

WHEN TO CHANGE WIPER BLADES

By: Ralph Seekins

Question: It seems like every time I go in for service, they tell me I need new wiper blades. How do I know if and when they really need to be changed?

Answer: Good question. Windshield wiper blades do have a tough life in Interior Alaska. Half the year, they are subject to repeatedly being frozen to the windshield or to traveling over sharp chunks of ice scattered across the glass. The other half of the year they are subject to prolonged ultra-violet light (destructive to rubber compounds) from our long daylight hours and super abrasive Tanana River dust. Subsequently, wiper blades just wear out faster up here than they might in other places.

As a result, at our own Quick Lane, we ask our specialists to check wiper blades as part of our free multi-point inspection - a courtesy extended to all our service customers. Our recommendation follows along with what you would find in most owner manuals. We suggest you also regularly check your wiper blades and replace them at least once a year or if they are cracked, cut, torn, worn, streaking or chattering. Frankly, you can easily check the blades and make this replacement decision all by yourself.

So, if the blades on your wipers are visibly deteriorated due to sunlight, if the rubber micro-edge is torn or frayed from traveling across ice, if the mechanism has worn and allows too much play, if the blades leave streaks across the windshield, if the blade "chatters" as it moves across the windshield, or if you see little pieces of rubber dangling off the blade, get some new ones.

There lots of choices when it comes to replacement wiper blades. I recommend that, if possible, you should use original manufacturer replacement wipers. Your vehicle's manufacturer really wants you to have a pleasant driving experience and has designed their blades to fit the windshield properly and to give you good front clarity and therefore the best chance safe and convenient operation of your car on the road in wet (or snowy) weather. I'm most acquainted with Ford products and their neoprene Motorcraft Winter Wiper Blade is a good choice for the colder time of year. And, one feature of the Motorcraft Premium Blade is that it actually has a different color wear indicator built into the blade to remind you when it's time to get a replacement. Other manufacturers may provide the same options.

As a tip, I occasionally notice some pretty smart owners that pull their vehicle's wipers into the upright position - away from the windshield - when they get to work or stop for shopping when snow is falling or when the blades might freeze to the glass while parked. Their wiper blades will last a lot longer than those of us who allow the blades to freeze to the glass and have to be ripped free. It only takes a couple seconds here to avoid a lot of inconvenience and to save some money down the road.

Oh, and one other thing. When your car or truck travels through an automatic car wash, the brushes can sometimes bend the wiper frame. It's always a good idea to check the wiper operation even before driving off from the car wash. A quick adjustment has often kept bent wiper parts from scratching the windshield.

I hope this information adds some "clarity" to the situation. Good luck and safe driving.