

# Keep Your Wheels Aligned

consumer *brief*

Driving down the highway you swerve to miss that huge pothole, but you are out of luck. When you take your car in for service, the mechanic tells you that you need a wheel alignment. What exactly does that mean?

A wheel alignment consists of adjusting the angle of your wheels so that they are perpendicular to the ground and parallel to each other. Proper wheel alignment reduces tire wear, improves fuel economy and handling and increases your driving safety by eliminating steering and tracking problems. As a rule, you should have your wheels aligned every 10,000 miles or at least once a year.

## WHEEL ALIGNMENT - QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

*What are the indications that my car may need an alignment?*

- Uneven tire tread wear
- Your car pulls or drifts to one side
- Your steering wheel does not return easily after a turn, or
- Your steering wheel remains on an angle when driving in a straight line.

*Where do I go for a wheel alignment?*

- If you have a new car, you can go to your car dealer. Your new car warranty should cover your car for at least three years or 36,000 miles, whichever comes first. However, generally speaking, a wheel alignment is considered to be a maintenance item, unless there is a manufacturer's defect involved.
- Your local auto repair shop may be able to perform a wheel alignment. Ask your friends and neighbors for a recommendation and make sure the shop has the necessary equipment. The equipment is specialized and expensive, so not all repair shops perform alignments.



Also, check to see if the shop is accredited by the Motorist Assurance Program (MAP). MAP is an industry-sponsored organization that has established uniform inspection and communication standards for inspecting vehicles and recommending repairs, as well as standards for the proper treatment of customers.

When performing your wheel alignment, the mechanic may discover worn, bent or broken parts that will need to be replaced. These parts are not usually covered in the price of the alignment.

Call the Division of Consumer Affairs at 800-242-5846 to find out if the shop you are planning to use has been the subject of any complaints.

*How can I protect myself from being "taken" by a dishonest mechanic?*

1. Look for advertised prices in newspapers or posted at the repair facility. Try to have a price range in mind so that you can assess what is a fair price when an estimate is given to you. Remember, the lowest price may not always be the best price.
2. When having a wheel alignment performed, you need to know whether your vehicle takes a two-wheel or

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four-wheel alignment. An unethical repair shop may try to charge you for a four-wheel alignment when your car needs only a two-wheel alignment.

3. Check with your manufacturer to find out information on wheel alignment. A phone number for the manufacturer's Help Line can usually be found in your Owner's Manual.
4. If you are unable to reach the manufacturer directly, ask your mechanic to check the manufacturer's guidelines.
5. Get a written estimate. Any changes to the estimate must be approved by you, either orally or in writing, prior to the work being done.
6. Ask to be given printouts of the alignment at the time the job is started, as well as one after the adjustments have been made. Ask the mechanic to explain the difference between the two printouts and keep the printouts for your files.

*What if I have a problem with the repair work?*

If you believe your car was not serviced properly, go back to the shop and discuss your concerns with the owner or manager.

If you are unable to resolve your problem, you should contact your county or municipal office of Consumer Affairs or seek help from the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs

by writing to us at:

**P.O. Box 45025,  
Newark, NJ 07101,**

via e-mail at: **AskConsumerAffairs@lps.state.nj.us .**

or calling us at: **1-800-242-5846.**

