



Spring  
CAR CARE

# Erasing the Winter

**N**ow that the cold weather is gone, erase the remnants it left behind on your vehicle.

Once the temperatures begin to go up, take a walk around your vehicle and look for signs of salt buildup or rust.

Here are some areas you should pay special attention to once the warm weather returns.

## UNDERCARRIAGE

While you can't always see them, many parts under a vehicle ensure everything operates safely and efficiently. Unfortunately, the undercarriage is seriously impacted by road salt. When planning to clean your undercarriage, the Illinois Secretary of State urges you to pay special attention to these important parts, as they are most at risk to becoming compromised:

- Exhaust system and muffler;
- Coil springs and sub-frame; and
- Hydraulic brake systems.

If you notice signs of rust between your axles and brake system, have a professional inspect it for safety.

To clean your undercarriage, use a high-pressure hose or power washer to blast salt and other debris build-up. If you need to raise your vehicle with a jack or jack



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stand, be sure it is stable before crawling underneath the car.

## PAINT INTEGRITY

Another area of your vehicle that can become damaged during winter weather is the paint. Most modern vehicles

protect their colors with a layer of clear coat. It acts as a protective barrier to keep your vehicle's paint job looking fresh. Unfortunately, once this defense is compromised, damage can quickly spread, resulting in a faded appearance. If spots are minor, you

can find touch-up paint at your local auto parts store. For more serious damage, the helping hand of a professional may be needed.

## CLEAN UP BATTERY CONNECTION

Cold weather is harsh on

electrical components in your engine bay. Pay attention to the state of battery terminals. If you notice corrosion, starting performance can be an issue.

Use a wire brush and a terminal cleaner to improve connections.



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# Protect Your Pickup Bed

**P**ickup beds are built to work and haul but that doesn't mean they have to be vulnerable. Protect your investment with a sturdy shell so you can transport large items without the fear of causing damage. It will also help retain more resale value if you decide to trade it in down the road.

## **PLASTIC DROP-IN**

One of the least labor-intensive options to consider is a plastic insert specifically designed for your vehicle. Don't be fooled by universal options that may require modifications before it will fit and may fit poorly. A custom option can easily be installed by people with a little automotive knowledge. Talk to a professional at your favorite auto

service center to find the best shell for your money. You don't want to invest in a protective shell that doesn't fit properly as it may move around during regular driving, causing damage to the paint underneath.

## **PROFESSIONAL SPRAY ON**

With the help of an expert, a spray-on liner can be more efficient

when controlling your cargo from moving around. High-quality textures create a strong base, offering a grip that isn't provided by a plastic shell.

But there are some disadvantages. A professional is needed for this job, and if the manufacturer's specifications aren't properly followed, the bed can damage the truck.

It may also be more expensive

than other options.

## **DIY**

If you know your way around a vehicle's paint, you can save a lot of money with DIY kits. They are typically available for spray guns, rollers and even spray cans. Keep in mind, any damage caused to paint from an install may void a manufacturer's corrosion warranty.

# Interior Overhaul

**D**on't forget to include your vehicle with spring cleaning plans. Keep reading for some tips to get your car ready for spring and summer road trips.

## CHANGE YOUR FILTERS

When committing to a professional detail, consider changing the cabin air filter while you're at it. This filter traps dust pollen or other allergens in the vehicle's HVAC system. Consult your user's manual for replacement intervals and specific instructions for your vehicle. Many detail facilities will perform this job for a small fee.

## DIY VERSUS PROFESSIONAL CLEANING

While you can certainly spruce up your interior with a little TLC and a vacuum, a professional cleaning is more effective after a long winter. Experts will take the time to inspect and scrub even the hard-to-reach areas.

You will likely discover different levels of service offered at your local detail facility. According to a recent survey from the American Automobile Association, Americans find themselves in their vehicles for 17,600 minutes per year. If you are someone who feels like you're always driving, it's a good investment to treat yourself to a luxury package.

## CLEANING CARPET

The carpet in your vehicle is just as susceptible to housing bacteria and stains as the carpet in your home, especially if



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children or pets are frequent co-pilots. An expert has the proper tools to eliminate dirty carpet efficiently. They have the knowledge to recommend when a simple shampoo or a more complex steam cleaning is appropriate.

## DON'T FORGET THE GLASS

Give yourself a safer view of your surroundings by cleaning the windshield and surrounding glass. Make sure to find a product appropriate to your windows as some ammo-

nia-based cleaners can damage tint.

Before cleaning your windshield, wipe it down with a microfiber towel to remove debris. Next, in circular motions, rub a small amount of isopropyl alcohol on its

entirety to act as a degreaser.

If you find any chips or dings during your cleaning, visit an auto glass professional to have them patched before they spread. Depending on your insurance coverage, it may even be free.



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# Choosing an Oil Change

If you have ever felt overwhelmed when choosing an oil change service at the auto shop, you're not alone. With the many different types of fluid available, it's easy to be confused when choosing the most effective method for your vehicle.

Don't just settle for a package because it's the most affordable; some cars and trucks require high-performance lubricants to work at their highest efficiency.

## THE MEANING OF "W"

Many people see the letter and number combination on a bottle of oil and automatically assume the W means weight. It actually stands for winter. The first number in the oil classification refers to cold weather viscosity. The lower

the number, the less viscous the oil in cooler weather. So a 5W-20 oil will flow better in lower temperatures than a 10W- oil. The second number represents the viscosity at warmer temperatures.

Always follow your vehicle manufacturer's recommendations for types of oil to use. After choosing the right viscosity of oil, now you have the choice of which type of lubricant will perform the best. Here is a look at some of the differences between the types

of fluids available.

## SYNTHETIC AND BLENDS

Modern engines frequently call for a fully synthetic oil. This fluid is designed to flow efficiently at low temperatures while maintaining peak consistency at full viscosity. It is a must to lubricate tight spaces found in newer motors. Manufacturers boast about the longer oil-change intervals that synthetic oil offers, but it's important to take the advice of your owner's manual, especial-

ly if a vehicle is under warranty. Synthetic blend oils are a popular choice because they are often less expensive than their full synthetic cousin while still offering some of the benefits.

## CONVENTIONAL

For engine protection without the expense or features of synthetics, conventional oil covers the bases for older motors. While it is much less expensive, you may find yourself changing the oil more often, as its life is usually rec-

ommended for only 3,000 miles.

## HIGH MILEAGE

Many oil manufacturers make a specially designed lubricant for engines with over 75,000 miles. It is packed with additives like seal conditioners, to swell barriers that are prone to leaking. If you notice oil underneath your vehicle, it may be time to switch to a high-mileage option instead of paying for expensive engine repairs.

# Transmission Maintenance

Automatic transmissions don't always get the same attention as oil changes and tire rotation when it comes to routine service. But forgetting to take care of the heart of a vehicle's powertrain can leave you stranded and digging deep into your pockets.

## CHECKING THE FLUID

Much like your engine, the components of a transmission require constant lubrication. When there isn't enough fluid, the important network of gears can become damaged and less efficient. The process is a little more complex than checking your engine's oil. Here's how.

First, park your vehicle on an even surface and leave it running. The system must be hot before accurate levels can be measured.

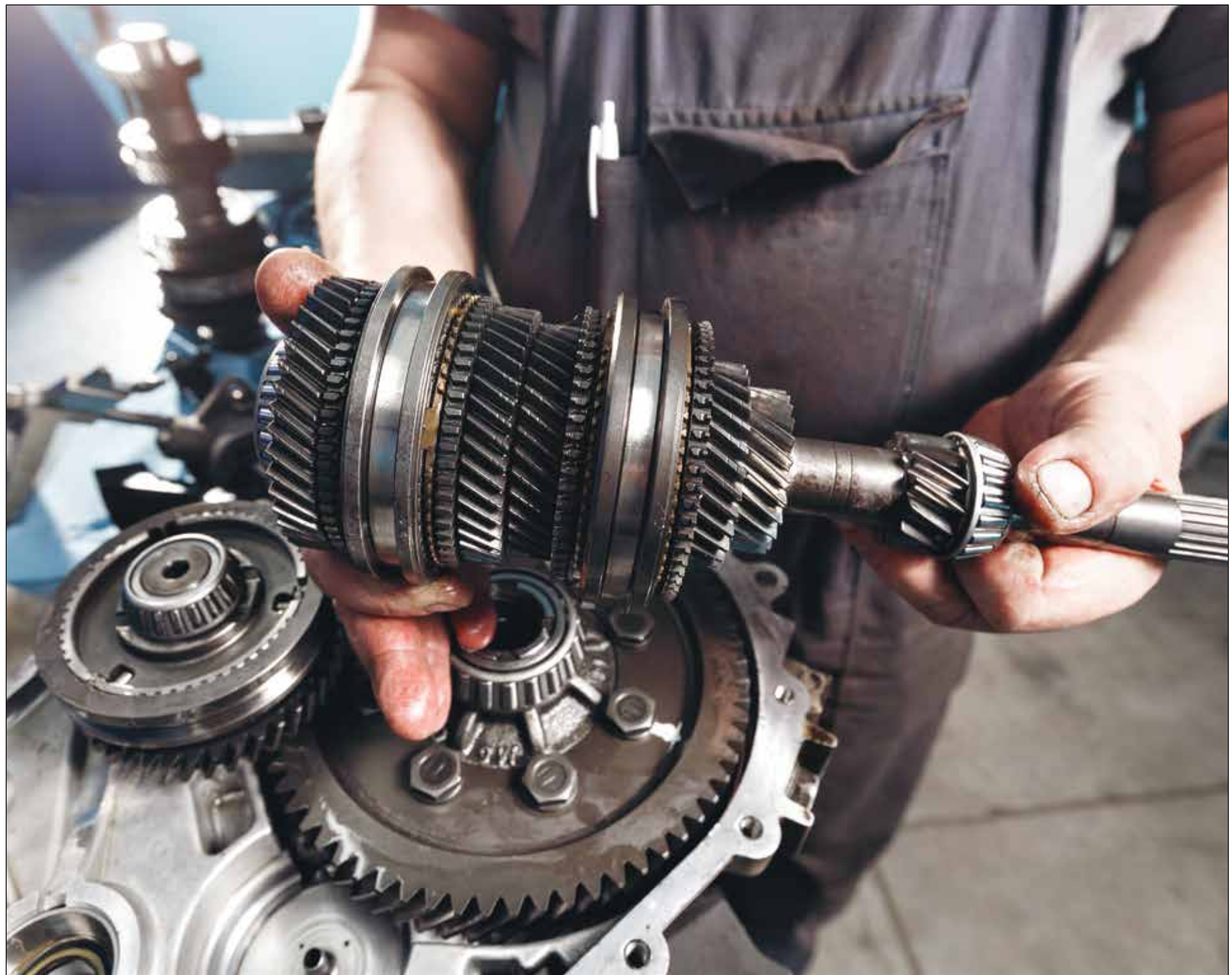
Next, open your hood and locate the transmission dipstick. In rear-wheel drive vehicles, it is in the rear of the engine bay; front-wheel drive models will have it closer to the front.

Ensure that fluid on the dipstick is transparent pink in color. If it smells burnt or you notice particles, a fluid change is required.

Wipe the stick clean and insert it back in the tube to check the level on its indicator. If you require more fluid, fill from the same tube.

## FULL FLUSH OR SERVICE

The Illinois Secretary of State recommends changing your automatic transmission fluid every 25,000 to 30,000 miles, but your instructions may differ depending on the vehicle manufacturer. Servicing a transmission is typically inexpensive as it includes partially



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refilling the system and replacing a filter and gasket in its pan. A full flush can cost a little

more as additives are used to completely eradicate contaminants in a system and a refill of

fluid is required.

Performing regular services and keeping an eye on the fluid

levels and quality can save you big bucks by avoiding the need for a flush.

# Inspect the Suspension

As spring approaches, focus your attention to the components that keep you and your family safe. It's likely that winter elements caused wear and tear to these important parts that make the wheels go around. Ask an expert at your favorite repair facility to ensure they are in good working order.

## SHOCKS AND STRUTS

If you find yourself bouncing around in the seat while driving on bumpy roads, your shocks or struts require immediate attention. There are multiple types of these suspension components, but popular systems use hydraulics, or air. Typically, cars and light-duty trucks will include struts as they also help support the frame. Larger vehicles like heavy-duty trucks or SUVs usually use shocks on all four corners. Most professional facilities recommend changing these parts every 30,000 miles, but the interval can be sooner when traveling on difficult roadways.

## BEARINGS

Have you noticed noise from the wheel while traveling or find it difficult to make turns? A vehicle's wheel is operated with the help of a bearing. When they begin to lose effectiveness, you may hear grinding noises at different speeds or even notice your vehicle wobbling.

A worn-out bearing can also cause your tires to wear unevenly, creating the risk of dangerous situations. Don't hesitate at the first sign of trouble. You should notify a qualified mechanic to diagnose and correct the problem.

## TIE RODS AND BALL JOINTS

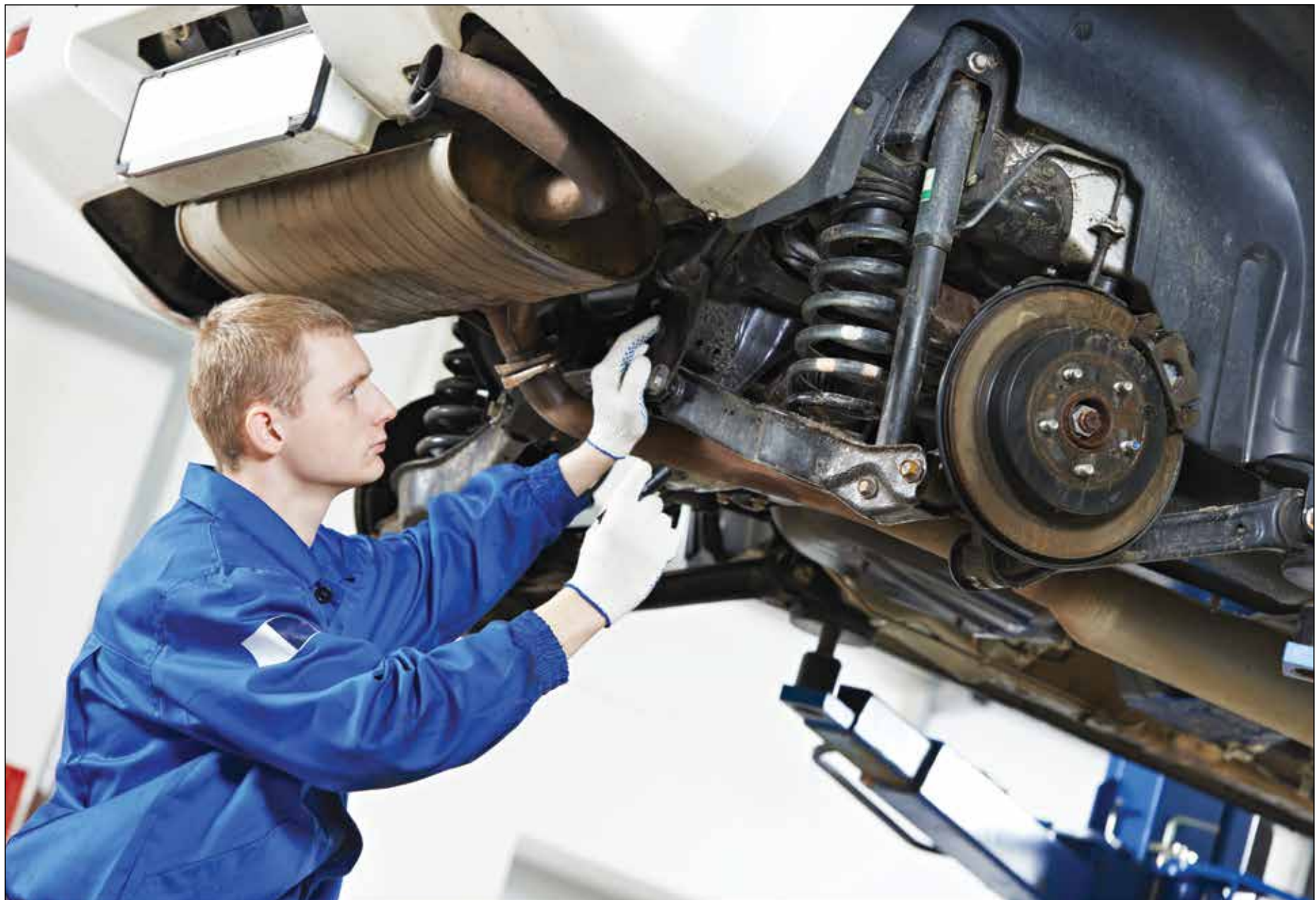
This duo is at the heart of the steering and suspension system. Multiple tie-rod ends complete a vehicle's steering linkage after connecting to a

rack-and-pinion or gearbox. When you notice clunky steering or popping noises while turning, a main culprit is the tie-rod system. Upper and lower ball joints connect to an arm which attaches to the

steering knuckle. They allow a vehicle's suspension to travel up and down and impact its ability to turn.

The key to keeping this system efficient is asking your mechanic to grease these com-

ponents during routine maintenance. If you plan to DIY a repair, make sure to use premium parts that include a grease fitting. Some cheaper options won't include this tool to improve the part's lifespan.



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# Protect Against Sun Fading

After a long winter, most of us welcome the sunshine with open arms. However, we often forget to protect our vehicles from its rays. Not only does fading negate an attractive interior, it can reduce the resale value of your car.

There are several protectants you can take advantage of to keep your leather and vinyl looking fresh. Most products can be found on the shelves of your local auto parts store, but if you decide you want commercial-strength assistance, inquire with a professional service in your area.

Here are a few of the problem spots that demand attention once spring arrives.

## DASHBOARD

If you don't feel the need for chemicals to build a barrier between your vinyl dashboard and the sun-caused fading, there are a couple solutions.

When possible put your vehicle in a parking garage or park under trees which offer shade.

Use a windshield protector to block the rays while you're

not in the vehicle. This also will help keep the interior from becoming too hot.

If these strategies aren't an option during your daily routine, specially made conditioners do an efficient job protecting against fading or cracks. Before applying the protectant, make sure to clean the surface with a microfiber cloth and cleaning

agent. If you spray a barrier while particles are present, it may create a pattern if sun damage occurs.

## LEATHER SEATS

Your leather seats are at serious risk of becoming damaged from the sun's UV rays. Fortunately, there are many conditioners that work like the sunscreen we use on

our skin. In addition to offering protection, high-quality leather additive keeps your seats soft and comfortable.

For extra hot days, consider using covers made of cloth to avoid unexpected burns when hopping into a hot seat.

## CONVERTIBLE TOP

Many people welcome spring in by cruising through

town in a convertible. However, when the top is up, it's material can also be heavily compromised from prolonged exposure to the sun. It's a good idea to get periodic inspections from a professional and replace a top when it is recommended. Allowing damage or wear to go on could cause serious damage to your interior on a rainy day.



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