

The London Free Press

Ready for a road trip ; EDUCATION: There's more to getting prepped than just a tuneup

The London Free Press

Thursday, May 14, 2009

Page: C10

Section: Today Ticket

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Dateline: TORONTO

Ad Value: \$4,848.32 ■

Circulation: 85,754 ■

While the recession may be putting a crimp on overseas travel plans, those opting to stick closer to home may still be keen to hit the road for a day or overnight trip, particularly as the holiday weekend approaches.

But put the brakes on before packing bags, kids and pets into your sedan, minivan or SUV: experts say there's more to being road-ready than simply filling the tank.

Be Car Care Aware, a consumer education campaign spearheaded by Car Care Canada, has developed the Family Road Trip Guide to help Canadians gear up for spring and summer driving.

The new guide, available online for free download, shares suggestions on ways individuals can stay safewhile also saving gas and protecting the planet.

It also offers tips on keeping kids entertained by setting aside portions of the trip as "non-plugged in" time for interactive games and activities.

"It was more about the whole process," said former race car driver and Be Car Care Aware spokesperson **Kelly Williams**. "Yes, we want people to take care of their car, but let's take it back to its roots of going on a road trip, playing Punch Buggy or I Spy."

In addition to preparing a roadside emergency kit with items including flares, booster cables and a fire extinguisher, motorists are advised to put together a DIY road trip first-aid kit.

However, at its core, the emphasis is still on vehicle road readiness. Motorists are encouraged to conduct a 10-minute road trip checkup before heading out.

The checkup includes the basics of checking fluids, including engine oil, power steering, brake and transmission fluids. The guide also advises checking hoses and belts, exterior and interior lighting and wiper blades during the checkup.

Spot checks, like pulling the dipstick in your vehicle, are a way to assure peace of mind and are a small inconvenience "for the big inconvenience that it could turn into," said Williams, who has been conducting car care clinics since last March.

Williams said while checking belts and hoses can be done visually, it may be better to take your vehicle to a technician. If you notice something unusual when checking fluids, also consider having the vehicle inspected professionally, she said.

The guide advises checking tire inflation at least once a month, and to look for bulges and bald spots on tires during the 10-minute checkup, as well as inspecting treads for uneven wear -- an indication of the need for wheel alignment.

Failure to check tire pressure can potentially harm the environment as well as the pocketbook.

For each 5% a tire is under-inflated, 1% more fuel is consumed, the guide explains.

What's more, improper tire maintenance results in 1.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide being released into the environment, and costs light-duty vehicle owners in Canada nearly 643 million litres of fuel. Calculated at 79 cents a litre, that translates to more than \$500 million in wasted fuel.

Beyond getting vehicles road ready, motorists are also being advised to be aware of those the Canada Safety Council says are generally classified as "vulnerable road users" -- pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists.

The council said this trio of road users are at greater risk of potential injury or death should they be involved in collisions on the country's roadways.

In 2006, nearly 40 per cent of all collisions at intersections involving vulnerable road users were fatal. While half were pedestrians, 64 per cent of cyclists and 45 per cent of motorcyclists were seriously injured at intersections.

The council has partnered with DriveWise for a week-long awareness campaign to highlight the importance of road users of all stripes to take precautions on the streets, including wearing proper safety gear and adhering to rules of the road.

On the Net:

Be Car Care Aware: www.carcarecanada.ca

Canada Safety Council: www.safety-council.org

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