

In The Driver's Seat

Keeping Your Car On The Road At Peak Driving Season

by Bobby Hamilton

(NAPSA)—When I sit in the driver's seat, my goal is to be the first to cross the finish line. You can't do that without a car that's in tip-top condition. I make sure before I hit the track that my vehicle won't



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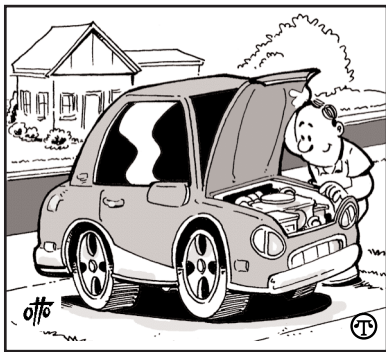
let me down. You should do the same before you hit the road. It doesn't matter if you're just driving to work or if you're loading up the family for a cross-country vacation.

So be your own Crew Chief. Follow these basic guidelines so you'll enjoy the ride:

- Having properly inflated tires is not only safest, but it also increases gas mileage. Use the penny test to see if your tire tread is acceptable. Put a penny, Lincoln head down, in the tread groove. Consider buying new tires if the tread does not go past Lincoln's forehead. And here's a special tip: Buy a small air compressor that plugs into your cigarette lighter for a quick fix if you get a flat. They cost about \$20 and can be found in most auto parts stores.

- Check to see if your oil needs changing. While you're at it, have your belts and hoses checked.

- Keep an eye on those gauges monitoring your car's electrical system, oil pressure and engine temperature. Keep an eye open for illuminated warning or indicator lights. If you see any red lights flashing or shining steadily, you should stop and have



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your vehicle towed into your local repair facility.

- Inspect your battery and cables for corrosion, cracks and dirt. Replace your battery every four years.

- Always keep your gas tank at least one-quarter full to keep from running out of gas at unexpected times, like highway gridlock.

- Always travel with an emergency kit, just in case. Make sure it includes a flashlight and batteries, flares or reflective triangles, jumper cables and a first-aid kit.

- Never, never leave children or pets alone in a car, even for a minute. A locked car sitting in the summer sun quickly turns into an oven.

- Keep a duplicate car key in your home, in case of a lockout.

Bobby Hamilton, a spokesman for AutoVantage, is the current NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series Champion after achieving four career NASCAR Winston Cup Series victories. He founded Bobby Hamilton Racing, which owns and operates three trucks in the NASCAR circuit.