

Summertime Vehicle Maintenance and Upgrades

Summer is here and its time to play in the endless sunshine. But before you hit the deserts in your dune buggies, make sure to prep your car for the summertime.

The Summer Solstice has just pasted and summer is in full force. The days are long, the nights are short, and there's just too much fun to be had. But before you start romping around and taking the obligatory road trip to the Grand Canyon, consider the health of your vehicle. You want your car or truck to be in peak performance so you don't have any unexpected breakdowns and delays.

1. When was the last time you changed your oil? Heat makes oil less viscous, which means that the oil can't protect your engine as well. Essentially, heat makes the oil thinner which in turn makes it run off the engine components quicker. If you are truly concerned with the oil in your engine, you can try running a heavier weight of oil. I stepped up to a 10w-40 from a 5w-30 in my Subaru when I was competing in SCCA run Autocross events two years ago and it was one of the better decisions I made that summer. If you aren't running your car very hard or if you live in a place where it doesn't get over 90 degrees, you're probably fine running whatever your vehicles manufacturer recommends. Plus, a heavier weight oil will have an effect on your MPG's and with gas prices over \$4.00 a gallon, it wouldn't be worth the switch unless you were really pushing your car's limits.

2. When was the last time you changed your air filter? Air filters let your engine breath clean air and when it becomes dirty, you choke your engine and lose power. I live in San Diego and last year a significant part of the county caught on fire due to a drought (although there was some suspicion of arson). I volunteered my time at the CDF camps to help the cause and one of the things they had me do was move around light towers for them. They used the light towers at night to help coordinate fire fighting efforts, but they need to be moved around a lot. I now drive a Ford F-150, so I was able to hitch it up to my handy-dandy receiver hitch to move them around. I was surprised though because the engine seemed sluggish. After the fires were put out, I went in to get my oil changed to see if that was part of the problem. I was near my 3,000 mile interval anyway, so it seemed to be a good idea. The mechanic pulled out my air filter to check it and a ton of ash fell out. Where I live and worked, the fires didn't make the air visibly dirty, but engines consume such a huge amount of air that the microscopic amounts of ash was able to literally clogged my air filter. The effect was dramatic on my engines power, but she felt good as new after I put in the new air filter. The point of this long-winded story is that you never know how your air filter is doing unless you check it often, say once a month. So it doesn't matter when you last changed the air filter, just pop open that hood, stick your head in there and see how your air filter is doing.

3. Cruising at highway speeds gets you where you're going in a hurry, but it'll also make a mess of your car if you live anywhere that has summer swarms of bugs. A bug deflector will help keep your car looking its best and save your paint at the front of your hood. They are easy to install and usually inexpensive. If you want to keep your car clean(er), this is a good first step.

For even more help getting your car in tip-top shape, you can click on the following links: [Air Filter](#), [Bug Deflector](#), and [Receiver Hitch](#).

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