

# Fall Car Care



# Preparing for Cooler Weather

As the weather cools down in fall, it's the perfect time to get your car ready for winter.

By winterizing your car, you can make sure you're ready for whatever wicked weather winter brings your way, keeping you and your family safe throughout the season.

## PACKING YOUR CAR

Get ready for winter by packing a few essential items for the season. This includes, depending on where you live, snow and ice removal tools; a tire pressure gauge; traction aids such as cat litter or sand; cold weather survival gear; and a roadside emergency kit that includes jumper cables, a flashlight, a first aid kit, tools, snacks and water.

## MAINTENANCE CONCERNS

Let's work from the bottom up. Start by checking your tires to make sure you have the best tires for your vehicle and your climate. You can penny test the tread depth by putting a penny between your tire treads with Lincoln's head facing down. If the top of his head is hidden, you're good to go. If you can see the top of his head, it's time to think about a new set of tires.

If you live in an area that's frequently hit by severe winter weather, you might want to consider changing out your all-season tires for winter or snow tires before wintry condi-



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tions hit.

Next, check your battery. In cold temperatures, your battery may need more power to start your vehicle. Have your battery inspected by a professional to make sure it has enough power to start your car and also power winter necessities such as

defrosters.

Move on to the windshield. Look for any cracks or chips that can rapidly expand and affect your vision in cold weather and have them repaired by a professional. Depending on your insurance coverage, this may even be

free. You should also switch to a winter formula of wiper fluid that won't freeze in the tank and change your wiper blades to ones that are specifically designed for winter weather if you regularly get snow and ice in your area.

Make sure that your coolant

and antifreeze are able to protect your engine by checking the levels and having them topped off. You can also have this done at your next oil change, when you should also ask if you should change to an oil with the appropriate viscosity for winter in your area.

# Taking Care of Tires

Tires are a critical part of your vehicle's safety net for keeping you and your family riding along smoothly.

Well-maintained tires last longer, can improve your vehicle's fuel efficiency and give you more traction in dicey weather.

## INFLATION

Check your tire pressure at least once a month when the tires are cold, meaning when the car has sat for a while. Under- or over-inflated tires may not steer or brake properly, causing an accident. You may also be wasting fuel by driving on improperly inflated tires. Look in your owner's manual for tire inflation specifics or on the vehicle information placard on the inside of the driver's side front or back door. The number printed on the side of your tires is the maximum tire pressure, not the recommended tire pressure.

## ROTATION AND ALIGNMENT

You should also be rotating and aligning your tires regularly, about every 6,000 miles or so for rotation or every 15,000 for alignment. Refer to your owner's manual for more information for your specific vehicle. Rotating your tires ensures they wear evenly, as does keeping your tires in



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alignment. You should also have your alignment checked if you hit a particularly hard obstacle such as a pothole, curb or railroad crossing. Have your tires balanced every time you rotate your tires or when you change tires or wheels.

## INSPECT YOUR TIRES

While you're checking tread, also look around your tires for cracks, bulges or objects lodged in the tire. A nail driven into the tread may not cause an immediate leak and could lead to a dangerous blowout down the road. Have punctures or any

other defects inspected and repaired by professionals immediately.

## REPLACING YOUR TIRES

Replace your tires when needed. If your tires have wear bars, replace them when you can see the bars. Otherwise, put

a penny into the tread with Lincoln's head facing upside down. If you can see the top of his head, it's time for new tires. Don't mix and match tires on your vehicle. That can lead to poor performance at best and, at worst, uneven tread wear and mechanical issues.

# Dealing with Ice

Snow and ice are beautiful, but when it comes to driving, these winter weather hazards can be a killer.

Icy conditions can take even experienced drivers by surprise and lead to injury and even death if you don't know what to do. Here are some tips for staying safe on winter roads from AAA.

## ADJUST YOUR DRIVING

If you can, AAA suggests staying home in wintry weather, even if you're a veteran winter driver. Other people on the road may be less experienced than you, and there are always surprises. If you can remain at home, do so and avoid unnecessary risk.

If you do go out, drive slowly and adjust your speed to account for less traction when driving over snow or ice. Accelerate and brake slowly, avoiding skids.

Remember, it takes more time — and distance — to stop on slick roads than on dry ones. Adjust your following distance accordingly. Avoid using cruise control and keep complete control of your car yourself. The cruise control system won't be able to adjust for wintry conditions.

## BE PREPARED

Have winter tires and fresh antifreeze in your car before winter weather hits and know how to properly apply traction



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such as snow chains if they're legal to use in your area. AAA also suggests keeping cold-weather gear in your car, including extra clothing, food and water, in case you get stranded in winter weather. You should also maintain at least half a tank of fuel at all times during winter, AAA says.

## IF YOU GET STUCK

Being stuck in snow and ice can be a killer. Before leaving in wintry weather, let someone know where you're going and what route you plan to take. If you do get stuck, stay with your car. It's a good shelter and, during a storm, it's easy to become lost. Don't over-exert

yourself, and make yourself visible by tying a brightly colored cloth to your car or placing it in a rolled up window to signal distress. If possible, keep the dome light on at night.

Make sure you clear the exhaust pipe, because a blocked pipe can cause a build-

up of deadly carbon monoxide gas in the passenger compartment. Stay warm using whatever you can, including covering yourself with newspapers, maps or even the floor mats. Save fuel by turning off the engine and only turning it back on to run the heat long enough to remove the chill.

# Choosing Floor Mats

You probably don't think about your floor mats often — maybe when they get tangled around your feet or you need to vacuum your car. But they provide a vital service in protecting the frame of your car from damage from moisture and other substances.

As for getting tangled? It's important that your floor mats also properly fit your vehicle and don't interfere with the brake and gas pedals. Here are some things to keep in mind when choosing aftermarket floor mats.

## THICKNESS

The thicker your floor mat, the more liquid it can hold, if it's absorbent. Thicker mats also tend to provide more cushioning for your feet. However, thick mats can also interfere with pedals on the driver side, so make sure there is some sort of hook or other way to keep the mat in place on your floor.

## FIT

Some aftermarket mats are universal, some are cut-to-fit, and some are made exactly for your model of vehicle. Universal mats generally have the worst fit because they're made to fit all vehicles and may not cover your particular



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vehicle the best. However, they tend to be more budget friendly than the cut-to-fit or made-to-fit options. Cut-to-fit mats may be thinner or may be difficult for some people to cut, so keep that in mind when making your decision. Custom-made mats tend to be the most expensive.

## FEATURES

A floor mat may just seem like a floor mat, but there are features you want to look for. These include high walls or a lip to keep spills off your carpet. You also want to see a hook or another way to fasten the mat securely to the vehicle's floor. Choose a style and

color that complements or even matches your vehicle's interior for a premium look and possibly even some extra cash when you sell or trade it in.

## MAINTENANCE

No matter what your mat is made of, make sure to clean it

regularly per the manufacturer's instructions and check the fit every time you get in the car to make sure you can manipulate your driver's side pedals as needed.

Keep an eye out for faded, cracked or brittle materials. When you see those, it's time to shop again.

# Protecting Your Paint

Your car's shiny, bright paint may get you a lot of looks, but it's got a lot of enemies. Sun, rocks, salt, birds and more all have it in for your car's slick paint.

Here's how to keep it looking shiny and new for as long as you own your car.

## **WASH (AND DRY!)**

Wash your car regularly, at least once a week if you can. Avoid direct sunlight while washing your car and remove dirt and dust first with a clean, soft cloth or by spraying it with water. This will lessen the chance of any scratches on your finish. Use a cleaner made for automobiles and a clean cotton cloth. Dish detergent or other cleaners can contain chemicals that can harm your car's paint.

Remove mud and bird droppings with an automotive clay bar and an automotive cleaner. Rinse the car thoroughly to remove all soapy residue, then dry it with a microfiber towel or a clean cotton rag. This prevents water stains and other damage to your paint.

## **USE WAX OR SEALANT**

Waxing your car keeps it looking new and acts as a protective layer against the sun, bird droppings and bugs. You should wax your car every six

weeks and make sure it's clean first. Small dirt and debris can become trapped in the wax and damage the clear coat.

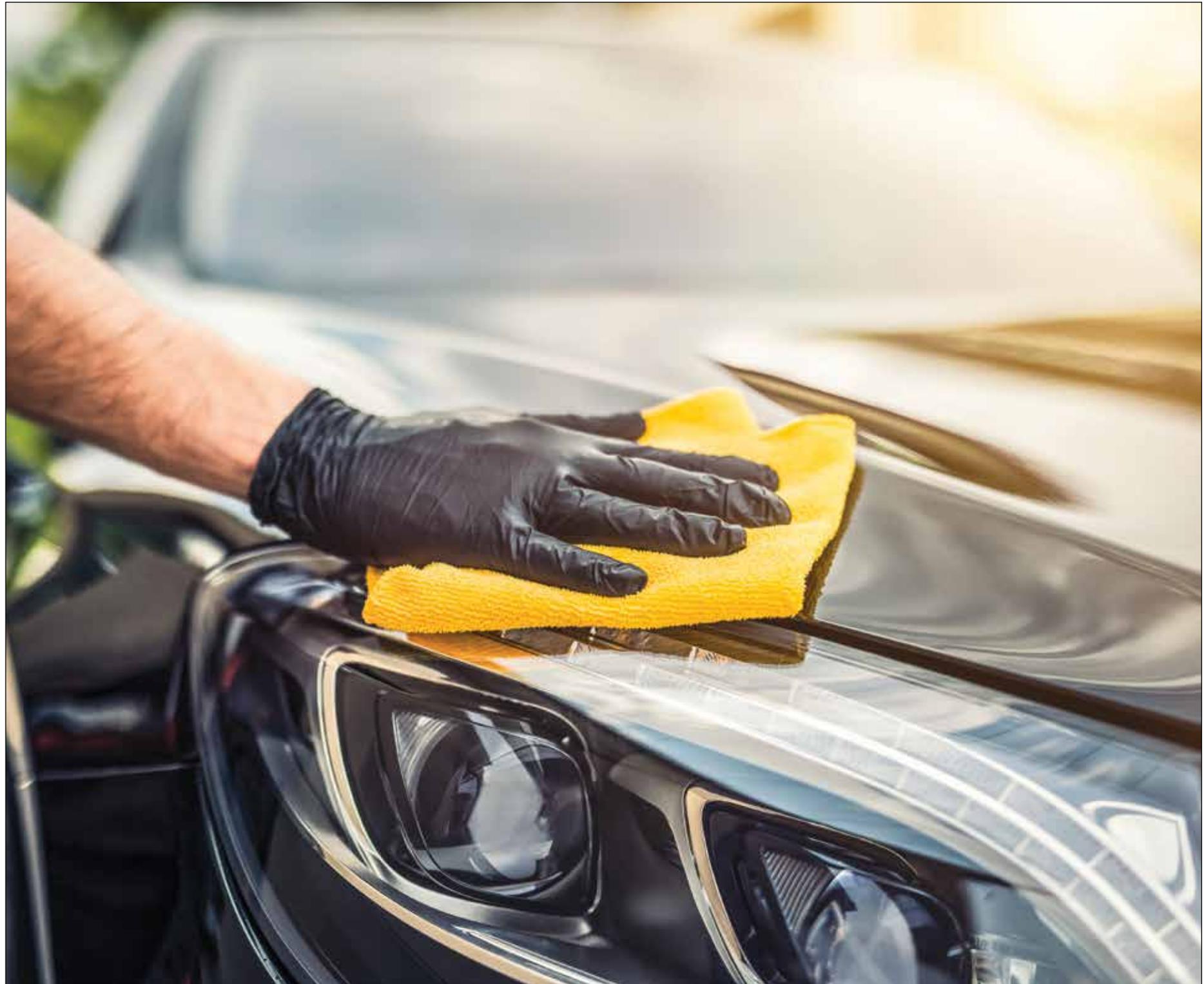
Paint sealants work better than wax and give your vehicle a glassy look if used properly.

Paint sealants should be applied every six months, but they can also highlight any paint imperfections, scratches and swirls. Follow the manufacturer's directions carefully for the best results.

## **PARK CORRECTLY**

Try to park in the shade when you can and, when you're at home, park in the garage or a dedicated car shelter. This keeps the paint from fading and also protects your vehicle from

the sun, acid rain and bird droppings. If you can't park in a shelter, consider investing in a quality car cover. Choose a cover that's water resistant and breathable, and fits your car snugly.



# Repairing Dents and Dings

It can happen in garages, in parking lots and even in your own driveway. Dents and dings are part of car ownership and, no matter how careful you are, you're bound to collect a few.

Dents and dings, however, don't have to be here to stay, damaging both your car and its value.

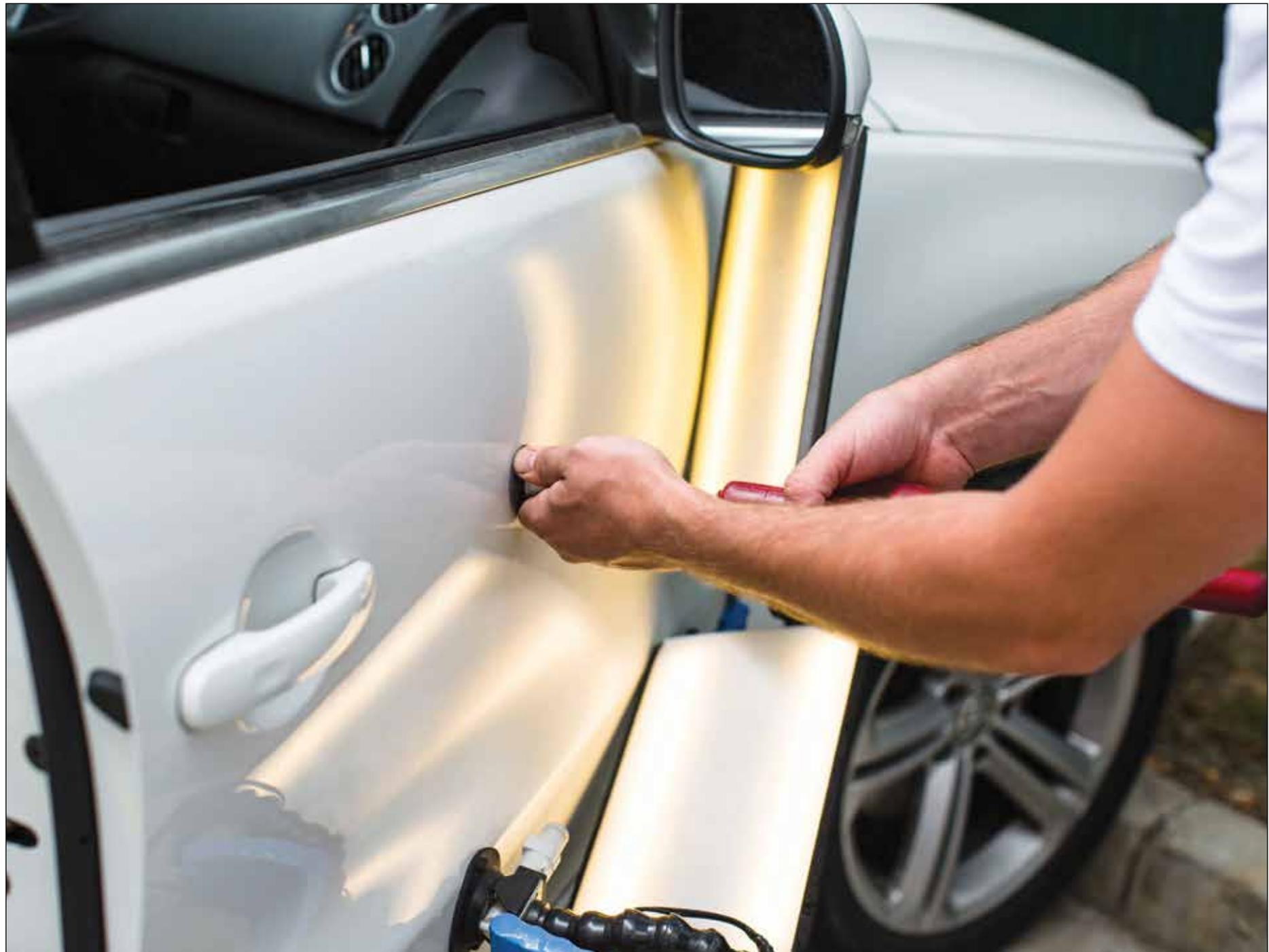
## DIY DENT REPAIR

You can buy dent repair kits on store shelves that may fix minor dents, door dings or bumper damage. Some dents in your car's plastic parts may even be able to be fixed with a hair dryer. Be careful, though. Fixing one small dent will sometimes cause another. Use the hair dryer or the dent puller included in your kit to slowly work out that dent, as well.

You can also fix some dents with body filler, but that will require several steps, including painting your vehicle to match. This is for the advanced shadetree mechanic, or for someone with a lot of patience.

## PAINTLESS DENT REPAIR

Some small dents or dings without damage to the vehicle's paint can be repaired by a specially trained technician



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with a set of special tools including metal rods, shims, picks, lights and mirrors. The technician will maneuver behind the dent and gently push it out, maintaining your factory finish.

Paintless dent repair can typically fix sharp dents, which are pointy dents in your

vehicle from things such as a minor accident or shopping cart; round dents, which may come from round objects such as hailstones or balls; wrinkled dents, which are usually caused by something scraping across your vehicle; as well as dings and crease dents.

Some insurance companies

may even cover paintless dent repair at no cost to you. Check your policy or talk to your insurance professional for more information.

## TRADITIONAL DENT REPAIR

Repairing dents the traditional way takes longer than

paintless dent repair because the technicians have to restore the shape, then sand down and repaint the affected area. In some instances, it may be more affordable to replace the whole body panel rather than just fix one dent. Talk to your automotive professional about what your options are.

# Summer Gas vs. Winter Gas

When temperatures cool down and vacation season ends in the U.S., refiners shift their gasoline output from summer blends — with their added fuel economy boost — to winter gas.

Keep reading to learn the difference between summer-blend and winter-blend gasoline.

## REID VAPOR PRESSURE

Reid Vapor Pressure is the measure of how easily the fuel evaporates at higher temperature. The higher the RVP, the more readily it evaporates. Winter-blend gas requires a higher RVP because if it doesn't evaporate at cooler temperatures, the vehicle's engine could start hard and run rough. To get the higher RVP, refiners will often blend winter gasoline with butane.



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## FEDERAL REGULATION

Federal law prohibits high RVP gas to be used in the summer because it contributes to increased emissions and air pollution. From June 1 to Sept. 15, gasoline cannot be sold with an RVP of greater than nine.

Instead of butane, refiners turn to pricier additives, such as alkylates and reformates, driving up gas prices in the

summer. Adding to the tab is the fact that blending also takes longer.

Some areas are also designated as high ozone areas by the EPA, and their RVPs can drop as low as seven, as well. During emergencies, the federal government may relax rules, allowing retailers to sell winter-blend gas even during the summer.

## STATE REGULATION

Some states have even lower RVP standards in the summer. In California, for instance, the RVP limit is seven and refiners may have to turn to summer-blend gas as early as April 1 and as late as Oct. 31. Some states may also require different formulations to reduce carbon monoxide.

## ETHANOL

Ethanol is a gasoline additive that's in 97% of all gas. In some states, gasoline blended with up to 10% ethanol, called E10, can meet the summer-blend maximum of nine RVP even though its RVP is 10. However, other states don't allow this exception, meaning the U.S. is covered in a patchwork of gasoline regulations

(and prices) year-round.

Generally speaking, the switch from summer to winter gas is virtually unnoticeable to most consumers except for bumps in prices as we go into summer and drops as we go into winter. Refiners and retailers work together to make sure that both prices and engine performance remain the same across the country.