

# 56 OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MISCELLANEOUS TIPS AND HINTS

taken from Highway One Classic Automobiles  
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1. Never use reconstituted antifreeze. It is found on the shelf of almost every autoparts store in America. You are putting your engine at risk by using this sub-standard fluid. Stick to a popular brand of ethylene-glycol based coolant. To back up this claim, General Motors published an advisory stating that they are not aware of any chemical that can be added to `used' coolant to restore it to an acceptable rate. However, on the bright side, at the time this is being written, a few companies are working on solving this problem.

2. If you are buying a used car and want to find out if it has been recalled by the manufacturer for certain defects or repairs, just take the VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) to the local dealership. They can access the information via computer for you free of charge.

3. Never try to start your car for more than 20 seconds at a time. It causes extreme amperage draw and can sometimes damage battery cables (even melt the protective insulation down). But more important than that is, it can ruin the starter. The starter is only designed for running short intervals. So take a one minute break between every 20 second interval of using the starter.

4. If your engine has ever overheated, the transmission has likely overheated too. Make sure to change the transmission fluid promptly. It is important to your transmission's longevity. Once the transmission fluid overheats, it loses much of its protective properties.

5. Tires do not need to be rotated unless they are wearing unevenly. Unnecessary tire rotation is a common waste of money.

6. If you feel a pulsation or vibration during braking, many mechanics will automatically machine your front brake discs. Sometimes this vibration can be your rear drums. To tell the difference, try to notice if the vibration is coming through the steering wheel or through your seat. The steering wheel indicates front brakes, your seat indicates rear drums. You can use this method to also determine the front or rear location of other general vibrations.

7. Keep in mind the oil pressure light on the dashboard is not a foolproof system. If the light does come on, the engine has been without oil long enough to do severe damage.

8. If the water does not bead up on the car's exterior after it has rained, it is time for a wax job. Your car should be waxed twice a year; more if you drive near salt water or park your car outside.

9. Never get lost on an interstate again. There is a system to the numbering. One or two digit even- numbered highways indicates major East to West routes. One or two digit odd-numbered highways are major North to South routes. Three digit even-numbered highways show loop routes around a city. Three digit odd-numbered highway head to or from a center city.

10. If white smoke flows from your exhaust after the engine warms up, it could indicate a leaky head gasket (this is commonly referred to as a blown head gasket). The coolant leaks into the combustion chamber and burns to make the white smoke. Other symptoms to look for are oil in the radiator fluid or water in the engine oil. Also be aware that white smoke can also just mean that the car is running rich. However, a rich running engine will usually emit white smoke immediately after start-up and continue thereafter.

11. When adding oil to the engine, make sure to wipe away any oil that spills on the ignition wires. Oil destroys the insulation on the wires, making them weak.

12. Symptoms of piston ring wear are: hard starting in cold weather, blue smoke from the exhaust, and power loss going up inclines or when accelerating. If you are experiencing these symptoms, be prepared for a "ring job" (expensive). However, worn valve stem seals could also show the same symptoms. If there is constant blue smoke it is probably the rings. If the blue smoke is only during deceleration, it is most likely a seal. This is a common rip off. They will charge you for an expensive ring job when you only needed a valve stem seal replaced.

13. If you are trying to locate old service or owners manuals, contact Dragich Auto Literature 1-800- 238-8484 or (612) 786-3925. Also pick up a copy of the Hemming Motor News. This is considered the "bible" for any classic car enthusiast. If you're having a problem finding rare parts, this is the book to find them in, it has everything. Each issue is usually over 800 pages. 14. Will platinum spark plugs give you more power? Absolutely not! The only thing you get from platinum tipped plugs is longer plug life. That's it! So don't believe the rumors.

15. Some mechanics will recommend SAE 10W40 for your car when the owner's manual calls for the viscosity of SAE 5W30. In the 1980's SAE 10W30 was the most popular oil. Nowadays, newer engines have been designed for SAE 5W30. The only time you should consider SAE 10W30 or 10W40 is if the temperature is going to run above 90 degree Fahrenheit for several days or longer. This would then become the oil of choice.

16. Just because a battery says "maintenance free" doesn't mean you cannot add water to the battery like the old days; most of the time you still can! They usually have a hidden filler neck to add water. Many times consumers are talked into purchasing a new battery when filling up the old "maintenance free" battery would have done fine (and saved you \$75 - \$100). However, there are a few battery makes (mostly American made) that are permanently sealed. One of those is the Delco Freedom Battery. It cannot be refilled -- once it is depleted, it is time to replace it. Note: never try to test or try to charge a Delco

Freedom battery that has a clear to pale indicator. This can cause it to explode and probably seriously injure you.

17. Most people ruin their door locks without knowing. Never use lock de-icer without re-lubricating the lock. De-icer contains alcohol that melts the ice but also dilutes the lubricant in the lock; therefore causing the locks to stick and finally fail. Do not use regular penetrating oil, it washes out the lubricant in the lock. Make sure to use a graphite lubricant like Lock-Ease or sewing machine oil.

18. How do I get the musty odor out of my car? A deodorizer will mask the problem temporarily and steam cleaning will get rid of it for a while, but it will come back. The trick is to get the carpets and upholstery steam cleaned and then remove the carpets and under padding to wash the floorpan (the musty smell usually comes from the moisture between the floorpan and the carpet. Don't forget to wash the floor, seats, carpet, headliner and all upholstery with a disinfectant.

19. Never rest your hand on the gear shift knob, it causes increased wear and premature failure to the synchronizers. The synchronizers are what stop the gears from grinding every time you shift.

20. A little safety tip: make sure to clean off your headlights. The road salts and grime in winter tend to coat the lights when following other cars and reduce visibility. This may sound unnecessary but try it, it makes a big difference. This is also common in the spring and fall months with wet dirt roads.

21. Many rear brake repairs could be easily avoided. A major reason rear brakes wear pre-maturely is because they weren't adjusted regularly. The great part, which most people don't know, is that by engaging your emergency brake, you move the self-adjusting mechanism in the rear brakes. In other words, by periodically using your emergency brake, you keep your rear brakes adjusted and money in your pocket.

22. Very difficult wiring shorts are the best handled by the dealership. Most regular repair shops are not properly equipped for this type of work.

23. To get the haze off your windshield that your wipers or washer fluid won't remove, wash the windshield with vinegar, rinse with water, and dry.

24. If you get stuck in mud or snow, the best way to get out is to gently accelerate back and forth to produce a rocking motion. Note that 15% tire spin gives you maximum traction, so do not "gun it". Also, do not rock more than a few times as you take a chance of damaging your automatic transmission.

25. There are many automotive magazines and trade publications that are absolutely free to interested individuals. All you have to do is ask for them. To locate these, simply go to the library and retrieve a copy of the Standard Rate and Data. This publication will list all magazines in circulation. If there is a notation beside that magazine's name that states

"Controlled Circulation," it usually means that magazine is free. Just write or call them and ask to be added to their mailing list. Indicate some interest with the magazine's subject matter. Keep in mind that these are not magazines found on the newsstand, but more "insiders" magazines for manufacturer's, suppliers, store owners, dealerships, repair centers, etc. They offer extremely valuable information.

26. Almost always use rebuilt parts rather than buying brand new ones. It is much cheaper and you are getting parts that are, in most cases, just as reliable as new ones. Try to stay with a major brand name as there are a few companies producing inferior rebuilt parts.

27. Compare prices of replacement parts between the factory dealership (e.g. GM, Ford, etc.) and your local auto-parts store. They can vary drastically in either one's favour.

28. One of the simplest and least expensive horsepower gains comes from a tuned free-flowing exhaust. A set of exhaust headers with a low back-pressure muffler will normally increase horsepower by as much as 20% for just over \$200.

29. If you are buying an older used car with an automatic transmission, be very careful which one you choose. The horsepower loss between different transmissions varies dramatically. The local transmission shop will be able to quote you exact figures on different transmissions and their horsepower "robbing" capabilities. The percentage can range from 10% loss of power all the way up to 35%, although the latter is very rare. Most newer cars are only 4-8%, but watch out for some of the older years.

30. The gear ratio can be changed in direct proportion with the change in tire diameter. If you go up 20% in tire size and want to keep the same shifting points, you will have to go down 20% (actually a 20% increase in numerical numbers) in your gearing. If you choose to change the gear ratio for better fuel economy, it is much cheaper to purchase used gears from an auto wrecker because new ring and pinion gears cost a fortune. I strongly recommend you have the gears installed by a gear specialist or speed shop. If you shim the pinion or ring gear improperly or incorrectly set the back-lash, you can seize your differential within a few miles of driving.

31. Another great way to get low cost horsepower is to make sure your engine gets the air it needs to burn the fuel. This can be accomplished by installing a performance air cleaner like ones offered by K&N or installing a secondary air cleaner to increase air intake volume.

32. Nail polish remover is a great cleaner for small parts. It contains mostly acetone and can also remove tar and bugs from chrome. Keep in mind that it also removes paint; so don't get it near any.

33. When working on a car and trying to free a rusted bolt or nut, use a propane torch to heat it then melt a little candle wax around the head. It acts like a lubricant and allows the nut or bolt to be removed easily. As corny as this tip sounds, it works great.

34. How to fix an annoying fan belt squeal even after it is adjusted: if spraying on fan belt dressing only eliminates the problem temporarily, try scuffing the pulley with very fine sandpaper. 35. Use aerosol furniture polish for your hard plastic and vinyl interior pieces. It produces a nice shine and keeps dust down to a minimum.

36. Philips head screw drivers frequently slip out of the screw groove. Try using a little valve grinding compound on the tip of the screwdriver for tough screws. The gritty compound gives the screw a little more grip which prevents you from rounding off the slots in the screw.

37. Automotive hand cleaner works well to get the oil and grease off of ignition wires, vacuum lines, and hoses. Your engine will sparkle.

38. Remember that some metric wrenches work on SAE (English) bolts and vice versa. They aren't exact, but they will suffice. Try the following possibilities: 1/2 inch = 13mm, 9/16 inch = 14mm, 3/4 inch = 19mm, 13/16 inch = 21mm.

39. Rough idle quick-fix: Many cars with fuel injection can develop a rough idle after 10,000 miles. This may be due to a carbon build-up and can be easily eliminated by spraying some carburetor cleaner into the throttle body or air intake while the vehicle is running.

40. Do you have a small radiator leak? Stop it with a tablespoon of pepper or some egg white. Although this is a temporary fix, it will get you by until you have a chance to fix the radiator properly.

41. How to find an annoying tick, knock or rattle. Stop by your local autoparts store to purchase an automotive stethoscope (it looks similar to a doctor's one but has a different end). You can use this stethoscope inside your engine compartment to pinpoint where that tick or rattle is coming from in order to fix it.

42. If you want to do your own very inexpensive radiator flush, here's how. Drain the entire system (including the radiator and engine block), refill it with water and 1/2 cup of dishwasher detergent. Run the engine for a few minutes to let the fluid circulate and then drain completely. Refill and flush again with water to make sure all the detergent is gone. Then refill with coolant. Note: only use dishwasher detergent, other soaps will foam up.

43. Remove annoying adhesive residue from your paint (usually from sticker you have peeled off) by using WD40 or lighter fluid. Make sure to remove all the fluid after the residue is removed since it can damage the finish of your paint if left in place.

44. If you do your own brake work, a little tip is to place masking tape over the brake shoes so you don't get grease or oil on them (which always seems to happen). Then right at the end when everything is in place, just remove the tape. Note: most people forget to remove it so right a little note to yourself and tape it to the steering wheel.

46. Never wear jewelry when working on a car. It can either trap your hand by snagging on a part or cause an electrical short if you put your hands between a "hot" wire and a grounded part.

47. For people that do "burn outs"; there is that rubber build-up on the body that is extremely tough to get off. Next time use a household laundry product called Spray'n'Wash. It works every time and won't ruin your paint's finish.

48. Studies have shown that 33% of all vehicles on the road have air filters in need of replacement. This can decrease your fuel economy by up to 10% by providing insufficient air volume to burn the fuel dispensed by the injectors. Make sure to check yours, it only takes a minute.

49. Do not rev the engine before turning it off. This was a common practice for older cars, but it is not necessary for newer ones. It can cause excessive wear on the cylinder walls and contaminate the engine oil with gasoline. You should normally turn an engine off as soon as you stop. Nevertheless, there is an exception to this rule. After a long high-speed trip, let the engine idle for a minute or so before turning it off. This helps allow the engine to cool, eliminate hot spots, and relieve hot fuel vapours that could cause vapour lock and result in hard starting.

50. Excessive idling creates extra engine wear and breeds contaminants in the oil. Idling is one of the most severe modes of engine operation.

51. To cool an engine if it is overheating in traffic, simply put the car in neutral and press down the accelerator slightly to increase the idle. This action increases the coolant flow which could bring the engine temperature down just enough to prevent overheating. If this isn't enough, try rolling down the windows and turning on the heater full blast to dissipate some of the engine heat.

52. A common problem that baffles most mechanics is a car that runs fine until it warms up 10-20 miles later and then completely dies. If you let it sit for 30 minutes or so, you can start it up and it will do the same thing all over again. Tell the mechanic that you suspect one or more of the electronic ignition systems is failing after subjected to high temperatures for a period of time. The ignition module, pick-up coil, or ignition coil are usually the culprits.

53. Run the air conditioner at least 10 minutes every week. This procedure helps avoid costly breakdowns.

54. With a manual transmission, start the engine in neutral and engage the clutch. There is less drag on the engine and it is easier to start (especially in winter months when cold motor oil is very thick).

55. Many automated car washes do more harm than good. Rotating brushes, if adjusted for smaller cars, may apply too much pressure to full-sized models and scratch the finish.

Also, many car washes use recycled water. The salt picked up from previous washings can further rusting (in states experiencing winter salt/sand road conditions). "Hotwax" cycles can damage vinyl tops. New "touchless" car washes use very high pressure spray guns and harsh chemicals to blast away the dirt (and probably part of your wax job.) The safest wash is still the old fashion hand-wash done in the shade.

56. Don't put sandbags in the trunk of your front wheel drive cars for extra traction in the winter. The extra weight in the rear actually lessens traction on the front wheels.

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If you find the information you have just read valuable, you may be interested in a new book called Car Secrets Revealed. It is written by Corey Rudl and can be seen at <http://www.carsecrets.igs.net/> There are hundreds of "insider" secrets on just about everything automotive. It covers topics such as how to reduce your car insurance by 50%, how to get free repairs after your warranty expires, how to buy cars (and parts) at wholesale prices, how to legally beat the police radar speed traps, how to avoid the auto repairs rip-offs, and hundreds more.

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