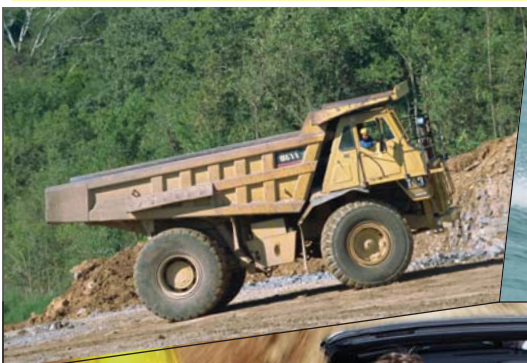




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3 ways lawn equipment is now more like your car

(BPT) - The cars of today aren't quite your father's car. While that's not a surprise given the rise in new technology for the automotive sector, what some homeowners may find surprising is the level of technology with items in the garage next to the car - like the lawn equipment. Here are three unique ways today's lawn equipment is featuring automotive-like technology.

Bluetooth Connectivity

While Bluetooth technology has become more of a standard on new cars, it is actually a unique feature on lawn equipment. With the Cub Connect mobile app, owners can connect their smartphone with certain lawn mowers, garden tractors and zero turn riders via Bluetooth. It takes the guesswork out of maintenance by allowing the lawn tractor to alert its owner about needed oil changes, blade maintenance, air filter replacements and other routine maintenance.

"With so many apps available for things homeowners don't use, this app can actually help them keep track of maintenance for an important piece of equipment," says Jason Cameron, home expert and TV host.

Electronic Fuel-Injected Engines

Electronic Fuel-Injected Engines - or EFI engines - were popularized in the automotive sector in 1980s. However, no one had been able to engineer the same type of technology in residential lawn tractors until this year. For the first time ever, fuel-injected engines are now available on XT2 LX42 Cub Cadet lawn tractors. The new engine technology reduces emissions and delivers excellent fuel consumption - using up to 25 percent less fuel than carbureted engines that are standard on other lawn tractors.

"According to a recent study, lower fuel consumption is a top benefit to residential lawn mower customers," Cameron says. "And they have a willingness to pay for fuel-injection technology - more than half however, were likely to purchase a riding mower with a fuel-injected engine."

Another advantage of the engine technology is that riding mowers with these engines feature a one-step start, making it easier to start in all weather conditions. The push-button start mirrors the features in many cars.

Zero Emissions

Hybrid and electric cars have carved a place in the automotive world, but there is now an equivalent to that eco-friendly technology for lawn care. The RZT-S Zero is the world's only electric zero-turn rider with steering wheel control and four-wheel steering. It requires zero gasoline, zero oil, zero oil filters and provides zero emissions and zero engine noise, making it one of the most environmentally friendly lawn mowers on the market today. It operates on battery power, which provides up to 60 minutes of continuous mowing on an overnight charge.

For handheld lawn equipment, there's a new technology available that also provides zero emissions. Cub Cadet powered by CORE uses a sophisticated motor technology to deliver more torque with longer runtimes and no gasoline. It's the same type of technology used in wind turbines and even submarines. In addition to providing zero emissions, it offers reduced noise and high torque levels equal to two-cycle engines most common in garages. This technology is available in string trimmer, hedge and leaf blower options.

With features like Bluetooth, push-button starting, fuel-injected engines and zero emissions, cars aren't the only products showcasing innovation. The next generation of lawn equipment is designed to help homeowners create their ideal outdoor spaces by incorporating efficient new technology. More information about these automotive-like features is available at www.CubCadet.com.



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Local repair shops face new challenges with today's vehicles

by Mike Lange

Few things surprise Darrell Drew, who has been repairing vehicles in his Dexter garage for more than 20 years.

"I had a 2015 Audi come in the shop for an oil change," Drew said. "When I started on the job, I discovered it didn't have a drain plug."

So Drew investigated about \$120 in an evacuator "that sucks the old oil out through the dipstick," Drew said. "It's not a big investment. But it seems like the average repair shop is investing a lot more in equipment nowadays."

Today's cars and trucks usually arrive at the dealership loaded with options, some of which were unheard of 20 years ago. They're also designed to be more reliable, thus requiring fewer trips to the repair shop except for routine maintenance.

But even the more sophisticated the vehicle is, the more testing equipment is needed to correctly diagnose and fix problems.

After several years working at Bangor area dealerships, Matt Blockler opened his own garage in Sangerville two years ago. "I was prepared to invest a lot of money in equipment, but it can really be a burden for a small shop," Blockler said. "The price of some testing equipment has doubled in the last 10 years."

While mechanics traditionally relied on the sound and on-road performance of engines to pinpoint problems in the old days, today's cars are

equipped with computers that alert drivers when something goes haywire – or is about to.

"When your 'Check Engine' light comes on, it could be for a dozen different reasons," Blockler explained. "So you need the test equipment and the codes for the specific model. Otherwise, you could change every sensor in the engine and it still wouldn't run right."

Drew cited the tire pressure monitors as another driver convenience that can require some high-dollar investment for a garage. "The diagnostic tool costs \$500," he said. "If you replace one (sensor), you have to sync and program the whole system."

Dave Hall, who has operated a repair service in Greenville for the past 20 years, ran into the same dilemma. "The tire pressure monitors are convenient for the driver, but they're a challenge for the repair shops," he said. "On some models, you have to reprogram the system when you rotate tires."

Hall said that he's spent thousands of dollars on diagnostic equipment in recent years and doesn't see the trend ending. "A good scan tool costs \$5,000 to start with," he explained. "Then to get updates every month costs \$1,200. We also subscribe to an online repair manual service and that's another \$1,200."

Hall also has had a few unexpected surprises when repairing late model vehicles. "I had a Chevy come in

recently with a bad window switch," he said. "We were able to replace the switch, but the owner had to take it to the dealer to have the system reprogrammed."

Drew said that while today's vehicles are safer and more reliable than their counterparts 20 years ago, drivers should not take anything for granted. "If you detect something isn't right or a warning light comes on, bring it in as soon as possible," he advised. "If you postpone repairs, it will cost you more in the long run."

Blockler agreed. "Unusual engine noises could mean a timing belt is going to fail," he said. "Driver should also check their engine fluids routinely."

Hall said that rear-gear and transfer case fluids also need to be checked routinely. "Also, when you're inflating your tires, don't go by the number on the tire itself; use the pressure listed on the tag inside the driver's side door," he said. "That figure is based on the weight of the vehicle. It's a small thing, but tires last a lot longer when they're inflated properly."

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Most Americans support funding for public transit

(StatePoint) More than seven in 10 Americans support increased federal funding for the nation's public transportation systems in communities of all sizes, according to a survey conducted by ORC International for the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

This support is broad, according to the survey, spanning various age groups and political affiliations, with some of the highest numbers among Millennials ages 18 to 34 (77 percent) and individuals age 65 and older (76 percent).

Owning or having access to a private vehicle does not diminish this support, with 71 percent of car owners reporting that they want to see more federal investment in public transportation in both large and small communities. In addition, over half of respondents said public transit is important in attracting and retaining employers in their community.

As Congress finalizes work on the Surface Transportation Bill, some experts are echoing the public sentiment. "No matter where you live and work and what age you are, public transit provides vital access to jobs and everything a community has to offer," says APTA President and CEO Michael P. Melaniphy. "We must ensure we provide for both large and smaller communities through growth of the federal transit program."

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Experts say that with so many economic and cultural benefits that public transportation brings to a community, it's no surprise that so many Americans support its funding.

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Safe driving tips: how to get the most out of your tires

(BPT) - A tire's tread depth significantly affects driving safety. In fact, to ensure a vehicle drives safely, the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration recommends a tire be replaced once its tread depth reaches 2/32nds of an inch. Winter tires should be replaced even sooner.

Worn tires cause more than just headaches for drivers. Less tread means longer braking distances and more difficulty handling a car. This is especially true in slippery conditions because the tires are not able to effectively clear water from underneath

causing the vehicle to hydroplane.

The contact area between

the tire and the road is dramatically reduced when tires wear out and when



MONITORING THE CONDITION of your tires throughout their lives helps keep drivers safe on the road.

driving speed increases. While driving 50 mph in 1/8 inch of water, the contact patch between the tire and road is only 16 percent compared to the contact patch of a stationary vehicle.

"Unfortunately, many drivers don't regularly check the depth of tread on their tires. People check tread depths when fitting the tires, but then blissfully forget about them for the entire season," says Matti Morri, technical customer service manager, Nokian Tyres.

Monitoring the condition of tires throughout their lives helps drivers maintain safety on the road. So, what steps should you take to ensure you get the most out of your tires?

of a tire's tread. Insert the penny into the main groove so that the edge of the coin touches the tread and Lincoln's head is upside down. If the top of Lincoln's head remains visible from the groove, the tires are fully worn.

Some new tires on the market have innovative tread wear indicators to alert drivers when their tires need replacing. In fact, all new models from Nokian Tyres come fitted with a Driving Safety Indicator (DSI) that indicates how much tread is remaining, as well as a raindrop or snowflake symbol that appears once the tire has worn down to the point where the vehicle could handle unsafely on wet roads.

1. Monitor and rotate your tires.

Tires wear unevenly, especially on front wheel drive vehicles where the front tires wear down much quicker than the rear tires. For this reason, you should monitor the tread depth throughout the season and rotate tires from front to back, providing the tire size is the same on both axles.

If a set of tires are installed in the spring and used heavily until the start of autumn without being rotated, it is completely possible for the front tires to be worn down while the rear tires still have up to 70 percent of tread left.

Rotating helps to minimize the performance and grip differences between the front and rear of the car for more predictable handling.

2. How to measure tread depth.

A U.S. penny is a handy tool for measuring the main grooves in the center

3. Minimize tread wear through proper inflation.

To help extend tread life, maximize fuel economy and optimize a vehicle's performance, it's important to check a tire's air pressure once per month in the summer and twice per month in the spring and fall when there are large fluctuations in temperature. Tire over- and under-inflation cause tread to wear quicker than normal and can potentially result in a dangerous blow-out. Additionally, under-inflation will cause your vehicle to use more fuel (or reduce range in an electric vehicle) and diminish the performance of your vehicle as it requires more effort to for the car to move.

For the most accurate pressure reading, check the tires while they are still cold. Driving heats up the tires causing the air inside to expand resulting with an inaccurate reading. The correct tire pressure for the vehicle and tire size combination can be found on a placard in the driver's door jamb, on the inside of the gas cap, or in the vehicle's owner's manual. Remember also to check the pressure of the vehicle's spare tire (if equipped).

Drivers should keep these simple tips in mind throughout the spring and summer to help ensure a safe driving vehicle and to get the most out of their tires.

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Put your phone away:

Distraacted driving includes hands-free talking

(StatePoint) In an age of constant communication and connectivity, it can be difficult to take a break. But drive time is when your phone should take a backseat to safety, say experts.

"You don't need to be texting to be distracted by your phone," says Kelly Nantel, vice president of communications and advocacy at the National Safety Council. "Even hands-free talking is a major distraction."

Research indicates drivers using handheld and hands-free phones only see about 50 percent of all the information in their driving environment. This phenomenon is known as "inattention blindness," similar to tunnel vision.

While multitasking is valued in today's culture, researchers find that the human brain doesn't actually perform two tasks at the same time but rather switches attention between tasks. At your desk, this can be an effective and efficient way to work, but behind the wheel, "multitasking" can be deadly.

From checking GPS, to firing up a drive time playlist, there are countless smartphone-related reasons why people take their mind off the road. And newer in-vehicle systems allow drivers to call, text, email, update social media and browse the Internet, despite research showing these systems cause distraction that can linger after the driver finishes the task.

One of the major reasons drivers today are so distracted is one of the most surprising -- pressure from your family. Indeed 82 percent of Americans feels their family pressures them the most -- above friends or employers -- to drive distracted, according to a recent NSC survey.

"It is a sad irony that the people we love are actually jeopardizing our safety the most," says Nantel. "If you really care, don't call to say, 'I love you,' instead encourage your family to say everything else aside, disconnect and focus only on the road."

To prioritize safety and reduce your risk of being involved in a crash, turn your commute into "me time," and your car into a safe sanctuary. The National Safety Council is offering some tips to take back your drive.

- Turn off your phone when you get in the car.
- Tell your family (and anyone else expecting to hear from you) that you will be driving and will call or text them when you are parked at your destination.
- Send emails and texts before you start driving.
- Return the favor. When friends, family or colleagues are driving, refrain from placing distracting calls or sending texts.

Driver distractions have joined alcohol and speeding as leading factors in fatal and serious injury crashes. In recent years, thousands of people have died in crashes when drivers used cell phones.

The issue has started capturing the attention of political leaders nationwide and some are taking action to improve laws that promote safe driving, though no law goes far enough, say safety experts, because no law prohibits hands-free use. To learn more about the dangers of distracted driving and efforts to end this public health crisis, visit distracteddriving.nsc.org.

Driving contains enough risk. So put the phone away and encourage those you love to do the same.



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Gas station myth or fact: What you need to know when you refuel

(BPT) - On any given day, some 40 million Americans stop at gas stations to fill their tanks. For many, it's a weekly routine, one they don't spend much time analyzing, but are there things you think you know about your fill-up that just aren't true?

Andrea Kaufman considers herself a fairly conscientious auto owner, but the St. Louis Park Minnesota resident admits she doesn't know the finer details of pumping protocol. "I've heard plenty of gas station tips and tricks, but I'm not always sure which ones I should believe."

Let's set the record straight as energy experts dispel three common gas station myths.

Myth #1: It's best to buy gas early in the day.

The theory is that gasoline is denser at cooler temperatures, so you'll get more fuel per gallon early in the morning. While the basic science is correct, the experts at Consumer Reports point out two practical reasons why this is a myth.

First, most gas stations store fuel in double-walled underground tanks that keep gas at steady temperatures. Second, even if there were variations, the volume difference between gasoline at 75 versus 60 degrees Fahrenheit is just 1 percent - not enough to be noticeable at the pump.

Myth #2: It's dangerous to use a cell phone near gas pumps.

According to the Federal Communications Commission, there is no documented incident of a wireless phone causing a gas station fire or explosion.

It's true that many fuel companies post stickers on pumps warning motorists to turn off phones while refueling as cell phones could be a distraction. But the Petroleum Equipment Institute (PEI) reports the most likely cause of fire at the pumps is static electricity created by drivers sliding in and out of vehicles. For safe refueling, PEI recommends you turn off the car engine, refrain from smoking and stay outside the vehicle.

Myth #3: All brands of gas are the same.

Like more than two-thirds of Americans, Kaufman buys gas primarily based on price and convenience. "I don't know if there is a difference between brands," she says. While all gasoline sold in the U.S. must meet federal requirements for performance, not all gas is the same.

The auto industry has a certification system for fuel. Top Tier certified gasoline includes additional detergents and fuel additives that remove engine deposits that can hurt fuel economy. "Today's more fuel-efficient engines need higher-quality fuel for peak performance," says Akhtar Hussain, refined fuels expert at CHS, which markets Cenex brand fuels for more than 1,450 gas stations in 19 states. "Cenex TOP TIER Detergent Gasoline provides 2.5 times the cleaning power of conventional gasoline and removes deposits for better fuel economy and reduced emissions."

Our Top Tier certified gasoline keeps newer high-precision engines clean and helps older engines perform better, he adds. "It helps clean your engine every time you fill your tank." Cenex TOP TIER Detergent Gasoline is available at every Cenex location. To find one near you, visit cenex.com/locations.

So much for these tank-filling myths. Now it's time to fuel up and enjoy the drive.

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Planning a summer road trip? Pack these tips

(StatePoint) Americans from across the country will be hitting the road for a well-deserved summer vacation.

Summer is the perfect time to say goodbye to airport lines and hello to the great American road trip.

Whether you're headed somewhere sunny, going camping in a national park, or visiting family or friends in another city, these tips can help you save money and reduce stress while traveling America's highways and country roads.

Travel Off-Peak

Savvy planning can help you avoid crowds on the road and at the destinations you visit. For example, hitting the road mid-week after the morning rush hour can

help you get a great head start on your travels.

Visit attractions on unpopular days of the week to avoid long lines and annoying surcharges. Many attractions and hotels charge extra fees on popular travel weekends, like holidays.

This is an especially good year to consider a midweek visit to a national park. With the National Park Service celebrating its centennial this summer, look for special events at parks across the US!

Save on Fuel

Whether you're driving a motor cycle or minivan, tuning up your vehicle before hitting the road can be a smart way to ensure optimal performance and fuel efficiency.

Also, take advantage of fuel savings opportunities. For instance, using an ExxonMobil Smart Card helps drivers save on their fuel expenses. New customers who apply from May 1 to July 31 will save 12 cents on every gallon of fuel for the first two months after the account is opened. After that, they will enjoy ongoing savings of six cents off every gallon, every day when using the ExxonMobil Smart Card at any of the nearly 11,000 Exxon- or Mobil-branded stations across the continental U.S. Subject to credit approval. Drivers can apply online at ExxonMobilSmartCard.com or pick up an application at the station.

Make it Fun
A road trip is about so much

more than the destination. Bust boredom with games like "20 Questions" and "Name that Tune." Don't be shy about making small detours to see on-the-way points of interest - it'll break up the journey and be easier on the driver and passengers alike.

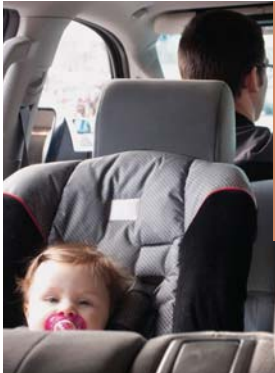
Avoid typical disputes by rotating DJ duty. If you bring the right attitude, the old adage "getting there is half the fun," will be true of your summer road trip.

With a few tips and tricks, you can hit the road headache-free this summer.

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Bike right

by Tresa Erickson

Biking is a great way to get in a little exercise and have some fun, but there is a right and a wrong way to do it. Read on for some bike safety tips.

Conduct a bike check

Choose the right size of bike and make sure it is in good condition. Hop onto your bike. How many inches are there between you and the bar? There should be a couple on a standard bike and five inches on a mountain bike. Place one foot on a pedal. Is your other leg slightly bent? If not, you need to adjust the seat height. Take a practice run. Are the wheels straight and secure? Do the handlebars turn easily? Can you stop quickly? If there are any problems with your bike, you need to resolve them right away.

Wear a helmet

A bike helmet is your best defense against traumatic brain injury in the event of an accident. Don't leave home without one. Get out your helmet if you have one. Does it meet the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) standards? Look inside for a seal of approval. Does it fit your head properly? The helmet should feel snug and sit low on your forehead, with the side straps forming a Y below your ears and the chin strap tight. Shake your head. Does your helmet move? If so, you need to readjust it. If you don't own a helmet, buy one.

Be seen

It is your responsibility to make sure you are seen. Wear fluorescent clothing when out and about, especially during times when visibility is low. Install front and rear reflectors on your bike and make sure they can be seen. Add a white front light for use at night if required to do so in your state. You might also want to consider adding a flashing red light to your bike.

Follow all road rules

Bikes are no different than cars on the road. Riders must follow the same traffic laws as drivers. You must ride with traffic as far right as possible and observe all speed limits and traffic lights and signs. You must also use hand signals to alert others to your actions and yield to pedestrians and other vehicles.

Be cautious

Accidents can happen at any time. Avoid them by being super careful on the road. Leave your headphones at home and keep an eye out for motorists, pedestrians and obstacles. Use bike lanes when available and take a straight path. Do not weave in and out of traffic or change lanes without looking over your shoulder. Take extra caution in bad weather. Slow down and give yourself time to stop.

These are just a few tips for being a better bike rider. Safety is important. Don't dismiss it. Take the time to inspect your bike, wear the right safety equipment and ride with caution. Short trip or long, you should never let your guard down for a moment.

Protect your investment

by Tresa Erickson

Boats are considered assets just like homes and automobiles, and as you know, it is important to protect your assets. To safeguard all of the time and money you have invested in your boat, you need to insure it. That way, should something happen on the water and damage occur to your boat, you can rest easy knowing that your boat is insured and you won't be out a lot of money to fix it.

If your boat measures 26 feet long or less, you will need to obtain boat insurance. If it measures more than that, you will need yacht insurance. Although the two types of insurance differ to some degree, both cover physical damage to the vessel in one of two ways: by Actual Cash Value or by Agreed Amount Value.

In Actual Cash Value policies, depreciation at the time of loss is taken into consideration. If the vessel requires repairs, a percentage of the depreciation is subtracted from the amount paid. If the vessel is a total loss, used boat pricing guides are used to determine the amount paid.

In Agreed Amount Value policies, depreciation does not factor in. If the vessel requires repairs, the amount paid reflects the cost of new parts. If the vessel is a total loss, the amount paid reflects the value of the vessel agreed upon originally.

In most cases, the amount paid also reflects the deductible, the amount the owner agreed to pay in the event of partial or total loss. Generally, the higher the deductible, the lower the premiums are.

Determining whether to get an Actual Cash Value or an Agreed Amount Value policy can be difficult. Boat owners should find a qualified professional and discuss the pros and cons of each as they apply to their personal situation. They should explore any other variables and make sure that whatever policy they select covers all of their needs.

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Smart travel tips for family vacations

(StatePoint) The best way to get your kids to stop asking "are we there yet?" is to never have them ask in the first place!

With some smart planning you can enjoy your next family vacation from start to finish — including your travel time getting to and from your destination.

Packing

A fun and easy vacation starts with smart packing. The key is not to pack too much so your family isn't hefting heavy luggage from place to place.

It's all about sticking to essentials when selecting clothing, beauty products, guidebooks and electronic devices. Take neutrally-colored clothes that you can mix and match, and don't bring too many pairs of shoes. If your vacation isn't very long, only take two pairs per family member: one to pack and one to wear. Rely on hotel toiletries or take multi-use products, like sunscreens that combine with moisturizers, or shampoo and conditioner combos.

Don't bring every guidebook you have! Take only one and

use the Internet to supplement it on your tablet, phone or laptop.

Transportation

The old saying "getting there is half the fun" can actually be true if you plan wisely for your family getaway. Traveling by train, for instance, is a great option. With the city-center to city-center convenience of rail travel, you save time and can relax along the way.

This is especially true for a European family vacation, as train travel allows you to discover historic and culturally rich destinations up close through your train window. Rail travel in Europe can also be a great value, as it continues to be a popular destination for vacationing families with the strong U.S. dollar.

Along with discounts and local bonuses, kids ride free on select rail passes — the Eurail pass product line, the Swiss Travel Pass, the German Rail Pass, the France Rail Pass, and several BritRail Pass products. Plan ahead when looking to get rail passes, train tickets and reservations by contacting a service like Rail Europe.

The company combines maps, schedules and fares of over 50 different train companies, creating a one stop shop to easily plan and book European rail travel. Contact Rail Europe to book your travel by visiting www.raileurope.com or by calling 1-800-438-RAIL.

Lodging

Traveling with a family is like traveling with an army. The key to success is logistics. When it comes to hotel rooms, make sure to check ahead so rooms are equipped with what you need.

Don't be shy about asking for mini-fridges, cribs, high chairs or extra roll-away beds. And when you are checking in, ask if your hotel has any extra amenities for kids — such as games, coloring books or rubber ducks for bath time.

And check in advance to ensure sleeping configurations work for your family, paying attention to such details as separate sleeping areas or alcoves.

A little smart planning can help your family go a long way on vacation!

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Spring clean your car.

Tips to get your car in great condition

(StatePoint) For some, spring cleaning is a time-honored ritual, which doesn't just apply to your house. Remember that your car is likely in desperate need of some attention after the winter months.

"A car that's well-maintained is safer, cheaper to run, more reliable and can be worth more money at resale time," says Brian Moody, executive editor of Autotrader.

To help, Autotrader editors are sharing "Simple Spring Car Care" tips to get your car in tip-top shape for the busy driving season ahead:

- Wash and wax your car thoroughly. If you can afford it, have it professionally detailed. However, if you do it yourself, be sure to use a pressure nozzle in order to rid your car of any leftover road salt or sand from the winter. Direct sunlight can cause a car's finish to become dull, but a thorough washing and waxing can also help keep your car's paint and clear coat looking good.

- It's tempting to run the car through an automated car wash, but those big revolving brushes can dull the finish over time. If you're not allowed to wash your car at home due to regional laws or neighborhood rules, seek out a good drive-thru wash and hand wax instead.

- Check and set your car's tire pressure to the level specified in your owner's manual or on the driver's door sill. As temperatures warm up, the air in your tires can expand and that might impact the way the car handles.

- Be sure not to over-inflate the tires. While low tire pressure can cause the tire to heat up if it's not rolling down the road properly, extreme over inflation can cause a blowout in high temperatures. If you're not comfortable doing this yourself, take your car to a shop like Big-O Tires, Sears Auto Center or Firestone Auto Care Center — those kinds of chains will usually do it for free.

- Have a qualified mechanic do a visual inspection under the hood. If you're comfortable doing this yourself, check for worn belts or hoses and make sure your coolant (sometimes called anti-freeze) isn't too old. Coolant lasts a long time, but keeping track of when it was last changed, especially in older cars, can help you avoid overheating as the temperatures gradually climb.

- For more tips for keeping your vehicle in great shape whether it's hot, cold, or rainy can be found at www.Autotrader.com.

- For better driving all season long, make sure your spring-to-do list includes cleaning and maintaining your car.



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Tips to make family road trips smooth sailing

(StatePoint) Hitting the road with the family? Experts say there's no reason to view the journey itself as a pre-vacation chore.

"Travel doesn't just have to be about getting to where you're going," says Tara Trompeter, managing editor at Autotrader. "Family time in the car can be a great opportunity for making memories and a little bit of planning before you get on the road will go a long way toward filling the experience with more fun and laughter for everyone involved."

To keep road warriors comfortable and content on their drives, Autotrader editors are offering some of their top travel tips:

- Prepare your vehicle. Do a quick check on the essentials before you head out. Check the wear and pressure on your tires, and be sure your fluids (oil, coolant and wiper fluid) are topped off.

- Make it an adventure. Just because you have an ultimate destination

doesn't mean you can't enjoy fun stuff in between. Check your route for family-friendly stops along the way, such as a zoo, park or even toy store to give kids something to look forward to while breaking the trip into manageable pieces.

- Keep little ones engaged. Technology features like built-in screens and DVD players can be savors on the road. If your car doesn't come equipped with these, consider bringing along a handheld device on which little ones can play games or watch videos. And if technology isn't your thing, remember that magnetized board games and word games can work just as well.

- Bring snacks. Greasy food isn't the best for staying alert -- or feeling good -- while road tripping. Instead of relying on fast food, bring along lots of small, healthy snacks to keep kids (and adults) content. Great options include fruits and vegetables that are easy to eat and fuss-free, like carrot sticks, bananas and apples.

- Have patience! Between road congestion, frequent stops and bad weather, travel time can take longer than anticipated. Allow and plan for extra travel time, and you'll have a better chance of arriving safely and stress-free.

- Consider an upgrade. Before setting off, consider upgrading your old gas guzzler to a new one that's energy efficient and comfortable enough to make the long journey with the family in tow. To help, Autotrader rounded up a list of 10 fuel-efficient family cars that boast affordability, roomy interiors and a fuel efficient 30 miles per gallon on the highway. Among their picks are the Ford Fusion, Honda Accord, Honda CR-V, Jeep Cherokee, Hyundai Tucson, Kia Optima, Mazda CX-5, Nissan Rogue, Subaru Outback and the Toyota Camry. To learn more, visit autotrader.com.

With the right strategies for happy travels, you can begin your vacation the second you hit the road.



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Is RV travel for you?

by Craig W. Armstrong

There are many forms of travel. You can travel by air, sea or land. If you choose land, there's a way to travel with all the comforts of home by recreational vehicle (RV). RVs have never gone out of style, and this form of travel is a world of its own. Are you interested? Here are a few things to consider about the RV lifestyle.

Probably the first thing to consider is cost. RVing is something that requires a commitment and with that commitment comes cost. Like most things in life, you get what you pay for with RVs. Prices can range from thousands of dollars to millions. Set your budget and do your homework.

Talk to people who own an RV and are familiar with the lifestyle. If you don't know one of these folks, the Internet

can lead you to local groups. Again, RVing is a lifestyle and has its own community. Like most communities, members are willing to share their knowledge and experiences. Once you have an idea of what you are looking for, considering renting a similar model. This is a good way to try out the model before making a major investment.

When you are ready to buy, inspect every model carefully. RVs have thousands of moving parts, and some are fairly easy to check. Inspect the doors, the slide-out functions, and the awnings. These are basic but important functions.

Things get a little more mechanical from here. Once you reach your destination, you will need to power your electronics with a generator. Hook up the generator, let it run for a while, and make sure ev-

erything that needs power is getting power. Your water and propane systems are crucial. Make sure they are working as well. The last thing you want is to be without water and a toilet.

Next comes the engine. If you're not a mechanic, have someone who is take a look under the hood. Not all mechanical issues can be predicted, but having a mechanic give the engine a good 'once over' is crucial. Buttons, switches, knobs; check them all. This is especially important if you are buying used.

These are just a few suggestions for buying an RV. The RV lifestyle is vast, and it will take time to learn it. Many people would rather travel by RV than any other way. If you think you would enjoy it, start your search now.

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All boat trailers are not created equal

by Ronda Addy

You researched your boat before you bought it. The trailer you use to transport it is just as important, so you should research it before you buy it as well. The type of trailer you buy will depend on factors, such as the size, weight and style of your boat, what type of vehicle you will be using to haul the boat and how often you will be towing your boat.

There are two basic types of boat trailers: bunk and roller. The bunk trailer is the less expensive of the two and is suitable for deeper water. The roller trailer is suitable for shallow water. Some trailers combine the two types of technology but are more expensive.

Along with the type, you should consider the hauling capabilities of the trailer as well as its construction. The trailer you choose should be able to haul boats heavier than yours. It may be made of galvanized steel or aluminum, neither of which will rust but may decay.

Features can run the gamut. Brake and turn lights are required by law. Safety chains are essential, and the hauling vehicle must have a trailer hitch. It's illegal, not to mention dangerous, to attach a trailer to the bumper of a vehicle.

Other features are not required, but having them will make loading and unloading easier. A locking feature will attach the trailer to your boat. A load guide will help center the boat on the trailer. Smaller trailers typically have a guide hoist to get the boat on the trailer, while larger trailers have a one- or two-speed mechanical winch. A transom saver will support the boat's engine by reducing pressure. A swing tongue, swivel jack and hitch swivel will also help.

The tires on the trailer need to be weather resistant. They can be radial or non-radial. Radial tires will last longer than ply tires and offer better traction and stability and less rolling resistance. Non-radial tires are designed for use in extreme driving conditions, such as dirt, sand, snow and mud. They offer little in the way of shock absorption. You can reduce wear and tear by selecting tires with a high ply number and a large diameter.

You spent all that money on your boat. Doesn't it make sense to tow it using the best possible trailer you can afford? Imagine what would happen if you didn't.



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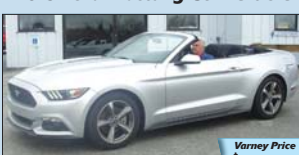
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