

## **Ladies, Start Your Engines!**

### **A woman's guide to shoptalk and car maintenance.**

Kim Izzo

I always thought that some of the least feminine things to do in life were to change a tire, check the oil or talk shop with a technician. Under the hood wasn't in my worry zone.

Flashback to 2000. I'm driving on a stretch of Missouri highway and it's raining. That's when my windshield wipers suddenly stopped working. I find a repair shop and think I'll be driving away in minutes. Long story short, it took me seven hours of waiting, pleading and, believe it or not, driving across town to pick up parts before I was on the road again.

I don't know about you, but when I walk into any repair shop I immediately feel vulnerable—something many members of both genders can admit to—and when the service advisor tries to explain things to me, he might as well be speaking penguin.

“Automotive technicians enjoy a lingo of their own,” admits Dan Messner, manager of Automotive Technical Services for CAA in [Manitoba](#). “Have the technician speak to you in plain terms. Ask questions such as, ‘What does this part do? How does it work? Why do I need it?’ You're the customer paying to have a service done, so you should expect to clearly understand what the work is for and leave feeling satisfied as a consumer.”

Asking questions and doing research are the keys to being knowledgeable about car maintenance. Remember the owner's manual that's stuffed inside your glove compartment? It's

a wealth of information about what your car needs and when. Messner also suggests keeping a maintenance schedule that includes mileage dates for services performed. “Oil changes, tire rotations, seasonal inspections and repair work should be logged,” says Messner. “This provides you with a record and will prevent you from having unnecessary maintenance done to your car.”

According to Messner, we should all know how to change a tire, check and adjust tire pressure, change the oil, check and replace windshield wipers, and top up all fluid levels. In addition to the owner’s manual, information about automotive basics is available online at websites such as [www.caa.ca](http://www.caa.ca). Information can also be found through how-to books, such as Dare to Repair Your Car: A Do-It-Herself Guide to Maintenance, Safety, Minor Fix-Its, and Talking Shop, by Julie Sussman and Stephanie Glakas-Tenet ([HarperCollins](#), 2005).

But there remains that whole speaking-to-technicians thing. “Developing a relationship with a shop is key, like finding a good doctor,” offers Kelly Williams, a former CASCAR ([www.cascar.ca](http://www.cascar.ca)) race driver and a spokesperson for Car Care Canada’s Be Car Care Aware Campaign. “The best thing for women to do is to empower themselves with information. Then when a technician tells them they need to replace brakes, they’ll know what he’s talking about.”

Both Messner and Williams suggest that a good way to find a reputable repair facility is through references from friends and family. Other excellent options are CAA Approved Auto Repair Services (AARS) facilities, which have been accredited and are recommended by CAA.

For a more hands-on approach, women’s car care clinics are often available through dealerships, colleges, CAA locations and other industry sources. Participating in one might be just the ticket to solving your car anxiety.