

# The Driver's Guide to



# Automotive Maintenance

**Braman  
Honda**

OF PALM BEACH

[bramanhondapb.com](http://bramanhondapb.com)

5200 Lake Worth Road  
Greenacres, FL 33463  
[BramanHondaPB.com](http://BramanHondaPB.com)  
855-746-0879



Routine automotive maintenance is arguably the single most important thing you can do for your car. It may seem intimidating to look under the hood of cars these days, but you really don't need any complex knowledge to take care of a few simple tasks yourself. Adding some regular check-ups and taking care of issues that do arise in a timely fashion goes a long way toward extending the life of your vehicle and ensuring a safe ride.

## Read the Owner's Manual

Many people drive cars without ever looking at the manuals. Most likely, a car is the most expensive piece of technology that you own. Would you run a new dishwasher or dryer without reading the manual first? Even if you don't have any particular interest in cars, you can learn a lot about your vehicle from the manual, including the recommended guidelines for various automotive maintenance tasks.

If you have had major repairs performed on your car, you know that it doesn't take long for car issues to get expensive. It may seem like you're spending a lot of money on preventative automotive maintenance, but basic tasks such as getting the oil changed and having routine check-ups with a mechanic can potentially save you thousands of dollars in the long run. It's very important to not skimp on routine maintenance.

## Regular Visual Checks

### **BODY AND BUMPER**

The biggest reason you should keep an eye out for damage to the body and bumper is for insurance purposes. If there is any kind of dent or other damage, you want to know where and how you got it, even if it's something as simple as another driver bumping his door into your vehicle in a parking lot.



### **FLUID LEAKAGE**

Check for fluids leaking underneath the vehicle. These fluids may include oil, transmission, power, or brake fluid. During the warm months, it is also normal to see water dripping from the air-conditioning unit. While a small leak may not cause problems right away, it's best to get it checked out sooner rather than later so it doesn't turn into a big issue.

### **TIRE PRESSURE AND TREAD**

You should check your tire pressure a minimum of once per month. Maintaining optimal air pressure extends the life span of the tires and gets you better gas mileage, both of which save you money. Consult your owner's manual for the ideal tire pressure level for your vehicle. Tire pressure gauges are inexpensive and readily available at any hardware or auto supply store. Tire gauges are also small, which means you can keep one in your glove compartment and do pressure checks on-the-go as needed. Many gas stations have free air pumps or you can buy your own pump and learn how to fill your tires.

You should also listen for any strange noises, both inside and outside the tires, and make sure that they have adequate tread. Use a penny to measure tread depth. Simply insert a penny into your tire's tread groove with Lincoln's head upside down and facing you. If you can see all of Lincoln's head, your tread depth is less than 2/32" and it's time to replace your tires, or keep an eye out for the tire's tread wear indicators.

### **SMOKE**

Diesel emissions and start-up fumes are normal, but any other type of smoke in the vehicle exhaust may indicate an issue.

### **ENGINE OR FLUID WARNING LIGHTS**

Any time a warning lights up on the dashboard, talk to your mechanic as soon as possible.

### **BURNED-OUT HEADLIGHTS, TAILLIGHTS, AND TURN SIGNALS**

For your personal safety and the safety of other drivers, all of the exterior lights on your car should be working at all times. It can be difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether these lights are working properly while driving. Have a family member or friend inspect the lights for you when it's dark outside and the car is running. Your regular mechanic can replace burned-out bulbs or you can have this work done at a car care center like Sears Auto Center or Firestone.

### **WINDSHIELD WIPER DAMAGE**

If your windshield wipers are cracked, torn, or starting to streak, it's time to replace them. There are a number of factors that contribute to the lifespan of windshield wipers, including driving frequency and car housing. For example, if you leave your car parked outside all winter, large amounts of snow and ice may damage the wipers more than they would damage a similar car parked inside a garage. Any time you're having trouble seeing through your windshield, replace the wipers and clean both the inside and outside of the windshield, as general cleanliness may also affect visibility. Wipers are cheap and readily available, so there is no reason to put off this simple replacement.

## Under the Hood

You don't have to be a mechanic to learn how to check basic components under your hood. At a minimum, you should check the belts, the engine oil level and cleanliness, the transmission and transaxle fluids, the windshield washer, antifreeze/coolant, brake, and power steering fluid levels. With the exception of wiper fluid, you don't have to feel comfortable changing these fluids to become competent in checking them.

In some instances, you can view the tank level directly. However, most fluid containers have dipsticks or gauges that allow you to check the current level against a notch that indicates the ideal level. The fluids should be above the minimum but below the maximum lines. Your owner's manual will have any additional guidelines for all of these fluids. If you're checking the antifreeze, take care not to remove the radiator cap while the engine is still warm or hot.

While you're inspecting components under the hood, watch out for leaks and worn or loose parts, such as loose electrical or tube connections in and around the engine. Worn or exposed wires and tubes and loose or warped belts should be replaced right away. You don't want to drive with a belt that is cracked or has missing parts.

The general guideline for belt replacement is every 60,000 miles for the timing belt and every 40,000 miles for the serpentine belt. Check your owner's manual for the recommended numbers for your particular vehicle. As long as your belts are in good shape, you can leave them alone.

If they are worn out or damaged in any way, have them replaced before they fail, as damaged belts can harm other components of the car, resulting in even more expensive repairs. Belt replacement

is a complex task for someone without advanced automotive skills, but it is a routine job for a mechanic. Don't be afraid to take your car into the shop for this replacement job.

Finally, keep an eye on the battery. You should always know the age of the current battery. If your battery is five years old or older or is not getting an adequate charge to start your car with ease, it's time to have it checked out. You should also make sure that the battery is not leaking and that it doesn't have any sort of buildup on the contacts.

If there is buildup, purchase a battery cleaning brush for a few dollars at an auto parts store. Once you have a cleaning brush, you can keep it in your trunk. While you're buying a brush, you may also want to think about getting an inexpensive battery tester or jump starter to avoid having to call AAA or a friend to give you a jump if the battery dies. Most battery replacement stations perform complimentary battery charge and water level checks. You may also have a comprehensive warranty for your battery that covers these types of issues.



## Changing the Oil

One of the most critical aspects of automotive maintenance is changing the oil and the oil filter on a regular basis. For decades, the standard guideline for oil changes was every 2,000 to 3,000 miles. However, many newer vehicles can be driven for much longer between changes without compromising safety. The best way to figure out how often you need to change your oil is to check the owner's manual. Regardless of the oil change schedule, make sure to also have your filter changed every time the oil is changed.

An engine oil level check should be part of your routine inspection under the hood. Cars have a dipstick or an electronic gauge for checking oil color and level. Your oil should be relatively clean. Once it runs through the engine, it will have a slightly darker color than it does when it is brand new. Keep motor oil on hand so you can add more as needed. There is more information about an inspection under the hood, including the engine oil level check, in the next section.

If you're changing the oil yourself, you can choose from a number of different types of motor oil. Lighter weight oil (e.g., 5W-30) is preferable for colder temperatures, while heavier oil (e.g., 10W-40) is better for warmer climates. Does your vehicle smoke or use a large quantity of oil? Opt for a heavier weight or a synthetic blend motor oil.

If you're changing the oil and filter yourself, you should also make sure to dispose of the used oil properly. You can put the used filter out with the regular garbage, but you must take the oil to an approved disposal center. Many auto stores and auto care centers take used oil for free, such as AutoZone and a Walmart Auto Care Center. Purchase a dedicated, leakproof container that you don't use for anything else to house the oil. For example, you should never temporarily store oil in a container that was once used for other chemicals or food. Make sure that the container is clean, properly labeled, and out of reach of children and pets.



## Regular Replacement & Maintenance

There are a few internal components of a car that you aren't likely to examine during your routine visual checks that you should still examine periodically. These checks include the cabin and engine air filters, spark plugs and cables, and the engine timing belt. With regular maintenance, you won't have to replace these items very often.

Your air filter should be clean without any clogs or damage. Most places that change oil also change air filters and are happy to do both at the same time. A mechanic will inspect the spark plugs, cables, and engine timing belt during an engine or electrical tune-up. If your spark plugs are worn out or covered in buildup, your engine can't work efficiently, which can lead to engine breakdown. If any filters, plugs, cables, or belts need to be replaced, your mechanic will let you know after he has inspected the vehicle.

Finally, you should have your tires rotated and balanced and your alignment checked on a regular basis. These tasks ensure that your tires wear evenly and that your car drives smoothly. They also extend the life span of the tires. If you have trouble keeping your car straight while driving, it's very likely that the alignment is off. The good news is that it's a simple fix that any mechanic can perform. Consult your owner's manual for the optimal tire schedule for your vehicle.

## TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS FOR TRACKING MAINTENANCE

It can be tough to keep track of routine checks and other car maintenance. Most people keep their mechanic receipts but don't have a real filing system. A smartphone app is a great way to note fuel efficiency, cost, and mileage; record maintenance and repairs; and get reminders and notifications for upcoming work. Among the best free Android apps are Car Maintenance Reminder and aCar. There are also a handful of popular and inexpensive apps with more robust features, such as tracking multiple cars and adding presets for specific tasks, such as oil changes and belt inspections. If you're interested in a paid app, check out Road Trip, Car Minder Plus, or AutoCare.

## WHEN IN DOUBT, CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL

While you can perform most regular automotive maintenance yourself, there are times when it's best practice to make an appointment with a mechanic. If you're not sure how to fix an issue or if your car presents a brand new problem that you can't diagnose, set up a consultation. You don't want to let a minor problem turn into a major problem. You also don't want to make an issue worse by ignoring it, thus increasing the repair costs. A reputable mechanic whom you trust can give you an honest assessment of your car and suggest a best course of action.

# Braman Honda

OF PALM BEACH

5200 Lake Worth Road • Greenacres, FL 33463  
BramanHondaPB.com • 855-746-0879

## \$500 OFF

**MSRP on Any New  
Honda Vehicle**  
(With This Coupon)

Must present printed coupon at time of purchase. Cannot be combined with any other offers. Valid only at Braman Honda. Excludes Honda Fit. Offer expires December 31, 2018.

**Braman  
Honda**  
OF PALM BEACH  
bramanhondapb.com

## \$250 OFF

**Any Pre-Owned  
Vehicle**  
(With This Coupon)

Must present printed coupon at time of purchase. Cannot be combined with any other offers. Valid only at Braman Honda. Offer expires December 31, 2018.

**Braman  
Honda**  
OF PALM BEACH  
bramanhondapb.com

