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Shop Talk from Urban Suburban This week: The economy and your car

By Krysten A. Laine, Urban Suburban

What to do and what not to do, keeping the budget, watching the pennies- where does it all go? Why is it every time I go to the mechanic it costs a fortune? These are a few tips to keep the bills down while maintaining your vehicle through the times of tightening the strings. Taking care of your car is like taking care of your teeth, daily brushing and flossing plus annual or bi-annual trips to the dentist keep the cavities at bay. If you don't brush your teeth or floss, you will wind up with cavities, possible root canal, gum disease or any other slew of problems that are prevented by simple daily care of your teeth. The same goes for your car. Even in times of tightening those budget strings, your daily needs do not change. You still need to run errands, bring the kids to school, go to work, go to Bart, carpool- all of which require the use of a car for some if not all of these things. In an emergency, you use your car to get to and from at the drop of a hat. Preventative maintenance is important for your car.

Open the hood- Get to know your car and find the basic areas beneath your hood. Do you know where your dip sticks are? Check the oil/fluid levels. Are they low? Check your driveway for fluid spotting, maybe there is a leak in need of repair. Take a look at the hoses running all over the place. Do the hoses look new? Are they cracked where they connect? Does it look like deposits are collecting around the connection point? Check your records for the last time you had tune up work done, it may be time to replace the hoses. Keep in mind that there are many other things in your car that hold fluid, like your transmission, your front and rear axles, and transfer case (four wheel drive vehicles). All these need to be looked at.

Listen for noise- Any strange or out of the ordinary noise you hear is a warning sign. These noises do not go away if you ignore them. They need to be checked out before they turn into bigger noises and bigger problems. Is there a squeal when you apply the brakes? Have your brakes checked out. Does the steering rattle through a section of potholes? When you turn the wheel hard, is there a rotational click coming from the wheels? Does your exhaust system sound like a tin can full of rocks? All of these are issues that should be checked out before they cause larger more expensive problems.

Lights on the dash- The blinking lights are not for decoration. They are an indicator that something in your system is failing. Newer cars have a lot more electronic gadgets that relate together in a network. Typically one can fail without the others failing. However, if the problem goes unchecked, a domino effect can occur. Bring your car in for a diagnostics check.

If you have any questions about this or any other Shop Talk issues, call US today at 925-283-5212. Our hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. We provide free shuttle service to the local area.