



Ralph Seekins

SPRING TUNE-UP TIME IS HERE

Spring in Interior Alaska is just around the corner. The days are getting longer and, even though the temperatures are still below freezing, the overpowering sunlight is starting to take its toll on the snow and ice on our roads. With spring soon here, it's time to get a thorough tune-up scheduled for your car or truck.

Interior Alaska vehicles take a lot of abuse during our super-cold winters. For example: the rougher roads take their toll on suspensions; exhaust systems fight more moisture from condensation caused by extensive idling times; seals crack and break; and most cars and trucks are not operating within the recommended tire pressure guidelines. So, as spring approaches, it's important to get a spring tune-up – or what I call an “annual physical.” Doing so can help save big repair bills on down the road. So, let's talk about what we should do for our cars or trucks this spring.

The first thing I advise is a quick review of the owner's manual to refresh my memory on

recommended service functions and intervals. Each manufacturer has its own set of specifications for what and when certain services should be performed. But remember, for vehicles in our sub-arctic climate it is vital to adhere to the manufacturer's recommended services and intervals for vehicles operated in “severe service” environments. Next, I'd review my vehicle's service history to see when it last had a thorough tune-up.

A tune-up is more than an oil and filter change. It should include inspection of a number of different components. For example, a well-trained technician will include the following:

Change oil, oil filter and air filter.

Change fuel filter and clean the fuel injectors.

Inspect and, if necessary, replace spark plugs.

Inspect battery and terminals for corrosion and tightness. Check battery for condition.

Check and top off all fluids (i.e., brake fluid, transmission fluid, and coolant).

Pressure check cooling system and check all coolant hoses and

connections.

Check all vacuum lines for cracking.

Check all belts for cracking or checking (on serpentine belts cracking is normal but missing chunks on the inside part of the belt is cause for replacement).

Inspect brakes.

Inspect exhaust system and timing belts.

Check constant velocity joints and boots for cracks and leaks.

Check all seals for signs of leakage from cold weather cracking.

Check shock absorbers and struts for signs of leakage.

Check power steering systems for leakage and wear.

Check wiper blades for wear.

Remove winter tires and check replacements for proper inflation and tread wear. Consider replacing the compressed air in the tires to nitrogen for even greater all-weather safety.

If your vehicle is equipped with a winter front, this is a good time to remove it until next winter. And, after break-up is over, it's a good idea to give your vehicle a good wash and high-quality wax so the paint is protected from the super-long daylight hours of summer.

Once again, a little care now at annual physical time can help prevent big repair bills down the road and can also help keep you and your family even safer on the road.

Ralph Seekins has more than 42 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 35 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln Mercury.