

SPRING CLEAN THE RMI WAY

Spring can only mean one thing to a motorist; car cleaning time. Winter dirt and grime builds up almost unnoticed during the cold months of the year, and needs to be removed as soon as warmer weather arrives.

But once the car is clean, motorists may find that more work is required, especially after the coldest winter in 30 years.

According to Sue Robinson, Director of the Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMI), it is the perfect time for simple maintenance: She explains: 'Give your car a once-over to see if there is any obvious need for repair. There may be chips and scratches under the layers of grime, and these should be attended to.'

The underside of the car may have suffered most of all during the winter months. Salt, snow, chemicals, and grit can become lodged in the underside and wheel arches. To avoid corrosion, any dirt should be removed to avoid the ravages that are accelerated by these drying on the car. It is best to hose down the entire underside. They also have a detrimental effect on rubber components such as drive shaft gaiters, silent block bushes and shock absorbers.

Tyres will also need consideration. The legal requirement for tyre tread depth is at least 1.6mm across the central three-quarters of the breadth of the tread and around the entire circumference although braking and cornering performance deteriorates significantly at less than 3mm. Motorists may not have thought to check this during the winter months, and they may be driving with illegal tyres without realising.

Make sure you have the recommended pressure in all your tyres including the spare tyre if your car has one. In the event that you need to use the spare, make sure that the pressure is set to the level recommended by the manufacturer. It is advisable to check this with a gauge as soon as possible. Poorly inflated tyres cause uneven tread wear and can adversely affect the other tyre on the same axle. Imbalance of tyre pressures will also affect handling and braking performance. In the case of needing to use a 'space saver' spare tyre remember that they are not intended to be used at high speeds.

There are a number of other areas that may need attention:

- Check battery terminals are not corroded and are tightly fitted.
- Check the coolant level in the radiator; and top up according to manufacturer recommendation – most vehicles now use anti-freeze all year round as it inhibits internal corrosion and premature failure of major components, but ensure that the anti-freeze is less than two years old. To check cooling system performance, leave the engine running for a short period with the bonnet up, and wait for the (electric) fan to start up – never open the cooling system by removing the radiator cap when hot.
- Lubricate hinges and door lock catches – lock barrels should only be lubricated with graphite powder, never oil or WD40.
- Check that all lights are working, including brake lights and indicators.
- Check windscreen wiper blades; During winter they will have operated over frozen screens contaminated by grit, which can cause grooves in the rubber. Minimise threat of streaking by replacing the blades and adding a proper screen washer solvent to the washer reservoir.
- Check condition of exhaust system.

The interior of the car may also need some consideration. Robinson comments: 'It is a

good idea to clean out a vehicle whenever the chance arises. An airing, as well as a thorough vacuum will make a difference.'

Motorists who feel that they could use some professional help when preparing their car for the warmer weather should visit an RMI member garage.

Robinson commented: 'Businesses that belong to the Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMI) are bound by the conditions of their membership to provide a good service to their customers.'

'When having a service or any form of work carried out on your car use a reputable garage, be it the dealer who sold you the car or, a local independent garage .If the supplying garage is too far away for such jobs, a local RMI member would be happy to support you with service.

'A member will be able to advise you on the type of service you need, and will be able to point out potential problem areas before they arise, or become serious. In fact, whether you want to buy or sell a new or used car or motorcycle, service or repair your existing vehicle, find an auction house, or a cherished number plate dealer, the RMI will be able to help you.

'If you have a problem, the RMI's National Conciliation Service is on hand if the problem cannot be solved in direct consultation with that member.'

To find a garage that is a member of the RMI, visit www.rmif.co.uk.

Robinson concludes: 'With just a little work, your car will be ready for Spring and beyond.'