

7 Most Common Car Problems (+How To Fix Them)

I've driven a lot of miles in my life; I mean a lot of lot of miles.

Ever since I turned 16 and was able to get a driver's license, I've had a steady succession of cars. I can't even count how many. I've also done a lot of traveling, so I've had just about as much time to encounter problems with my cars and have to deal with them as anyone.

I guess I should add that I tend to drive older vehicles. There's a saying that you're either making car payments or you're paying for repairs. While there is quite a bit of truth to that statement, I've found that making repairs to cars is much cheaper than making car payments, especially if you do the work yourself. While I have a pretty good shade-tree mechanic now, who does most of my work, I did it all myself for a lot of years. All, in this case, includes everything up to engine rebuilding and replacement.

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Through this, I've noticed one striking truth... my vehicles rarely have problems at a convenient time or in a convenient place. I mean, why can't a car break down in the driveway? Why does it have to happen far from home? It's a whole lot easier to fix it, sitting in front of my garage, where I have all my tools to work with, than having to figure out how to drag the thing back home.

This has led me to always keep a tool kit in my car. While I don't have everything in the car, I do have a ratchet and sockets, wrenches, pliers and screwdrivers. That gives me the

ability to do most repairs, no matter where I am. I've replaced a head gasket with that set of tools; although I did have to borrow a torque wrench from the auto parts store to properly re-tighten the head.

I don't care if you're going out of town to go fishing for the weekend or you're on a bug out, the possibility exists that you're going to have problems along the way, forcing you to make some sort of emergency repairs. If you want to wait for a tow truck and pay the garage to do your work, that's fine; but what are you going to do if there's no tow truck available or the garage is closed? You either fix it yourself or you do without.

So let's take a look at a couple of the most common vehicle problems and the hacks we can use to make an emergency repair, for those times when you don't have what you need.

Tire Problems

Everyone is bound to have a tire go bad on them sometime. Tires can go bad in one of three ways:

- They can have the air leak out
- They can explode
- The tread can wear down to the point where the belts are showing

Any of those three mean that the tire is destroyed. The question is, what can you do, so that you can get where you're going to?

Tread Wearing Out



Most of us try to keep good rubber on our vehicles, changing the tires when they start going bald. But every once in a while, we miss the signs, especially for the tires on a trailer that has been sitting for a while. The rubber in the tires may be dry, allowing it to wear off excessively rapidly and leaving us running on a tire with the belts showing through.

This is one of the easiest problems to solve, if you keep a roll of duct tape in your vehicle. All you need to do is put several layers of tape over the bald spot on the tire. Stop every once in a while (like every 20 miles) to check it and add more duct tape as necessary. I've driven over 100 miles to get to somewhere I could buy a tire this way.

Tire is Flat

Flat tires are annoying to say the least. If you've got a good spare and all the tools to change it, it's nothing more than a nuisance. But if you don't, you're stuck, right? Wrong! There are still ways of solving the problem.

If you don't have a can of Fix-a-flat in your car, Coka-Cola can be used to make your own imitation "fix-a-flat" to seal your tires and allow you to fill the tire with air again. Mix the Coke with powdered dirt, making a slurry out of it. Then comes the tricky part – getting it into the tire.

To start, remove the screw or nail and rotate the tire so the puncture is down. Then, if the tire has broken free of the rim, you can just stuff it in the crack, then fill the tire with air. If not, you'll need to remove the valve from the inside of your valve stem and put the slurry in through there.

If you have a drinking straw, you can suck the slurry up through the straw and blow it out into the valve stem. Once enough is in, screw the valve back into place and fill the tire with air.

But what if your tire is so bad, that there is no way it will hold air at all, as with a blown tire? In that case you can still use the tire, cutting the sidewall in a couple of spots and filling it with grass. Pack as much in there as you can. You won't be able to get the tire to the normal inflation point, but you will be able to get it to the point where you can drive the car slowly to someplace you can find a tire.

No Jack in the Vehicle

If there is no jack in the vehicle, you might have some trouble changing the tire. A man named Archimedes came up with a solution to this problem, over 2,000 years ago. It's called the lever. All you need to do is put a good sized rock right next the car. Then, find a tree branch to use as a lever. You'll need a couple of people to push down on the far end of the branch, lifting the car, while you change the tire. Be sure to work fast though, before they get tired.

I actually had to do this with a Jeep once in the Army. While it works, the lighter the vehicle is, the easier it is to do. I would never have wanted to try it with my motorhome. Make sure your rock is big enough so that it comes up as far as the vehicle's body and get as long and strong a branch as you can find.

Putting a Tire Back on the Rim

One really odd problem you might have is the ability to jack the car up, but not get the wheel off. Sometimes, the lug nuts are on so tight, you can't remove them. Other times, the wheel is rusted to the hub. Whatever the reason, the solution could be to change the tire by putting another tire on the rim that

is already mounted to the car.

This is a bit tricky to do, but not all that hard, if you have two pry bars. Watch someone at the tire shop do this sometime or catch a video online so you know the technique.

The next problem is getting the tire to seal to the rim. In tire shops, they use a lubricant for this. You obviously won't have that available to you; but there are several things you can use, like soft-drinks. But the best thing to use is anti-bacterial hand cleaner. It makes a good lubricant and as it dries it seals the joint between the tire and the rim.

Sometimes, the tire needs a little help pushing up against the rim, so that it can seal and not let all the air escape. This is easily accomplished by tying a rope around the diameter of the tire and then using a stick for a windlass, compressing the tire and causing the sides to bulge.

	ABS: Due to self-diagnosed fault with the ABS system. Normal braking should remain but the wheel could "lock up" while you're braking.		Fog Beams: Fog lights are activated.
	Air Bag: There is a fault with one of or more of the air bags within your vehicle. There is a fault with one of or more of the air bags within your vehicle.		Master Warning Light: There is an unidentified problem with your vehicle. Take it into a service center to have it diagnosed.
	Brake System: Hydraulic pressure has been lost on one side due to constant braking or fluid levels are low.		Open Door: One or more doors are not closed completely.
	Check Engine: Have a professional check your engine as there could be one or more problems like the ones listed above.		Seat Belt: One or more people in the vehicle are not wearing their seatbelt.
	Cruise Control Indicator: Cruise control is currently engaged in your vehicle.		Tire Pressure: Optimal air pressure in one or more of your tires is low.
	Emergency Indicator: Emergency lights are activated.		Windshield Washer Fluid: Low washer fluid is detected and needs more.

An Overheated Car

Cars can overheat at the strangest times. The car's engine produces a lot of heat as it operates. If the engine can't get rid of that heat, it overheats and won't run. Enough of that, and the engine can be seriously damaged.

If the engine overheats, you can be sure that you will need to add water. Even if all the water didn't leak out, some will have leaked out in the form of steam. More will probably leak out as you try and fix the problem that caused it to overheat. So no matter what, you're going to need some water.

The first thing you have to do is pop the hood and figure out where the car is leaking water or steam. You'll probably have

steam coming out of the overflow tank, but where else? Where it is leaking from shows you where the problem is and what you need to fix. Possibilities include:

- The radiator
- The radiator hoses
- The car's cabin heater (under the dashboard)
- The water pump

If you don't see water or steam coming out of any of these, but still see it coming out of the overflow tank, then the problem is probably the thermostat. This is located in a housing where one of the radiator hoses connects to the engine block. There are usually two small bolts holding it in place. In addition, there's a gasket, which is probably glued in place.

Before making any sort of repairs to a hot engine, allow it time to cool. It will need at least 45 minutes. If you can't grasp the upper radiator hose, without it being uncomfortable, then you need to give it more time to cool.

Emergency Hose Repairs

The most likely hoses to go bad are the radiator hoses. Those are most likely to go bad near one end or the other. This gives you an easy way of temporarily fixing them, if the hose is long enough that it has some slack in it. Simply cut off the bad portion of the hose and reattach it with the hose clamp.

If the location of the leak or the length of the hose doesn't allow this, then your best bet is to patch it with duct tape. But before you do that, be sure to clean the outside of the hose thoroughly, so that the tape can stick. If you have a knife, scrape the surface of the hose to roughen up the rubber slightly. Then wrap several layers of duct tape tightly around the hose.

To make the hose patch even better, put a hose clamp over the duct tape bandage, tightening it up to act like a pressure bandage on a bleeding wound. If you don't have a hose clamp, you can use a piece of thin rope (like paracord) making a loop and then using a stick as a windlass to tighten it.

There's actually a tape which is made for this, called Silicone Rescue Tape. It's designed to withstand temperatures of 500°F and pressures of 700 PSI. That makes it stronger than duct tape. It might be a good idea to throw a roll of it in your trunk.

In the case of other hoses, like the hoses that run from the radiator to the heater core, all you have to do is disconnect the hoses. Take the one that does not have a leak and loop it to connect from the radiator, back to itself, bypassing the heater core. While you won't have heat in the car, you will have a working car.

Emergency Radiator Repairs

Generally speaking, problems with the radiator will be nothing more than pinholes, or more likely, only one pinhole. However, that first pinhole will be an indication of more to come. So, while you may be able to fix the radiator well enough to keep driving for a while, even for months, you will need to replace the radiator core fairly soon.

As far as I'm concerned, the best radiator sealer is that powdered stuff they sell in a plastic tube. But if you don't have that, you can use a makeshift substitute; black pepper. Finely ground black pepper will find its way to the pinhole and jam in the hole swelling to fill it. Another way of doing this, if you don't have access to black pepper is with a raw egg. Just beat the egg and put it in the radiator (not the overflow tank). As with the pepper, it will find the hole and then cook in place, sealing it.

Emergency Thermostat Repairs

The thermostat exists for the purpose of controlling the flow of coolant through the engine and radiator. You can actually run the car without it. The only “bad” thing that will happen is that the engine will warm up slower. But then, that’s a whole lot better than it warming up too much.

Here’s the problem. You can’t take the thermostat out of many of the newer cars and still have the gasket seal. So what you have to do is take the thermostat out, break it to take the plunger out of the center of it (just requires cutting a couple of soft metal stringers) and reinstall the thermostat and gasket.

If the gasket is damaged, you can make a temporary gasket out of silicone gasket sealer, silicone tub sealant, cardboard or chewing gum. Just chew the gum enough to get the gritty sugary texture out of it.



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