

AUTOMOTIVE TIPS

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Classic car restoration – tips before you invest

Angie's List, the nation's leading provider of consumer reviews on local service companies, collects reports on more than 80 classic car or custom car categories. In a nationwide Angie's List poll, nearly one in eight members say they own a classic, custom or restored vehicle. Before you dash out to purchase your childhood dream car or start customizing that hatchback in your driveway, consider these Angie's List tips. Don't trust the "for sale" photos you see online: An automobile might appear perfectly restored on the surface, but you never know what lies beneath. Have a restoration mechanic or vintage car expert inspect the car before you buy. Don't buy a car that was recently restored: Buy one that was restored at least five years ago. You'll be able to see how the car has held up and determine if any lingering damage or issues exist that can't be hidden with a fresh coat of paint. When customizing, do your research: Be wary of rough estimates for parts or services. Don't allow the shop to make a single change without a written order that includes the cost differential. Check with your insurance company to ensure proper coverage: The use of a specialty insurance company might be required to make certain your antique car is properly protected. Auto service tips Posted: 9/15/2009 8:41:32 AM | 5 comments We often don't think about maintenance on our vehicles until something is wrong. But keeping your car in top running condition is vital. Angie's List went to highly-rated auto repair professionals for the 5 Auto Checks you shouldn't skip out on. Oil Changes: Oil is the engine's blood, and is critical to a car's long life. Your vehicle's oil should be changed depending on your driving habits, typically every 3,000-7,000 miles or around 3-6 months. You should check your oil about every 1,000 miles. Tire Maintenance: Properly maintained tires improve the steering, stopping and traction of your vehicle. Tire pressure should be set to the manufacturer's specification. Tires that are over or under inflated wears tires out faster, affect fuel consumption, and is a safety hazard. Rotate and balance your tires every 6,000-8,000 miles and get an alignment check every year to make sure there are not suspension problems. Fluids: Transmission fluid, break fluid, and coolant can break down over time

and lose their effectiveness. All fluids should be checked and topped off every oil change. Have your transmission fluid flushed out every 50,000 miles, depending on your driving habits. Brake Check: Brake inspection should be part of your vehicle's ongoing maintenance to ensure safety and reliability. You should have your brakes inspected at least once a year; more often if you experience grinding or shaking when you break. Regardless of care, brakes will likely need to be replaced every 20,000-30,000 miles. Scheduled Maintenance: Failure to follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule could lead to breakdowns, poor fuel economy, and a higher cost of ownership in the long run. Having a certified professional inspect your car according to these schedules is an opportunity to catch problems before they get you stuck or escalate into larger repairs. Build a relationship with a shop or mechanic. Bouncing from shop to shop may save a few dollars on particular jobs, but in the end the only one who will have any responsibility for the condition of the car will be you. A good mechanic, who is familiar with your needs, your expectations, and your car, will help you get the most from your car. *These tips are simply guidelines and are not intended to replace or overrule your owner's manual.

Car buying tips Posted: 8/20/2009 3:43:26 PM | 0 comments Buying a new car is a big investment. Researching your available options will make you a better consumer. 8 Tips for driving away with a good deal: Bring a friend: A friend can keep you focused on the task at hand and help you from becoming emotionally attached to the car. Know what you can afford: Evaluate your financial situation to determine what you can afford and stay within your plan. What's your trade worth? If you plan to trade in your old car, check Kelley Blue Book www.kbb.com for the value of your trade-in. Keep the trade separate from the new car transaction. The price of a trade-in should have no bearing on the price of the new car. Also check out the Cash for Clunkers program. Research models and pricing: Narrow down your list to three vehicles and do price research on all. There are many sites on the Internet that can help you including Edmunds www.edmunds.com. Do you really need the add-ons? Think carefully about additional options like a sunroof because they can affect the price of the car. Decide ahead of time what extra perks you want. Is a service contract for you? Service contracts provide for the repair of certain parts or problems. These contracts are offered by manufacturers, dealers, or independent companies. Check to see if they provide coverage beyond the manufacturer's warranty. Remember that a warranty is included in the price of the car while service contract costs extra. Avoid focusing only on the monthly payment: Insist on negotiating one thing at a time. Settle on the vehicle's price first, then discuss a trade-in, financing, or leasing separately, as necessary. Don't bring up leasing until after you've agreed on the vehicle's price. You're in control: If it is not the deal or price you want, be prepared to walk away. Don't let anyone pressure you

How to avoid auto repair hassles Posted: 2/10/2009 12:18:54 PM | 2 comments Auto service requests are up 58 percent on Angie's List. As more and more consumers decide to hold on to their car instead of purchasing a new one, finding a great mechanic you can turn to for scheduled tune-ups or emergency repairs is critical. How to find a good mechanic: Don't wait until your car dies to find a mechanic. Develop a good relationship with an auto repair shop to avoid being rushed into a last-minute decision. You'll also be first in line for emergency service and cost savings. Don't go to a tire shop looking for brake work. A full-service shop may be able to handle most of your needs, but if you need a highly specialized service, do some research to find the right auto repair specialist. Look for a repair center with a good history and a professional atmosphere. Ask for a tour of the facility. The staff should be properly trained and have certifications displayed from a trusted national organization, such as the Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair (I-CAR) or National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE). State or local law may require that a shop be licensed or registered. ASE certified mechanics must have two years of experience and pass an exam to become certified. Remember, certification alone does not guarantee good or honest work. Determine if your warranty requires you to use a specific dealership or shop. If you use another source, keep all receipts in case your warranty coverage is questioned. If you had an accident, get your car inspected. Even damage that might appear to be only minor or superficial should be thoroughly inspected to ensure there is no hidden damage. Driving a damaged vehicle could lead to

a costly citation, or worse, an accident. Your insurance company might have companies they recommend. But be sure to get estimates from companies you know and trust. If one estimate seems way out of line compared to the others, ask why. Get at least three estimates. Get a written estimate before authorizing repairs. Request that all replaced parts be returned and insist on a detailed invoice of work done, including an itemized description of parts and labor charges. Ask if unexpected repairs may arise once the work gets started. Many auto service shops charge a diagnostic fee to determine what ails your vehicle. Some may reduce or forgive that fee if you have the work performed there. If you decide to have it repaired somewhere else, be aware that you may have to pay another diagnostic charge. Tape an itemized list of all the repairs you want made to your steering wheel before you drop your car off. That way, the mechanic who works on it, will have exact instructions from you. Include your name, address and phone number so they can reach you with any questions. If it's a lengthy repair, ask the shop to help arrange a rental. Your repair center should be able to help arrange for a rental to be waiting for you when you drop your car off. After repairs are finished, get a complete repair order that describes the work done. Check the work closely before you leave, and ask to see any old parts. Some states require mechanics to give you any parts they have removed from your car unless the warranty requires they be sent back to the manufacturer. Address any concerns immediately. Request an itemized receipt and check for any work billed but not performed. After you leave, keep a list of any problems you experience and contact the repair center immediately.

How to improve gas mileage
Posted: 1/19/2009 1:22:06 PM | 0 comments

Regular maintenance such as tune-ups, oil changes and tire rotations go a long way toward preventing breakdowns before they happen. Routine maintenance will not only boost your vehicle's reliability and resale value but also save fuel." Pay attention to the little things: A car wash does more than just clean your car. Regular washing, especially the underbody makes an enormous difference in a car's longevity. Brake-fluid and fuel lines run along a car's underbody and are highly susceptible to dirt, water, salt and, therefore, rust. Take note if your car starts to sputter, stall or have other strange symptoms. Auto repair shops advise that you keep a detailed log of any problems and the conditions under which they occur – such as the weather or speed at which you were traveling. This detail will help your mechanic diagnose the problem. Monitor tire inflation and mileage to save money at the gas pump and in the repair shop. Proper tire inflation helps you get better gas mileage. In addition, fuel efficiency is often the first warning sign of a problem, so monitoring your mileage can catch a problem before it gets too big (and expensive). If your engine light flashes, stop the car as soon as possible. Driving even a few miles with an engine problem can wreak havoc on your car. A tow shop will almost always cost less than fixing the damage caused by driving with a faulty engine. Never underestimate the value of regular maintenance: Have your car checked by a professional before extended road trips. Have the mechanic look at the belts, hoses, filters, tires, fluid levels, wiper blades, lights and battery. Never ignore regular oil changes – which should be done every 3,000 – 4,000 miles on most cars. Check your owner's manual to see if you car has a specific oil type, and make sure your mechanic uses that type. Follow the manufacturer's service schedule. Annual, biannual and mileage-based preventative maintenance is intended to give technicians the chance to uncover any problems in the early stages. As well, if a technician tries to pressure you into buying a service your manufacturer doesn't recommend, chances are you don't need it. Develop responsible habits: Drive smoothly. Cars that are driven gently last longer and experience fewer problems. Don't race from red light to red light. Avoid sharp turns, slamming on the brakes and other habits that put stress on your car. Avoid driving on a low tank of gas. Your fuel pump is located in the gas tank. Sediment from gasoline can settle in the bottom of your tank. When you run your car on low fuel, the pump can pick up the sediment and become damaged.

Hybrid car repair tips
Posted: 1/14/2009 3:05:31 PM | 0 comments

Most hybrid components do not require advanced repair training. The big exception is the electrical system. In a hybrid, it's built into the drivetrain and the unique, high-voltage battery can be deadly to work on. The most expensive repair often associated with hybrids is replacing the battery, which can cost between \$3,000 - \$5,000. However, batteries generally last several years,

and often for the life of the vehicle. Overall, Angie's List service providers agreed that maintenance and repair costs for hybrids cost less on average than that of traditional fuel vehicles. The big reason is because most components don't require regular maintenance, like a standard transmission or power steering. The regenerative braking system in hybrids also requires fewer brake pad changes. Find a technician who specializes in hybrid repair before you need one: Right now the easiest way to find a hybrid-certified mechanic is in the hybrid dealership's service department. These mechanics are required to undergo extensive hybrid training that some independent mechanics may not have gotten yet. If you prefer to use a local repair shop, ask in advance if its mechanics have been certified. Many of these shops are sending their top mechanics back to school. Independent hybrid service centers are also popping up to accommodate the growing trend, and many are environmentally-friendly garages that use recycled materials and rely on solar energy. Check licensing & certification: Most mechanics are ASE (Automotive Service Excellence) certified, whereas not all, but the majority of independent mechanics are not certified in hybrid repair. Hybrid dealership technicians, on the other hand, are required to complete the monthly and yearly certification courses and are up-to-speed on the latest innovations. Never work on the electrical system yourself: Unless you are a hybrid-certified mechanic, leave the electrical and battery repairs to the professionals who are trained to work with those deadly, high-voltage components. Don't be late with tire rotations: The electric engine creates more torque than a gasoline engine and can wear out tires faster. Charge that battery: Regularly charge your 12-volt battery if your hybrid has plug-in capability. Hybrids that don't plug in use regenerative braking energy to self charge. Stay up on routine maintenance: As with traditional fuel vehicles, staying current on your regular maintenance will extend the life and preserve the resale value of your hybrid. Warranty work: Most hybrid warranties cover eight years or 100,000 miles. Determine if your warranty requires you to use a specific repair center. If you use another source, keep all receipts in case your warranty coverage is questioned. Hybrid vehicles appear to be here to stay. Ten percent of Angie's List members already own one and in a 2008 poll, nearly half said they have a hybrid in mind for their next purchase. Hybrids range from full hybrids, which operate under electric power alone, to partial or motor-assist hybrids, but they're not the only new kind of vehicle hitting the road. Other options include alternative fuel vehicles that use diesel or dual types of fuel. Traditional cars can also be converted to flex fuel.

Winter car care tips Posted: 11/12/2008 11:28:24 AM | 0 comments Mechanics consistently tell us that one of the most common mistakes car owners make is failing to protect their cars from harsh winter weather. Get these inspected before the cold weather hits: Battery: Make sure terminals are clean and tightened. If you suspect your battery won't survive the season, get a new one now. Radiator and all belts and hoses Tire pressure and tread depth. If you have to replace your tires, replace all four. Air pressure in tires decreases in cold weather so get them checked. Tires should not be worn down to less than 1/16 of an inch. Check tires once a week and make sure your tires are properly rotated and aligned. Coolant and freezing point All fluid levels filled (power steering, transmission, wiper and brake fluid). Replace your antifreeze every two years. Check your oil and make sure it's the proper oil for your car (check your owner's manual). Make sure your water pump and thermostat works. Check radiators and hoses for cracks and leaks, and test heaters and defrosters for proper operation. Always keep the gas tank full. Lights Brakes Heating and ventilation system Replace oil filter and wiper blades Lubricate all locks, door hinges and latches, weather strips and window channels Cold Weather Car Tips: Warm it up: Our experts suggest letting your car warm up 3 to 5 minutes if the temperature is 10 degrees or colder, so the oil can circulate throughout the vehicle. If your car is older than a 1996 model, it may require closer to 10 minutes. Frozen out: If your lock freezes up use a light or match to heat the key. You can also use a lock de-icer. To keep your doors from freezing shut, your best bet is to keep your car in a garage. If you don't have a garage you can apply a coat of petroleum jelly to the door's hinges and latches. You can also place a plastic trash bag between the door or window glass and the frame. Do not throw hot water on the car - it will freeze. If you experience problems in cold weather and are stranded, be prepared. Keep your vehicle supplied with an emergency kit, which should include

a cell phone and charger, ice scraper, blankets, flares, a flashlight, a shovel, jumper cables, sand or kitty litter, tire repair tools, gloves, boots and a knit hat. Also keep a couple bottles of water, some high-energy snacks and a first-aid kit handy. Run the motor for about 10 minutes per hour and crack your window to let air in. To reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning make sure that snow is not blocking your exhaust pipe. Tie something bright to the antenna so rescuers will spot you. Safe driving tips for winter Posted: 11/4/2008 11:22:34 AM | 0 comments Sure, you get your oil changed every 3,000 miles, but regular oil changes aren't enough to handle the elements when the weather turns cold. So when the first bout of freezing temperatures hits this winter season, will your car be ready to perform? Here are tips from Angie's List on what to have inspected before the winter season: Battery tested Radiator and all belts and hoses inspected Tire pressure and tread depth checked. If you have to replace your tires, replace all four. Coolant and freezing point tested All fluid levels filled (power steering, transmission, wiper and brake fluid) All lights tested Brakes inspected Heating and ventilation system tested Replace oil filter and wiper blades Lubricate all locks, door hinges and latches, weather strips and window channels One of the common mistakes car owners make, mechanics say, is not planning for the cold weather. If you do experience problems in cold weather and are stranded, be prepared. Keep your vehicle supplied with an emergency kit, which should include a cell phone and charger, ice scraper, blankets, flares, a flashlight, a shovel, jumper cables, sand or kitty litter, tire repair tools, gloves, boots and a knit hat. Also, keep a couple bottles of water, some high-energy snacks and a first-aid kit handy. Car care tips Posted: 5/27/2008 1:00:00 AM | 0 comments Vehicles that are driven gently and serviced regularly last longer and experience fewer problems. If you read nothing else in the car manual, read the preventative maintenance schedule and follow it. You'll save in the long run by detecting problems in their early stages. If you're pressured to buy a service your manufacturer doesn't recommend, chances are you don't need it. You may need a new technician, though. Driving the speed limit will increase your fuel efficiency. Don't race from red light to red light. Avoid sharp turns, slamming on the brakes and other habits that put stress on your car. Avoid driving on an empty tank. The bottom of the gas tank collects sediment from gasoline which can travel into the nearby fuel pump and result in low fuel-efficiency. Schedule an annual maintenance check shortly before your area's most extreme weather sets in. Equip your car with an emergency kit of high-energy snacks, bottled water, shovel, blanket, cell phone battery charger, tire repair tools, flashlight and flares. Don't skip regular oil changes, which should be done every 3,000 to 4,000 miles on most cars. Check your owner's manual to see if your car has a specific oil type, and make sure your mechanic uses it. A car wash does more than just clean your car. Regular washing, especially the underbody and in the winter for cold-weather areas, makes an enormous difference in a car's longevity. Brake fluid and fuel lines run along a car's underbody, which is subjected to a lot of dirt, water and salt -- all of which lead straight to rust. Keep a detailed log of any issues and when they occur; like bad weather or a particular speed. This detail will help your mechanic diagnose the problem. Related: How to avoid auto repair hassles Regularly monitor your tire inflation and mileage to save money at the gas pump and in the repair shop. Proper tire inflation helps you get better gas mileage. A drop in fuel efficiency is often the first warning sign of a problem, so monitoring your mileage can catch a problem before it gets too big (and expensive). If your "check engine" light flashes, stop the car as soon as possible. Driving even a few miles with an engine problem can wreak major havoc and cost you more in the long-run. If you're planning a road trip, take your car to a reliable auto repair shop for a thorough check-up two weeks before your vacation. Make sure to let them know you'll be taking a road trip in the near future, so if there's an issue, you'll have time to get it addressed.

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