

# AUTOMOTIVE

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## A Car's Life

Getting the most out of your years with a vehicle

BY BENJAMIN YONG



A happy car is a long-lived car: regular maintenance and gentle treatment are key to longevity.

You know that old adage “take care of your body and it will take care of you?” Well, it applies to cars, too. We spoke to BCAA Auto Service Centre Senior Operations Manager Stu Miller about how to keep your vehicle healthy into its golden years.

### Average lifespan

Miller says how long a vehicle lasts really depends on the person behind the wheel. “I’ve seen cars from the early or mid-1990s that have more than 500 or 600,000 kilometres on them and are still running well. I drive a 2014 that has 147,000 km on it already,” he says. “The lifespan of a car will really vary depending on the owner’s driving habits and how well they maintain their investment. But on average, you can probably expect around 300,000 km.”

### Maintenance is a lifesaver

The number-one thing owners can do to prolong a vehicle’s life is to follow the manufacturer’s recommendations for servicing. Unsurprisingly, observing regular engine oil and filter changes are among the crucial items, as is replacing transmission fluid.

“When oil breaks down, viscosity is lost, as is its ability to lubricate, absorb heat and clean. So in all working, moving parts you will always have some type of metal or material that starts to wear away – the oil is designed to take that contamination and put it inside your oil filter. It’s the same idea with transmission fluid,” says Miller.

### Gently does it

Aside from proper maintenance, good driving habits can ensure a healthy vehicle lifespan, too.

## DEALS ON WHEELS

Pondering what kind of car to purchase? A recent AAA study revealed the cheapest type of vehicle to own and operate is a small sedan, with an average annual cost of \$8,200 (US\$6,354). This takes into account the sticker price, depreciation, maintenance, repairs and fuel. For monthly cost estimates on specific makes and models, use the CAA Driving Costs Calculator: [bcaa.com/carcalculator](http://bcaa.com/carcalculator)

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“The harder we are on the stop and go, the greater toll we take on not just the brake pads and tires but major components like the gearbox and engine. For example, the more your vehicle revs, the hotter the temperature gets, which can in turn damage critical components like the head gasket,” says Miller.

## Warning signs

When your vehicle’s engine has been seriously compromised, or the cost of prolonging its safe operation is significantly greater than purchasing a new (or new to you) car, it may be time to call it quits. One indicator of serious engine issues is increased oil consumption, which may mean the car is burning oil, identifiable by white or blue-grey smoke pouring out of the tailpipe. Another is drastically lower fuel economy, which could be the result of worn cylinders or bearings needing additional fuel to rotate the crankshaft. ■



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## HOW LONG DO CAR PARTS LAST?



Your vehicle might last the better part of two decades with proper maintenance. But some of its parts will need to be replaced during that time to keep it running safely and smoothly. Different makes and models have different maintenance requirements, so of course your owner's manual should be the ultimate authority here. But these general scheduling guidelines should come in handy:

**Air filter:** The general rule for replacement is every 24,000 km. But it depends on your environment. If you drive in dusty conditions, you're probably changing it every 12,000 km.

**Fuel filter:** Some brands recommend swapping these every 32,000 km, while others suggest a higher number. Consult your owner's manual for this one.

**Oil filter:** Most need to be changed every 8,000 to 12,000 km – but again, follow the recommendation in your owner's manual.

**Timing belt:** On average, expect five years or 100,000 km, although some automakers claim eight years or 160,000 km. Timing chains (a chain instead of a belt) only need replacement when the chain becomes loose or the guides break, both rare.

**Brake pads:** Brake pads are a consumable item, so lifespan depends on usage. A stoplight-to-stoplight city driver will likely wear out pads faster than a highway commuter. Ballpark? Roughly 50,000 to 100,000 km.

**Starter:** No two starters possess the same expiration date. A fairly robust part, many have been known to continue working well past 200,000 km.

**Fuel pumps:** Responsible for sending fuel from the tank to the engine, these are built tough, and owners may be able to squeeze as much as 160,000 km out of them. Pro tip: don't let the gas gauge go into the red before you fill up. This can prematurely wear out the fuel pump.

**Battery:** Most manufacturers say about five years, but it depends on treatment. Heavy use of electronics while the ignition is turned off can reduce overall capacity, as can jump-starting.

**Alternator:** This keeps your battery charged, and its longevity depends on how often the battery stays fully charged. Treating the battery poorly (as described above) can add excessive load and potentially cause failure of the charging system.

**Shocks:** Do you drive over a lot of potholes or speed bumps, or carry heavy loads often? These are just a couple of variables affecting longevity. But shock absorbers should last at least five years. To be safe, have them inspected around 100,000 km.

**Tires:** Drive an average 20,000 km annually? Your tires are good for three to five years. Even if the tread isn't gone at that point, get the set checked, because rubber degrades. Tires also require rotation every 12,000 km to stay in top shape.