

## **Alternators and Batteries 101**

*Charging and starting system issues? If your battery is decent, they may stem from your alternator. Uh oh.*

If you have a borderline battery and you decide you're going to sit in your car and listen to the radio and charge your phone while your kids are playing baseball, well, that's a good way to drain your battery quickly and frustrate you when you really need to start the car and get going.

You'll turn the key and.... Nothing.

It won't turn over.

And if you keep trying, you'll run the risk of flooding it.

Flooding the car? That is going to keep you out on the road (or in the parking lot) even longer.

Making you late in dropping the neighbor kids off... and *even* later in getting home.

The case above is sadly all too common and it's because most people don't understand that the battery and alternator keep charge and power going throughout the vehicle. This post will discuss how to prevent this from happening and keep your car starting reliably every time.

### **Average battery life & beyond**

The alternators and batteries are especially important in newer vehicles with all the electronics that are built into modern cars.

Generally speaking, an alternator is part of the charging and starting system in cars. Two other components to the charging system are the voltage regulator and the battery. We tell people all the time that your average life expectancy of a battery in the Seattle area is between 52-60 months.

Your alternator works to keep the battery up to a certain charge level to maintain all that you've got going on in the car over time.

These three components work together in your vehicle. The alternator, specifically, is where the electrical energy is created. And the alternator has a lot to do with keeping the battery charged so it can start the engine.

Once your alternator starts getting weak and not be able to keep that voltage up, that's when the battery starts to go because it's working too hard and can't keep up to that needed level of charge.

Then, when you keep driving a vehicle with weakening batteries, well, that makes the alternator charge too much.

This is when your alternator is going to get too hot and fail prematurely.

### **How can you preserve your alternator?**

Replace the batteries regularly.

People often don't want to believe that they need a battery because they feel it's too expensive.

They feel this way all the way up until the moment they learn that their car needs a new alternator.

### **Costs context: battery vs. alternator**

A \$150 battery may feel like a pinch, for sure, but let's compare that to a \$700+ alternator replacement cost.

Which would you rather pay?

### **How will I know if an alternator could be the issue?**

Pretend you're driving down the road and you start to lose power and the lights come on.

Let's say you stop the car and turn it all the way off, but then it won't turn back on.

That could *potentially* be an alternator that is not charging the battery.

Or if your car, truck, or SUV won't start and the battery is a fairly new one, you may have an alternator that's not able to keep the battery up to the needed power.

Another issue happens when your alternator belt is slipping, it can cause the alternator to not produce optimal power.

### **One more thing... recalls**

We've recently had a few cars in our shop with some frightening alternator replacement needs. A few makes and models have been under safety recall and people have ignored the notifications only to have their alternator catch fire. Really scary. So, please, don't ignore the recalls!

Regular maintenance and priority checklists will save you money over time.

This is part of the expert service we offer at Tom's Automotive Services, located just a few blocks off of the West Seattle Bridge.

We'd love to help keep you and your family safe on the roads with regular, guaranteed vehicle maintenance and repairs. Schedule your next service with us today. Don't wait until it's too late, come and see us.