

Keeping Your Cool While Your Car Sizzles

Summer heat waves do more than make motorists hot under the collar; they can also make batteries fail. Whether in the searing Southwest or sweltering East and Midwest, motorists should check the condition of their vehicle's battery.

Contrary to what most people think, high heat is more brutal on a car battery than extreme cold. Heat speeds up all chemical reactions. Because a car battery works by using a chemical reaction, motorists with older batteries might get stranded by premature failure during a relentless heat wave. High outside temperatures, combined with stop and go traffic on overheated pavements, can drive the under-hood temperatures to more than 200°F degrees. Factor in extra heavy electrical loads such as air conditioners, power windows, and stereo systems, and the dog days of summer can be deadly for a car battery.

People can make their lives a lot easier in the summer by making sure their vehicle's battery is fully charged and by keeping the engine maintained. A heat wave isn't the time to economize and hope for a few more weeks of battery life. Several tips for good auto and battery maintenance during hot weather include:

- Keep the car engine in good condition by performing regular maintenance.
 - Tune up and change the oil regularly. Periodically check the radiator fluids to keep the engine from overheating.
 - Watch for terminal corrosion on the battery and make sure all connections are clean and tight.
 - Ask your technician to test your battery. This type of test can be performed quickly by most automotive service centers.
- Ideally, park the car in a shady spot or in a garage, protecting the battery from damaging heat.
- If the car is difficult to start, have the vehicle's electrical system checked, and if any component is marginal, it's probably time to get a replacement component. This type of test can be performed quickly by most automotive service centers.