Motoring Feature

**AIR CONDITIONING —**

# KEEPING YOUR SYSTEM SERVICED

***A ROLLER-COASTER TREND FOR AIR CONDITIONING IN NEW CARS HAS HIDDEN COST IMPLICATIONS FOR MOTORISTS.***


***Already one of the most popular optional extras on new vehicles, industry forecasts point to nearly 60% of new cars being soon fitted with air conditioning as standard. This figure is up from 26.31% in 1990 and an estimated 46% in 1996.***

As we all know, air conditioning, with its controlled, in-car ambient temperature, can help motorists stay cool, comfortable and alert at the wheel, throughout the year, reducing driver error caused by fatigue or frustration. Aiding efficient de-misting of windows, it also gives drivers a clearer view of the road, potentially reducing the risk of accidents due to poor vision.

However, unless air conditioning systems are serviced correctly – by specially trained and qualified technicians – with the pressurised refrigerants and lubricants inside safely filtered, cleansed, recycled and reinstated for optimum output, strain on the compressors driving them can increase the load on the engine. This in turn can cause premature wear and tear leading to reduced vehicle performance, increased fuel consumption and higher vehicle emissions.

To avoid reduced performance, bigger fuel bills and future, costly repairs, experts advise specialised servicing of air conditioning units. Depending on use – the more frequently air conditioning is turned on, the less frequent the servicing requirement – a professional “Air Con Health Check” is recommended every one to three years, at around £100 a unit for a newer cars.

Servicing in this area is a specialist job, requiring specialist equipment operated by trained and qualified technicians, not least because of the environmental, health and safety issues involved. Air conditioning systems hold potentially hazardous waste in the form of HFC’s – hydrofluorocarbons. These are gases that, while accepted by Government as the good practice alternative to CFC’s, should not be released into the atmosphere.

With the right servicing equipment and qualified operator, HFCs can be recycled safely and efficiently, for use over and over again during the lifetime of an air conditioning unit which will then do the job it was designed for, without dragging down overall vehicle performance.

## The Facts...

Without correct servicing and maintenance, the refrigerant content in air conditioning systems can fall, causing the unit's compressor to draw more on the engine for power. This causes extra drain on the engine, resulting in premature wear, increased fuel consumption and higher vehicle emissions - symptoms not usually associated or expected in newer, high specification cars.

- Poorly maintained air conditioning systems can and will drain vehicle performance in time. Drivers need to plan for a new, specialist area of vehicle servicing for in-car air conditioning systems, costing about £100 a unit for newer vehicles, or pay the consequences long term - on the bottom line cost of reduced fuel and engine efficiencies, not to mention potentially hefty bills covering the repair of neglected systems." However, unless air conditioning systems are serviced correctly - by specially trained and qualified technicians - with the pressurised refrigerants and

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