



OWNERSHIP & SAVINGS

Reduce Wear & Tear: Make Your Vehicle Last

How you drive, park, wash, and maintain your vehicle decides what it's worth on the day you trade it in.

A NOTE FROM OUR TEAM

Every vehicle gets older. Not every vehicle gets worn out. The difference is mostly habits: how you stop, how you park, and whether you follow the maintenance schedule that actually fits your driving. Take care of it now, and it pays you back when it's time to trade.

— The Auto Advocate Team

Your vehicle starts losing value the day you buy it, but how fast it loses value is partly up to you. Gentle driving, a few minutes of attention each month, and following the right maintenance schedule protect your brakes, tires, and drivetrain. They also protect the number a dealership writes down when it appraises your trade.

1 Drive Like the Parts Cost Money

Brakes

Look farther ahead and lift off the gas early so the vehicle slows on its own. Every hard stop turns brake pads and rotors into dust. Smooth stops also save fuel: the Department of Energy notes aggressive braking and acceleration cut highway mileage roughly 15% to 30%.

Tires & suspension

Slow down for potholes, railroad tracks, and speed bumps. Avoid hard cornering and curb strikes. One solid hit can bend a wheel, knock the alignment out, and start uneven tire wear you'll pay for later.

Transmission & drivetrain

Come to a full stop before shifting between Drive and Reverse. Stay within your vehicle's towing and payload ratings, and follow the severe-service schedule when you tow or haul.

Engine

Skip the long idle warm-up. AAA says a modern vehicle is ready after about 30 seconds, and recommends easing into the first five minutes of driving rather than accelerating hard on a cold engine.

2 Tires: Your Monthly Five Minutes

- ☐ **Check pressure monthly**, including the spare, when tires are cold (not driven for at least three hours)
- ☐ **Use the door-jamb number**, not the maximum printed on the sidewall
- ☐ **Rotate** every 5,000 to 8,000 miles if your manufacturer recommends it, or sooner if you see uneven wear
- ☐ **Align** after a hard hit or if the vehicle pulls; alignment maximizes tire life
- ☐ **Balance** new tires when they're installed

WHEN TO REPLACE

Tread: NHTSA says tires should be replaced at 2/32 of an inch. Penny test: insert a penny with Lincoln's head upside down. If you can see the top of his head, it's time.

Age: Some vehicle and tire makers recommend replacing tires six to 10 years old regardless of tread. The last four digits of the DOT code on the sidewall show the week and year the tire was made.

3 Normal or Severe? Pick the Right Schedule

Most owner's manuals list two maintenance schedules. AAA explains that one is for "normal" conditions and one for "severe" conditions. Severe conditions vary by manufacturer, but typically include:

- ☐ Mostly short trips of 5 miles or less
- ☐ Sustained stop-and-go driving
- ☐ Extremely hot, cold, or dusty climates
- ☐ Carrying heavy loads or towing a trailer

If that sounds like your week, follow the more frequent schedule. If it doesn't, don't pay for services your vehicle doesn't need. Either way, **the owner's manual is the authority**, not a reminder sticker or a service advisor's menu.

FROM THE INSIDE

Our team has spent years on the dealership side of the desk, including watching trade appraisals happen. The appraiser walks around the vehicle looking for anything that costs the store money to fix before resale: tires near the wear bars, curb-rashed wheels, windshield chips, warning lights, odors, missing keys, and stains. Each one becomes a reason to lower your number. A folder of service records and a second key on the desk tell a very different story.

4 Wash, Park & Protect

Wash the underside

AAA urges drivers to wash off road salt and de-icing chemicals, which can speed up rust and corrode brake and fuel lines. After winter storms, choose a wash with an undercarriage rinse, and wash when it's above freezing.

Park with intent

Shade or a garage protects paint, dashboards, and seats from sun damage. Park away from cart corrals and tight spaces to avoid door dings, and keep a gap from the curb.

Keep the inside clean

Use floor mats and seat covers if you haul kids, pets, or work gear. Clean spills right away. Odors and stains are some of the hardest things to fix before trade-in.

5 How Condition Changes Your Trade-In Value

Valuation guides price a vehicle by condition, and the gap between condition levels can be significant. Kelley Blue Book uses four levels and reports that only about 2% of the vehicles it values qualify as Excellent. Edmunds uses its own scale, from Outstanding down to Damaged.

KELLEY BLUE BOOK LEVEL	KBB'S DESCRIPTION	SHARE OF VEHICLES KBB VALUES
Excellent	Looks new and is in excellent mechanical condition	About 2%
Very Good	Minor cosmetic defects; good mechanical condition	About 28%
Good	Repairable cosmetic defects and mechanical problems	About 50%
Fair	Requires some mechanical repairs	About 20%

Be honest when you rate your own vehicle. Many owners pick a higher condition than an appraiser will, and that gap is where trade-in disappointment comes from.

BEFORE YOUR TRADE-IN APPRAISAL

- ☐ Wash it, vacuum it, and remove personal items
- ☐ Address warning lights before you go, or know what they mean
- ☐ Bring every key and remote you own
- ☐ Check tire tread and note recent replacements
- ☐ Bring your service records folder
- ☐ Get your own valuation first (see **Trade-In Shield** at the end)

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THE DEALERSHIP HAS EXPERTS. NOW YOU DO, TOO.