

Make your car last 200,000 miles!

It's relatively simple and can save you thousands of dollars over buying new cars every few years.

If you think you're staying ahead of the game by trading in your car every three to five years, here's a secret: Many of today's cars can last for 200,000 miles or more with few, if any, major repairs if properly cared for. And holding on to a car long after the payments are through can save you many thousands of dollars.

Thanks to advances in lubricants, engine technology, and rust proofing among other things, today's cars are more reliable than ever. Long lasting cars run the gamut of the automotive spectrum, from small sedans to SUVs and pickups. More motorists could save money by hanging on to the car they have if it is what they want to drive. To keep a car performing properly, closely follow the maintenance schedule in the vehicle owner's manual and follow the advice of someone who is knowledgeable and skilled – a specialist on the vehicle. If you think you're saving money by skipping a service, think again. Missing even one service can accelerate premature wear and cause damage, reducing long-term car reliability. As long as you stick to the schedule, you'll save in the long run, even if some services seem expensive in the short run.

Some vehicles have sensors that take the guesswork out of maintenance. Some BMW, Toyota, Honda, and Mercedes-Benz models monitor the miles driven since the last service and record data such as how much stop-and-go driving is done, the engine temperature during each trip, and the time the engine spends operating at higher speeds. It then calculates how quickly your oil is breaking down and alerts you when service is due. Those systems can then adjust a car's complete service interval based on the severity of use and boost long-term car reliability. Overall they are fairly accurate but sometimes must be modified based on particular factors such as temperature and an excessive number of short drives.

When it's time for maintenance or repairs, use only parts and fluids meeting manufacturer specifications. Using the wrong type of oil or transmission fluid, for example, could result in damage leading to expensive repairs and diminished long-term car reliability. Cheap and no-name belts and hoses don't wear as well as those from a proven name-brand supplier.

Although synthetic motor oil is more expensive than conventional oil, you should use it if that's what the manual specifies or if you have special situations. Synthetic oil better resists extreme temperatures, and some engines, especially those tuned for performance, might require it. But conventional motor oil is fine for most cars.

Every time the vehicle is serviced all fluids should be checked for condition and proper level: this includes checking coolant, brake, transmission and power steering fluids. Fluids can give you clues about what's happening inside the component. For example, if your transmission fluid smells burnt when you pull out the dipstick or feels gritty between your fingers, it could signal the start of internal damage. Early detection will reduce repair costs and, again, increase long-term car reliability.

Be aware of odd noises from your engine, suspension, or brakes while driving. If you have any doubts about a noise, get it checked out by your shop right away. It could save you thousands of dollars and add many trouble-free miles to your driving experience.