

How Do You Prepare Your Car For A Long Trip?

It's bad enough when you have car trouble in your local neighborhood – or even in your own driveway. However, nothing could be worse or potentially more scary than have your car break down hundreds of miles from home.

Vacations are supposed to be a time for fun and relaxation, but the difference between pleasure and misery often lies in whether or not you took the proper steps to get your car ready for that long trip.

Before you leave home, there are several simple steps you can take to protect your vehicle, your trip and your loved ones.

First, in case anything does go wrong with your vehicle, make sure you give a trip plan to someone trustworthy. Now, you can go to work on that car of yours.

You can tackle each of these quickly before you hit the road:

- Change oil and filter
- Begin your trip with a clean car, both inside and out. It will help you find your map when you need it, etc.
- Try not to put luggage over the car. It creates air friction and slows you down – bringing more gas. If it is unavoidable, cover with strong sheet and tie them very well.
- Keep a small garbage bag inside the car.
- Change air filter.
- Cover headlights and front of the car with a protective sheet to prevent bug clogs or other damage.
- Get an extra set of car belts.
- Change spark plugs.
- Make certain your tire iron and jack are in the car.
- Check your spare tire.
- Pack a fire extinguisher.
- Bring towels for cleaning dirty windshields, spills, etc.
- Get a spare key for the car and keep it in your wallet or elsewhere on your person in case you lock your keys in the car.
- Fix sun protectors for side windows and front windshield.
- Get enough cassette tapes or audio CD to cover the trip.
- Bring a plastic funnel to add water or other fluids.
- Bring a water bucket in case you need to use a river or lake for emergency coolant.
- Always fill your gas tank when it is half full. Don't wait too long.
- Make sure your owner's manual is handy.

In addition, you should make a checklist of items to pack in a car survival kit. These can include:

- A chain or think towing rope
- Electric charger wire
- Flashlight
- Screw drivers and wrenches of different sizes
- Bungee cords
- Pliers
- Hammer

Before pack up, make one final check of the following:

- Tires condition. Check tires tread and look for signs of strain, bulges or other damage.
- Tire pressure. Don't over inflate
- Wipers and wiper fluid. When the rain falls, you don't want to discover your wipers are useless. In addition, bug hits can really mess a windshield, so you'll need a full fluid reservoir.
- Coolant. Flush radiator, if you haven't done so in a while.
- Fuses and Horn.
- High and low beam headlights.
- Oil, power steering and brake fluid.
- Loose cables
- Heater and air conditioner, if making a seasonal trip.

Once your car passes muster, there are some tips for effective driving. After all, you may not be a part of your car, but if you're not functioning properly, your car's condition really doesn't matter.

Know your limits and plan your trip around them. If the longest drive you have ever taken is 300 miles in a day, don't plan a trip with a string of endless 500-mile days. Whether you are capable of riding 500 miles per day, or 1,000, the ability to make miles tends to decrease as the length of the trip increases.

Forget about high speeds. A steady driver can book more miles, enjoy more mountain vistas and drive more twisty miles than someone bent on making the best times across a mountain pass. You'll also save on gas over the long haul.

Leave the Vivarin and coffee at home. If you get tired, pull over and rest. If it's midway through the day, try a nap of about 30 minutes. If it's getting dark, hole up in a motel. It's not worth risking your safety if your body is telling you it needs rest.

Learn to avoid boredom. Long drives usually mean moving across areas that you might not consider prime spots. For times like this, carrying a tape player with your favorite music or a book on tape can prove invaluable

Finally, stay away from trucks. Truck drivers hate having anyone follow them. When you are behind a truck, you become a liability to them. Never tailgate. Instead of paying attention to the road, a trucker will start worrying about the people on their tailgate. After that, it doesn't take much for disaster to follow.

With proper preparation before a trip, and a good attitude during a journey, you can make sure you not only survive a long trip – but also enjoy it.