

How to maintain your vehicle for safe driving in times of Covid-19

Keep your distance and avoid unnecessary contact - that's the most important motto in times of coronavirus. For many people, their own car is the safest and most trustworthy way to get around during the pandemic. Therefore, maintaining your vehicle and adhering to Covid-19 protocols are vital.



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With inter-provincial travel permitted for the first time in more than five months since the start of the Covid-19 lockdown, travelling long distance for business or taking a break as summer comes around is set to increase significantly. And, with international borders still closed indefinitely to contain the spread of the coronavirus, local travel is the default choice – even for those aspiring to venture abroad. This makes it all the more important to get your car fit for the summer.

Have your tyres got enough tread left, and are the pressures right?

Regular tyre checks are vital. Your tyres are what keep your vehicle in touch with the road. It's the tyres that enable many systems – including ABS, electronic stability programme (ESP) and emergency brake assist (EBA) – to deliver their full potential. Fully functional tyres are decisive when it comes to ensuring the safest possible driving, and especially for regions that experience heavy summer rainfall and sudden downpours.

One key factor is tread depth. The legal lower limit in South Africa is 1mm, but tyre experts at Continental recommend replacing your tyres when they get below 3mm of tread. Seriously worn tyres can turn into a major risk factor, particularly in wet weather as the grooves in the tyre aren't able to effectively disperse water, thereby significantly increasing the risk of aquaplaning, and contributing to much longer stopping distances. Additionally, after a long dry period, things can get hazardous when the rain mixes with dust, pollen and debris to form a slippery film on the wet asphalt.

Low tyre pressures can also extend the braking distance on wet roads – as well as affecting the precision of the steering, as well as the durability of the tyre with excessive heat build-up on underinflated tyres contributing to premature tyre failure.

Facemasks and disinfectant: What you need on a visit to the workshop

An all-round technical check-up of your vehicle is important too: oil level, brakes, battery, lights, coolant and the windshield washer/wiper system should all be checked. Changing the windscreen wipers is typically an easy do-it-yourself task, but checking the battery is a job for the experts as getting stuck on the side of the road with a flat battery isn't only

inconvenient, it is also dangerous.

The best place for this is your local car dealer or repair workshop.

When you head for the workshop, here are a few things to remember. Social distancing policies remain in place, based on the current government regulations. As a result, workshops may not be operating with a full staff complement, so longer than expected queues or delays in bookings may be experienced. Accordingly, it's advisable to contact the workshop and make an appointment if possible.

Customers are required to wear a facemask and keep the necessary distance from the staff and other customers, with temperatures checked and contact details supplied on entry. Many workshops, in line with current protocols, have adapted their hygiene measures to the Covid-19 situation and disinfect the car and the key before it is handed over.

If you're unsure if these protocols have been followed, it's advisable to disinfect the door handles, steering wheel, gearshift lever, handbrake and key with a disinfectant or soapy water. Keep a small hand sanitiser with you for use when handwashing facilities aren't available.

New coronavirus-led rules for inspections and warranty cover

Some manufacturers have prolonged the original and extended warranties offered on new cars because customers have recently been unable to visit authorised workshops to have repairs carried out.

Contact your dealer if your vehicle has reached its distance or time limits for scheduled services, or if maintenance or warranty work needs to be completed – particularly if the standard or extended warranty, service plan or maintenance plan is due to expire, or lapsed during the Level 5 and Level 4 of the Covid-19 lockdown.

It's important to note that manufacturers' standard terms remain for services, maintenance plans and warranties outside of this timeframe – so don't be caught out with your vehicle's cover lapsing as a result of exceeding these limits.

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