

DIY Car Checking Information

1. Engine Oil

On level ground with the engine off, clean the dipstick with a lint-free cloth while the engine is still warm. Reinsert the dipstick fully, remove it and check oil level. If the reading is low, top up the engine oil using the same grade of oil recommended by your vehicle manufacturer.

2. Radiator Coolant Level

Don't just check the level in the plastic reservoir, as the bottle could be full while the engine is empty if there is a fault in the system. While the engine is cold, remove the radiator cap, check inside the radiator and fill it up if required. A temperature gauge won't read correctly when there is no coolant in the system, so don't rely on it if you haven't topped it up for a while. While the engine is cold, feel the hoses and if they are hard and you can hear a cracking noise (listen carefully), or if they feel very soft or swollen in places, get them changed. Have a mechanic change the coolant every two years.

3. Automatic Transmission Fluid or Gear oil

For automatic vehicle, do replace your Automatic Transmission Fluid (ATF) every 20,000km or follow your user manual instruction. Do replace with the recommended ATF as per manufacturer's recommendation.

For manual car, do replace your gear oil every 40,000km or follow your user manual instruction. Do replace with the recommended grade of gear oil as per manufacturer's recommendation.

4. Battery

If your battery has removable caps, check the chemical fluid inside, it is about between the levels indicated on the case. (Be careful as battery acid can cause serious injury.)

- If low, top up with distilled water and avoid overfilling.
- Don't expose a battery to a naked flame and remember battery fluid is corrosive and can damage paint and wiring.
- Pull back the terminal covers and check that the wiring around the negative and positive terminals is in good condition. If you see any corrosion build-up, dissolve with hot water or bicarbonate of soda.

5. Brakes

Check the fluid level in the master cylinder (usually located near the right-hand corner in front of the driver's seat). If the level is low, the disc pads could be worn. If the level keeps dropping get it checked immediately for leaks. Have a mechanic flush the fluid every two years, as it absorbs moisture. Watch out for noises while braking and pulsations in the brake pedal.

6. Tyres

Check and adjust tyre pressure when the tyres are cold. (Find a tyre pressure placard on the inside of your glovebox, fuel cap filler or the driver's door.) Check for a minimum tread depth of 1.5mm on any part of the tyre surface that comes in contact with the road and look for abnormal wear or damage. Adjusting the pressure to the top of the recommended range reduces fuel consumption and wear.

7. Headlights

Check all lights are working, including stop and reverse lights. Drive up to a reflective surface if you cannot get someone to help you check this.

8. Windscreen wipers and washer fluid

Fill washer bottle with clean water and the right amount of washer additive, not household detergent. Check the condition of the wiper blades and replace if split, perished or not wiping properly. Run your thumb and finger along the wiper blade to remove any gunk.

9. Inside controls

With the engine switched off, check all controls for tightness and function. Put the steering wheel in position so the tyres point straight ahead. Lightly swing the steering wheel from side to side? Free play should not exceed 50mm.

10. Cosmetics

To keep your car's age as long as possible, wash it regularly, polish it at least twice a year and vacuum when necessary. Some polishes can adversely affect modern paint finishes, so always check your owner manual. Avoid parking it under the trees and in industrial areas, and wash any bird droppings and other stains off immediately.

11. Servicing

New cars should be serviced according to outlines in your owner manual. It's imperative not to miss the oil changes. Older cars should have an oil and filter change every six (6) months or 5,000km, whichever comes first.

12. Signal & Warning lights

The most important thing to do is giving the correct signal and warning lights. Do not put your observation if there is any warning light is on after you have started your car or during moving time.

- Engine light: Pull over immediately if you see this light on. It doesn't mean your car is out of oil, but do take a look on the engine oil level, which could indicate a serious problem.
- Check Engine light: This light means the computer has recorded an error or a fault and it requires attention, but not necessarily immediately.
- Alternator light: As this light has a picture of a battery on it, people think they need a new battery, but is actually means the alternator is not charging the battery, so pull over and call your workshop.

13. Summarized of your DIY check points

Run through this list regularly and keep your car in tip-top condition.

- Engine oil
- Radiator coolant level
- Automatic transmission and power steering fluids
- Battery
- Brakes
- Tyres
- Headlights
- Windscreen wipers and washer fluid
- Inside controls
- Cosmetics
- Servicing (every six months or 5,000km)

14. How to get help

- Do keep your preferable mechanic or workshop contacts.
- Do call your friend who has some knowledge in car maintenance work.
- Do visit some car maintenance web site to understand more about car maintenance work.
- Do learn some basic skill for minor maintenance work, such as how to change your tyre in safer way, change any light bulbs, and etc.
- In case of involving any road accident, do contact your insurance's agent to get the clear direction of action plan. You need to make a police report within 24 hours.
- Don't panic and simple sign any document during accident time.
- Do capture some pictures after accident with different angle if you have any camera with you.