when the oil life monitor says
Tire rotation	Often with every oil change
Engine air filter	Inspect at each oil change; replace sooner in dusty conditions
Cabin air filter	Replace on schedule; it filters the air you breathe inside the car
Brake inspection	At least once a year
Coolant	Replace at the long interval in the manual
Brake fluid	Replace at the interval in the manual; it absorbs moisture over time
Transmission fluid	Per the manual; some are sealed for many years
Spark plugs	Often at a long interval on newer engines
Timing belt (if equipped)	Replace on schedule; a broken timing belt can wreck some engines
Wiper blades	At least yearly

Warranty Maintenance

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) says plainly that you do not have to use the dealer for repairs or maintenance to keep your warranty in effect, and that it is illegal for a dealer to deny warranty coverage because routine maintenance or repairs were done by someone else. The exception is work the warranty itself pays for; then the maker can choose where it is done. The FTC also says the warranty stays in effect if you use aftermarket or recycled parts, unless such a part causes damage, which the maker would have to prove. The warranty company can ask for your maintenance records, so keep every receipt.

Do It Yourself or Not

Some jobs are easy for most owners: checking fluids and tire pressure, topping off washer fluid, replacing wiper blades, and on many cars, replacing the engine and cabin air filters. Oil changes are doable with the right tools and a safe way to lift the car, plus a place to recycle used oil. Leave brakes, belts, cooling system work and anything under the car without proper jack stands to a shop.

> **Never get under a car held up only by a jack** A jack can slip. Use proper jack stands on solid, level ground, or leave the job to a shop.

Your Next Step

Look up when your next scheduled maintenance is due, by mileage and by date, and write it on a sticker in the windshield corner or in your phone.

Chapter 8: Repair Shops and Avoiding Overcharges

Most mechanics are honest and good at their work. A few are not, and even good shops sometimes recommend work you do not need yet. A little knowledge and a few habits protect you.

Finding a Good Shop Before You Need One

- Ask friends, neighbors and coworkers who they trust.
- Look for technicians with current certifications posted in the shop.
- Read reviews, but look for patterns rather than one angry post.
- Try a new shop first on something small, such as an oil change, and see how they treat you.
- The FTC suggests making sure the shop will honor your vehicle's warranty and comparing the shops' own repair warranties.

Get It in Writing

The FTC advises asking for a written estimate before work starts, listing the problem, the parts and the labor. Nevada law goes further.

Nevada estimate rules Under Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 487.6875, a garage must give you a written estimate of the total charge for parts and labor, signed by the person who made it, for repairs over $50. If storage charges over $50 could apply, the estimate must say so. Under NRS 487.6877, if extra charges would exceed the estimate by 20 percent or $100, whichever is less, the shop must notify you. Under NRS 487.688, the shop must do the repairs according to the manufacturer's specifications and the most recent estimate you agreed to.

- Read the estimate before you sign it. Make sure it describes the work you actually asked for.
- Write on it, "Call me before doing any work not listed here," and leave your phone number.
- Do not sign a blank or open-ended repair order.

Ask for Your Old Parts

The FTC suggests asking for all replaced parts, noting that state law may require the shop to give them back. Asking up front tells the shop you are paying attention, and lets you see what was replaced.

Questions to Ask

- ☐ What exactly is wrong, and how did you find it?
- ☐ Is it a safety issue, or can it wait?
- ☐ What happens if I do not fix it now?
- ☐ Is this on the maintenance schedule in my owner's manual?
- ☐ Are the parts new, rebuilt or used? Brand-name or aftermarket?
- ☐ What warranty do you give on parts and labor, in writing?

Common Upsells to Question

- **Fluid "flushes"** that are not yet due on your manual's schedule.
- **Air filters and cabin filters** replaced every visit. Ask to see the old one.
- **"Your brakes are almost gone"** with no measurement. Ask how many millimeters of pad remain.
- **Fuel system or engine cleanings** not called for in the manual.
- **Premium oil changes** more often than the manual or oil life monitor calls for.

If you are not sure, it is fine to say, “Let me think about it,” pay for the diagnosis, and get a second opinion on any large repair.

Warranty Repairs and Recalls

Before you pay for a repair, check whether it is covered by the car’s warranty, an extended warranty you bought, or an open safety recall (Chapter 9). Recall repairs are done at no charge by dealers.

If Something Goes Wrong

The FTC suggests:

1. Keep every estimate, invoice and receipt.
2. Talk calmly to the shop manager or owner first.
3. If that fails, contact the state Attorney General’s office or a local consumer protection agency.
4. Consider small claims court, which does not require a lawyer.

In Nevada, the Attorney General’s office takes consumer complaints. Bring copies of your estimate, invoice and any notes about what the shop told you.

Your Next Step

Pick a shop you trust, or try one on your next oil change.

Chapter 9: Safety Recalls

When a vehicle or part has a safety defect, the maker issues a recall and fixes it. The fix is free, but only if you know about it and take the car in.

How to Check

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) makes it simple:

1. Find your 17-character Vehicle Identification Number (VIN). It is at the lower left of the windshield, on the driver's door jamb, and on your registration and insurance card.
2. Go to NHTSA.gov/recalls and enter the VIN.
3. If there is an open recall, call a dealer for your brand and schedule the repair.

NHTSA's recall handout says checking is free and the repair is free, and it recommends checking for recalls twice a year, such as each spring and fall. NHTSA's SaferCar app can send you an alert if a recall is issued for your vehicle. The NHTSA Vehicle Safety Hotline is 888-327-4236.

Tire Recalls

Tires can be recalled too. NHTSA keeps tire recall information on its recalls page. Register new tires with the maker when you buy them so you are notified.

Used Cars

Open recalls are not always fixed before a used car is sold. Check the VIN before you buy, and again after.

Report a Problem

If you think your car has a safety defect, you can report it to NHTSA through NHTSA.gov or the hotline. Reports help NHTSA spot problems that lead to recalls.

Your Next Step

Check your VIN at NHTSA.gov/recalls today, and put a spring and fall reminder on your calendar.

Chapter 10: Ready for the Road

Breakdowns happen. A small kit in the trunk and a plan in your head turn a scary night into an inconvenience. In rural Nevada, where the next town can be an hour away and cell service is spotty, it matters even more.

The Trunk Kit

- ☐ Jumper cables or a charged portable jump starter
- ☐ Tire pressure gauge and a small 12-volt air compressor
- ☐ Flashlight or headlamp with spare batteries
- ☐ Reflective warning triangles or flares
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Water, at least a gallon, more in summer
- ☐ Snacks that keep
- ☐ Blanket, gloves and a warm hat (winter)
- ☐ Small shovel and an ice scraper (winter)
- ☐ Phone charging cable and a charged battery pack
- ☐ Basic tools: screwdriver, pliers, adjustable wrench, duct tape
- ☐ Paper map of the area
- ☐ A copy of your insurance card, roadside assistance number and this book's emergency page

If the Car Breaks Down

1. Signal and get as far off the road as you safely can. On a freeway, try to reach an exit or wide shoulder.
2. Turn on the hazard lights.

3. If it is safe, get out on the side away from traffic and wait well away from the car, behind a guardrail if there is one. If it is not safe to get out, stay buckled in.
4. Call for help: roadside assistance, a tow company, or 911 if you are in danger or blocking traffic.
5. Set out triangles or flares if you can do so safely.

Overheating

If the temperature gauge climbs or the warning light comes on, turn off the air conditioner and turn the heater on high to pull heat from the engine, then pull over safely and shut the engine off. Let it cool for at least half an hour. Never open the radiator cap on a hot engine. If coolant is low and you have some, add it to the reservoir once the engine is cool, then get it checked.

Desert Driving

- In summer, carry plenty of water for every person in the car.
- Fill up before long empty stretches; gas stations can be far apart.
- Tell someone your route and when you expect to arrive.
- If you break down in the desert, stay with the car. A car is much easier to spot than a person walking.

Your Next Step

Pack the trunk kit this week.

Chapter 11: Records and Budget

Good records make a car easier to keep, cheaper to fix, and worth more when you sell it.

Keep a Car Log

Use the log in the appendix or a notebook in the glove box. For each service, write the date, mileage, what was done, where, and the cost. Keep the receipts in a folder. They prove maintenance was done for warranty claims, and they show a buyer the car was cared for.

Budget for the Car

Owning a car costs more than the payment and the gas. Set money aside each month for:

- Routine maintenance on your manual's schedule
- Tires, which are expensive and wear out on a predictable schedule
- A battery every few years
- Brakes
- Registration and insurance
- Unexpected repairs

Look back at a year of receipts to see what your car actually costs, and set aside that much per month, plus a little. The Money Basics book covers building savings for expenses like these.

Repair or Replace?

When a big repair comes up on an older car, compare the repair cost with the car's value and with what you would pay for a replacement. A $1,500 repair on a car worth $4,000 that is otherwise solid is often a good deal compared with a car payment. A car that needs a major repair every few months may be telling you it is time.

Your Next Step

Start a car log today with the current mileage.

Monthly Car Check

- ☐ Tire pressure, all four plus the spare, cold
- ☐ Tread depth (penny test) and sidewall cracks
- ☐ Engine oil level
- ☐ Coolant level in the reservoir (engine cold)
- ☐ Washer fluid
- ☐ All lights, including brake lights and turn signals
- ☐ Wipers: streaking or cracking?
- ☐ Any new warning lights, sounds, smells or leaks?
- ☐ Next scheduled maintenance: miles _____ date _____

Car Log

Date	Mileage	Service done	Shop	Cost

Date	Mileage	Service done	Shop	Cost

My Car’s Numbers

Year, make, model: _____

VIN: _____

Tire size: _____ Cold tire pressure, front _____ rear _____ spare _____

Oil type and amount: _____

Wiper sizes: driver _____ passenger _____ rear _____

Engine air filter part number: _____ Cabin filter: _____

Battery installed (date): _____

Insurance company and roadside number: _____

Trusted shop and phone: _____

Glossary

Alignment. Adjusting the angles of the wheels so they point straight and wear evenly.

Coolant. The fluid that carries heat away from the engine; also called antifreeze.

Dipstick. A metal or plastic rod used to check a fluid level.

DOT code. The code on a tire's sidewall; the last four digits give the week and year it was made.

Oil life monitor. A computer system that tells you when the oil needs changing based on how the car is driven.

Recall. A maker's notice that a vehicle or part has a safety defect, with a free repair.

Rotation. Moving tires to different positions so they wear evenly.

Severe service. Driving conditions, defined in the owner's manual, that call for more frequent maintenance.

TPMS. Tire pressure monitoring system.

VIN. Vehicle Identification Number, a 17-character code unique to each vehicle.

Acronyms

ABS. Anti-lock braking system

DOT. U.S. Department of Transportation

FTC. Federal Trade Commission

NHTSA. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

NRS. Nevada Revised Statutes

TPMS. Tire pressure monitoring system

VIN. Vehicle Identification Number

Sources

All web pages were read on November 18, 2026.

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Tires (nhtsa.gov/vehicle-safety/tires).
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Vehicle Recalls handout (trafficsafetymarketing.gov, 2025).
- Federal Trade Commission, Auto Repair Basics (consumer.ftc.gov, August 2012, updated 2022).
- Federal Trade Commission, Auto Warranties and Auto Service Contracts (consumer.ftc.gov, updated 2026).
- Nevada Revised Statutes 487.6875 (written estimates), 487.6877 (notice of additional charges) and 487.688 (repairs per specifications and estimate).

About This Book

Car Care Basics is part of a set of free plain-language guides from Trinfinity Enterprises. Facts were checked against the sources listed as of November 18, 2026. Your owner's manual takes priority over general advice in this book. This book is general information, not legal or mechanical advice. If you find something that has changed or needs correcting, please write to andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.