

15 Reasons to Read Your Owners Manual

by Garrett McKinnon, VehicleMD Staff Writer

I used to own a T-shirt that read: “Real Men Don’t Need Instructions.” And while it was meant in jest, too often both men and women climb into a new car without so much as a glance at their owners manual.

Let’s face it, reading an owners manual is about as much fun as a trip to the dentist. But in today’s increasingly sophisticated vehicles, it’s becoming more and more important that drivers spend at least a few minutes familiarizing themselves with exactly how their car works.

As such, we present 15 reasons you should read your owners manual:

➤ 1 FIND OUT WHAT ALL THOSE BUTTONS DO.



Modern cars have more buttons than ever before. You might want to know what they do before you start pressing them.

➤ 2 FIND OUT WHAT THAT LIGHT MEANS.



Just as the number of buttons inside a car is proliferating, so too are the

number of warning lights, some of which aren’t exactly self-explanatory. Your owners manual can decode those mysterious lights for you.

➤ 3 LEARN HOW TO OPERATE THE RADIO.



These days, you almost need a Ph.D. to operate a car radio. Gone are the days when you simply pushed the power button and turned the dial. In order to get the most out of your radio, spend a few minutes finding out how to work it. (Chances are the radio section in your owners manual will be the single largest section in the entire book!)

➤ 4 LEARN HOW TO OPEN THE HOOD.



Automakers are hiding the hood-release latch in some really odd places

these days. If yours is hiding, your owners manual will tell you where it is.

➤ 5 LEARN HOW TO OPEN THE FUEL FILLER LID.



You pull your new car into the gas station, only to realize you have no idea how to open the fuel filler lid. (This really happened to one of our staffers!) Save yourself some time before your first fill-up.

➤ 6 FIND OUT HOW TO SET THE TRIP COMPUTER.



Does your car have one trip setting or two? How do you reset either one? What other information does my car’s computer keep track of? The answers to these questions and more are waiting to be found.

➤ 7 CHANGE YOUR CAR'S SETTINGS.



These days, many of your car's systems can be controlled through its central computer. You may be able to customize settings for your alarm, climate system, lights, etc., but read up on the system first in order to avoid problems later.

➤ 8 KNOW WHAT TPMS IS.



If your car was manufactured after September 2007, it has a tire pressure monitoring system, or TPMS. (Many vehicles made as far back as 2003 also have these systems.) It's important to know exactly what the TPMS is and how it affects you, information you can learn in the owners manual.

➤ 9 KNOW WHERE THE SPARE TIRE IS.



A flat tire is the worst nightmare of most drivers. But even worse than the prospect of putting on the spare is not knowing where it is—or how to access it. Familiarize yourself with the spare tire before trouble strikes.

➤ 10 LEARN HOW THE OIL CHANGE REMINDER SYSTEM WORKS.



By some estimates, more than 60 percent of all new vehicles have an oil change reminder system. Find out how yours works and what those service messages really mean.

➤ 11 LEARN HOW TO RESET THE OIL CHANGE REMINDER SYSTEM.



Technicians aren't perfect, and every so often one may forget to reset your oil change reminder after servicing your car. Save yourself a trip back to the shop by learning the reset procedure and doing it yourself.

➤ 12 FIND OUT WHAT YOUR CAR'S SERVICE INTERVALS ARE.



Be an educated customer. Read your owners manual before having your car serviced to know exactly what services it needs and what it doesn't.

➤ 13 FIND OUT WHAT TYPES OF FLUIDS YOUR CAR REQUIRES.



In addition to knowing how often your car's systems require service, it's also a good idea to know what types of fluid those systems require.

➤ 14 LEARN WHY YOUR CAR IS "LIMPING."



Many late-model cars and light trucks have a "limp" mode that allows for low-speed travel in case of a cooling or other system failure. Find out if your car has such a system, and what it means if the "limp" mode engages.

➤ 15 LEARN THE COOL LITTLE FEATURES YOUR SALESMAN DIDN'T SHOW YOU.



Can your car signal a lane change with just a tap of the turn signal? Can you roll the windows down with your key fob? You might never know all your car's neat little "tricks" if you don't read the owners manual.

As it turns out, when it comes to operating today's highly complex automobiles, real men—and women—do need instructions! +