

Talking About Cars: Car Problems

Cars are freedom. Or, that seems to be the American way of thinking. Our cars are our 'wings,' they let us leave home, go where we want. . . and when we want to go. There's no other form of transportation that's as flexible as cars. Trains and trams and buses and bikes all have more limitations. As long as the car works the way it's supposed to.

But what happens when your car doesn't work? Then the car doesn't seem so much like 'freedom' as it does a pile of metal. And, if your car is as old as my first car was (I'll tell you more about it tomorrow), you probably have your share of problems with the car. Today, we're going to talk about some common car problems.

- The first vocabulary associated with car problems is the term 'break down.' We use it to describe when a car—or any other complicated machine or system—stops working. It can be a noun or a phrasal verb: “I had a break down on the way to work today.” Or, “my car breaks down all the time!” All the other vocabulary on this page describes specific kinds of break downs.
- The most common break down, I think, is the flat **tire**. A flat tire happens when your tire has a hole in it and the air that's supposed to be inside the tire escapes. A lot of things can cause a flat tire, from broken glass to nails.
- Your car needs gas—short for 'gasoline'—to run. We all know this, but sometimes we don't drive to the gas station soon enough. When we wait too long to go to the gas station, it's too late and our car has no more gas to drive on. Then, it stops. We 'run out of gas.' I think that every driver runs out of gas once or twice, but it's embarrassing. . . because it seems so easy to avoid.
- A problem I had with my first car a lot was that the engine would get too hot. Engines *always* get hot—they run by burning gasoline—but there's a system to keep the engine from being *too* hot: a liquid called 'coolant' is pumped through the engine and cooled by fresh air in the 'radiator.' When you don't have enough coolant, or there isn't enough fresh air reaching the radiator, your car can 'overheat.' 'Overheating,' can be very serious. It doesn't always cause your car to break down, but it can cause serious long-term damage!

What kind of break downs have you had with your car? Have I forgotten any important break downs? Do any of you have a very **reliable** car that *never* breaks down? Would you pay more for a car if you knew it would never break down?