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Shade Tree Automotive Diagnostics and Care - Part I - See No Evil by [Hiteshbhoi](#)

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Learning a little more about how to better care for your vehicles is a good idea for any number of reasons. It allows you to know if an unscrupulous mechanic is attempting to gouge you on your repairs – and that will save you money. It can prevent you from making unnecessary repairs – and that will save you money. It can help you locate a problem and fix it early, thus saving more money – sometimes a whole lot of money. It allows you to be more independent in an era where people are entirely too dependent on others to survive.

We need to get started now, so that we have time to cover everything!

First, do a visual check of your vehicle. The following will assist you in where to look, and for what:

• Look at your tires. Do they look low? A tire pressure gauge, available inexpensively at any discount store or auto parts store will help you make sure tire pressure stays dead on. Maintain as necessary. Better tire pressures will make your vehicle safer, and more fuel efficient. There are some very inexpensive air pumps for sale at discount stores – should you really want to stay on top of air pressure in your tires. Motorcyclists and moped riders need to be exceptionally concerned about their tire pressures.

• Look closely at your tires and inspect for severely worn edges, areas missing chunks of rubber, or objects sticking into the tire. Maintain or replace as necessary. If your tires are relatively new, and they seem to be wearing unevenly, take your vehicle into the shop for an alignment, and likely a tire rotation. These two things are frequently lumped together in less costly automotive service "specials."

• Look under the vehicle for liquids. One drop usually means nothing. Look for consistent drip marks. Remember that during summer months your vehicle's air conditioning will steadily drip water when in use – no worries. Your coolant system may also spew an occasional bit of water/anti-freeze, and that's okay too. If you find a stain indicating long-term or consistent leaking, trace the leak to its source: engine oil, transmission fluid, rear end oil, etc. Maintain or repair as necessary. Sometimes, just getting under the vehicle with a pressure hose at the car wash will clean off years of old oil and debris that causes many 'driveway' leaks – thus fixing the faux leak.

• Visually check your engine oil. Check it according to the manufacturer's instructions, and also feel it with your fingers. Engine oil is the life blood of your vehicle's power plant. Does the oil feel thick, or does it feel watery. Thick is good, watery is bad! Change watery oil (and be sure to use an Engine Sentry when you do change oil and filter). Add the appropriate oil if the level registers low. NEVER overfill your oil!

• Check the coolant level. Be sure to use caution, and follow the manufacturer's instructions to avoid injury from hot, pressurized liquids. Maintain as necessary. If you haven't had your coolant/anti-freeze checked lately, it might be advisable. Be sure to never add coolant or anti-freeze that is not recommended by your vehicle's manufacturer. Some radiators require special products so as not to erode or corrode them.

• Visually check your engine compartment. Tighten caps, firmly tug/test hose connections, look for worn things, things that have blown into the engine compartment, etc. Maintain or repair as necessary. This is also a good time to do light engine cleaning. Nothing too serious, just some rags and some degreaser: ammonia and water make a cheap, great degreaser, but it shouldn't be used

on aluminum â€” certainly not left on it. A toothbrush is also an excellent tool here â€” it makes quick work of much engine debris.

â€¢Visually check your automotive battery and connections. Make sure the connections feel tight at the battery. If you have green or white build-up on the battery, mix some baking soda with tepid water (1/4-cup of baking soda to one quart of water) and stir it thoroughly. Now, slowly pour it directly over the affected areas. Don't worry about all the fizzing and crackling â€” it's just cleaning. Make sure you do this where the runoff won't harm anything. An old toothbrush will make this go faster. When the terminals are clean and dry, apply a thin coating of automotive grease onto each battery terminal, and connection. Automotive grease comes in small, plastic tubs that weigh about a pound each. They're cheap, so get a good brand name. I use popsicle sticks to spread it with. Grease is good to have around for many automotive fixes and preventive maintenance actions.

Okay, you've completed the first steps of becoming a full-fledged automotive diagnostician â€” or something like that, anyway. You've definitely gotten your vehicle in much better condition, and you should have learned a thing or two. Keep an eye out for part II â€” Hear No Evil, and Part III â€” Smell No Evil.

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