CAN YOU FIX IT YOURSELF?

**The interior has developed a rattle.**

The culprit: Yes. A pothole or bad tire.

**Your garage smells like maple syrup.**

The culprit: A leak in the coolant system. There’s a leak in the radiator, heater, or cooling system. The leak could be a hose, a hose connection, or a crack in the engine block.

**White exhaust smoke.**

The culprit: A stuck valve due to carbon buildup. A stuck valve can also cause the engine to run rough and make a knocking noise. It’s likely a sticking valve, especially if the engine has been run for a long time.

**High-pitched squeal from under the hood.**

The culprit: A bad alternator. The alternator is responsible for providing power to the battery and other electrical components of the vehicle. If the alternator isn’t functioning properly, it can cause a high-pitched squeal under the hood.

**Wheel squeak that goes away when you brake.**

The culprit: A bad brake pad. If the brake pads are worn out or damaged, they can cause a squeaking noise when the brakes are applied.

**The steering wheel is vibrating.**

The culprit: A bad handling system. A bad handling system can cause the steering wheel to vibrate or shake when driving.

**The battery you just replaced is dead. Again.**

The culprit: A bad battery. A bad battery can cause the car to stall or not start. It’s a common problem in older vehicles.

**A bad charging system means it’s time for a new alternator.**

The culprit: A bad alternator. If the charging system is failing, it can cause the battery to die quickly. A bad alternator needs to be replaced to fix the problem.

**CHECK ENGINE LIGHT**

**COOLING SYSTEM**

Does your car have a temperature gauge? Consult that to find out just how hot it is—a little bit too hot, you can still drive it to wherever you need to go. But if the needle’s pegged to the letter H (or if you just don’t know), shut it down. If you’re desperate to get to where you’re going, turn your heater on full blast. You might be sweaty, but that’s a little less heat in the cooling system.

**TRACTION CONTROL**

If this light is flashing intermittently, you’re overcoming the available traction and you might want to back off the gas. Conversely, sometimes you want wheelspin (like if you’re stuck in snow or sand, or entering the burnout box at your local drag strip). In that case, manually disable the system and bring on the squiggles.

**OIL PRESSURE**

If this light goes on, pull over immediately and shut off your engine. You don’t want to mess around with this one. Oil starvation foretells imminent engine seizure, which is disastrous. Get a tow truck, please. Repairs are expensive.

**LOW TIRE PRESSURE**

Pay attention! Most tire-pressure-monitoring systems aren’t actually measuring pressure—they’re just measuring speed at each tire. If one doesn’t match the other three, the light comes on. Solutions: Add air and look for nails.

**BATTERY**

Get thee to a safe spot to call roadside assistance because time is running out. If it’s lit before you start your car, find some jumper cables. Your voltage has probably dipped to low to crank the starter.

**A GUIDE TO IDIOT LIGHTS**

**CHECK ENGINE**

Even been in a cab with a permanently lit check-engine light? It still ran, right? Indeed, the check-engine light isn’t typically going to indicate an item that’s strand you. However, it might pertain to a bad signal from an oxygen sensor or some component of the emissions system. That means you will fail your next inspection. Visit a garage, or check the code yourself with an OBD scan tool.

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**IDIOT LIGHTS**

**FOR COMBUSTION-ENGINE VEHICLES, OLD AND NEW.**

**THE BEST INTERNET CAR CARE VIDEOS**

The Humble Mechanic
Certified Volkswagen technician Charles Sanville will wash you through something as ambitious as a camshaft replacement, or an easier project like fixing headlight wires.

Engineering Explained
Mechanical engineer Jason Fenske’s videos are the fastest way to learn how a rotary engine works, or whether it’s okay to rest your hand on the gearshift. (It’s not.)

Haynes OnDemand
The go-to company for shop manuals now does video. It’s pay per video ($3.99) but the thoroughness and pro presentation are a great complement to the hard-copy Haynes books.