Title:
Are You Road Trip Ready?

Word Count:
407

Summary:
When it comes to "getting away from it all," many Americans are skipping the pricey trips abroad and opting to enjoy the many amazing, closer-to-home sights from the comfort of their own vehicles.

Keywords:
Are You Road Trip Ready?

Article Body:
When it comes to "getting away from it all," many Americans are skipping the pricey trips abroad and opting to enjoy the many amazing, closer-to-home sights from the comfort of their own vehicles.

If you're planning a getaway, remember that road trips can be tough on cars, and few things turn a vacation into a nightmare quicker than breaking down in the middle of nowhere. So, before you load the car and take off, make sure that your vehicle is in tip-top condition.

A pre-trip inspection as part of an overall maintenance program can give you peace of mind and help prevent costly repairs.

Inspect and repair, if needed, the following:

• Radiator and cooling system, including water pump, fan and thermostat

• Brakes, brake pads and brake linings

• Battery and cables

• Belts and hoses

• Engine oil and oil filter

• Wiper blades and washer fluid

• Tire pressure and overall tire condition (including the spare).

• Most importantly, don't leave on a long trip with your car's "Check Engine" light on.

The Check Engine light appears when your vehicle's On-Board Diagnostics (OBD) computer detects a problem. According to several state Air Pollution Control Districts, the Check Engine light is designed to limit air pollution, as well as alert drivers to a condition that can waste fuel, shorten engine life and result in potentially expensive repairs.

If the light does come on, a quick check of your vehicle's service manual can often identify the problem and a course of action.

Those who take their car to a mechanic often find that technicians use a diagnostic tool to scan their vehicle and access trouble codes at a cost of $55 to $100.

A new automotive tool, with a Web site, lets consumers run their own diagnosis, enabling them to verify the mechanic's assessment.

Called CarMD, the tool provides a basic overview of probable problems with the car's electronic and emissions-related systems. It incorporates the same basic technology as tools used by mechanics, but is said to cost less and can be operated by anyone. A green light indicates that all systems are "go," a yellow light signals a possible problem and a red light means there is a current problem and service is required.

For more in-depth information, simply plug the tool into your personal computer and turn it on. It will connect to the company's Web site and provide a comprehensive report on your vehicle's health, including possible problems, estimated fixes and repair costs.