



Summer Road Trip Check List

Tires: Have you checked your tire pressure? Have checked your tire tread depth, alignment wear or the age? Tires that are over 3 and 4 years old can become unpredictable. Belts can slip or dry-rot can start occurring in the side walls.

Lengthy, continuous running on hot pavement can cause aged tires to come apart. Improper tire pressure can make the vehicle want to pull to one side or the other. Cause irregular wear to the tires and can make the tire run hotter than it needs too.

Spare Tire and Jack: Make sure that you [check the pressure](#) and condition of your spare tire. Also ensure that all the jack and tools are accessible and in the correct compartments. It wouldn't hurt to get them out and try them out to make sure they still work.

Tire Balancing: If you are noticing any type of vibration from the tires between 50 and 65, get your tires re-balanced. A tire vibration can be annoying to feel, but it can wear out wheel bearings and suspension parts. Also, a tire being out of balance, can wear the tires unevenly. It can create a mild cupping pattern in the tread.

Struts and Shocks: Make sure your car can pass the 2-bounce test. Push down and get the car bouncing on each corner. It shouldn't bounce over twice after letting go. If it does, replace your shocks or struts. Bad struts and shocks can't keep the vehicles alignment while driving.

Alignment: This is something that can cause multiple problems. If your vehicle is out of alignment, you can struggle with it trying to pull to one side or the other. It will also wear your tires out and cause the tires to run hot on a long trip risking a blowout. Bad alignments have been known to cause vibrations as well. When not in alignment, this can make your vehicle struggle on cruising causing the engine to have to work harder. This will drop your fuel mileage.

Lights: Always ensure that all your lights are working. If it has been years since you have changed your headlights or taillights, consider replacements. You may want to install new bulbs before you take off on a long trip. Make sure that all running lights, backup lights and curb lights if applicable are working. If you're driving a truck or RV, make sure that all your towing connections are in working order as well.

When replacing your headlight bulbs, ensure they are aimed correctly. This would require a night time drive to check them. However, most automotive shops have the tools to adjust them if they are off. Ensure that both low and high beam are working as well. If your headlamp lenses have hazed over, there are shops and DIY kits to clear them up. [View Headlight Restore Kits Here](#)

Horn: As annoying as a horn can be, you never know when you are going to have to blast someone that isn't paying attention. Double check its operation.

Oil and Lubrication: You should consider changing your oil before heading out for a road trip. Most oils and engine designs today allow a vehicle to go up to 5000 miles before an oil change. If you only have one to two thousand miles on your oil, you should be able to hold off the change until you get back. Although, if your trip will exceed 5K miles, it might be a good idea to change it before leaving. Never the less, always check your oil level before your road trip. Be sure to check it from time to time on your trip. An engine doesn't have to smoke to use oil. Sometimes it just seems like magic how it disappears.

Newer vehicles and imports don't commonly grease fitting on steering and suspension parts. However, it doesn't hurt to visually check all joints before the trip. If your vehicle has grease fitting, be sure to give them a shot of grease. For rear wheel drive vehicles, make sure that your U-Joints on the drive shaft are good. Inspect any CV shaft boots on front wheel drive cars, or any vehicle that has CV shafts. Ensure the boots are not busted and spewing grease.

Windshield and Wipers: Inspect the windshield for any cracks or bulls-eye damage. A windshield crack grows with heat, cold, wind pressure and vibration. A long trip will for a fact make a damage like that increase. You don't won't a cracked line in your line of sight, sun glare or headlight glare at night can blind you. Cracked windshields also warrant a ticket from the police.

How old are your wiper blades and where are you going to on your vacation? It would be a good idea to replace your wiper blades before embarking on your adventure. You may want to consider the type of blade depending on what kind of terrain and climate you will be mostly traveling in. Also ensure your windshield wiper washer fluid is full. It might not hurt to put a few drops of dish-washing liquid in it. That really helps around the beach/ocean areas. to learn more about windshield wipers, check out my post [HERE](#).

Cooling System: Make sure you check your antifreeze level. This means more than the white plastic reservoir jug. That jug is an overflow container, it can give you a slight indication if you are low on coolant. However, a real check is done by taking off the radiator cap or cooling system cap in the main system. (Never open a radiator cap or cooling system cap while the engine is hot)

If you have 70K or more miles on your car, you may want to consider a cooling system flush and refill. Either way, get an Antifreeze Gauge, ([Hydrometer](#)) to see what temperature your coolant can protect you against. Always look for debris or anything that isn't antifreeze in your cooling system. If it is red or muddy looking, you may have too much rust in the system. If it looks like it has oil in it, that could be an engine fixing to blow.

Engine — Tune Up: When was the last time you had a tune up? Most cars now have coil packs instead of plug wires. Rule of thumb, these coil packs are recommended to be replaced at 100K miles. So if you are going to change the spark plugs, change these packs along with them. If you still have a distributor cap and rotor button, inspect and change if needed. Caps and rotors last about 30K miles if you need to base it off the last time it was changed.

Don't forget the PCV valve and the air filter. The PCV valve is used to balance the crankcase pressure with the intake side of the engine. When this valve quits working it can cause the car to smoke or just use oil in general. If you find a heavy amount of oil on your air filter, this could be a cause.

Exhaust System: Make sure your exhaust system is working properly. An exhaust leak can actually fill the car with carbon monoxide on long trips. The AC or vent can actually bring in exhaust while driving. With the windows rolled up, driving for continuous hours, this can make the driver sleepy and lose control of the car.

Battery and Charging System: How old is your car battery? If you get a good one, it will last up to 5 years. Any battery older than 3 years, you want to get a new one before heading out. Most Auto Parts Stores will do a complete FREE battery and charging system check on your vehicle. Take advantage of that and ensure against a break down on the road somewhere. You can check your own system with this [Charging System Tester...](#)

Heat and A/C: Even though you normally would use your heater during the summers, you might need it. Late night driving through the Arizona deserts can run around 30° to 40 ° F. Depending on the area you are driving too, it doesn't matter if it is summertime. Night time weather can still be cold. If you haven't had a coolant system flush or a new thermostat installed in at least 5 years, may be time. Cooling systems require checkups and maintenance, no better time than before a road trip.

Don't forget your AC. They can go for about 4 to 5 years before you might consider getting an AC check. Nothing worse to be on a long trip only to have the AC quit working. Not only does it provide cooling comfort in the summer but it also is necessary for defrosting your windshield. Especially in heavy moist and humid areas. So, this also is for a level of safety. A quick method for looking for possible issues, look under the hood. Follow all the AC lines and look at the compressor. If you see dark, dirty oily spots on the lines or any of the components, have the system checked.

Belts and Hoses: Always give a thorough visual inspection of all your belts and hoses. If you see any wet spots on your hoses, ensure that it isn't coolant leaking out. Feel your hoses for soft spots. These will be potential places the hoses can burst open. Make sure all your clamps are tight. Look for discolorations and cracks in your belts. If you have any, replace it. As a rule, if your vehicle has more than one belt, change them all at the same time. This applies to hoses as well.

Brakes: Many cars have wheels you can view the brakes through. If you have that, look at your rotors for grooving or burnt spots. If you are hearing brake noises, don't wait till after the trip. Get them checked now so you can avoid more cost later. Pay attention to the emergency brake, does it seem like you have to pull the handle further up or push the pedal further down? This could be a sign you need new rear brakes. Also, notice how much brake dust you have all over your wheels. Learn more about [When You Should Change Your Brakes Here...](#)

Key FOB and Remotes: When the last time you replaced your battery in your FOB or remote? If you're not sure, I recommend putting a new battery in it before a road trip. If you notice it seems flaky, install a new battery.

Wash and Wax: Applying wax to your vehicle will protect the paint from bugs, grease and road grime. Of course, you will have to wash your vehicle before waxing it. The wax will help when it comes time to wash your vehicle. Even though it won't make a big difference. A nice clean slick car will cut the wind better and give you a fraction of better mileage...

GPS: If this applies, for those that have older and portable units or use your phone, be sure to update. Ensure you your GPS has the current maps and information before heading out.

Roadside Tool Kit: Put together a small kit with a few tools, first aid and protective gear. Best be prepared in case you have to pull off the side of the road for an emergency. These kits can also be bought online or from any parts stores. [View Kits HERE](#). The kit should contain the following:

- Tire gauge
- Foam tire sealant
- Jumper cables
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Duct tape
- Black electrical tape
- Tow strap or tow rope
- Utility knife
- Flat blade screwdriver
- Phillips screwdriver
- Pliers
- Funnel
- Rain poncho
- Blanket
- Band aids
- First-aid manual
- Sterile gauze pads of different sizes
- Scissors
- Splint
- Antiseptic wipes
- Soap
- Drinking water

Reminder: Make sure you have all your car insurance and [roadside service](#) information with you. Also make sure that you bring along your Cell Phone Chargers. Both, the 12V automotive adapter and the one for 110V.

Have fun, be safe and enjoy your summer trip...

Roadside Assistance can be incredibly important on cross county vacations. Especially if you are driving or pulling an RV. AAA is the most common roadside insurance there is but when it comes to highway traveling or RV's, AAA is not a big help. AAA covers up to 100 miles from your home address. What if you had an insurance like AAA but covered you unlimited no matter where you were on the road?

Take a look, check out this Roadside Assistance.

