

Top 10 Signs of Transmission Trouble

1. Refuses to Go Into Gear: It may happen when trying to get into first gear from a stop, or at any point up and down the assorted gears. Common causes include low transmission fluid, wrong viscosity (thickness) of fluid, or require adjusting of the shift cables or clutch linkage.

2. Burning Smell: This may indicate your transmission is overheating. Transmission fluid not only keeps the transmissions many moving parts properly lubricated, but it prevents the unit from burning itself up by providing much-needed cooling.

Common causes include low or inadequate transmission fluid, which can in turn indicate a leak or dirty fluid that needs changing.

3. Noisy Transmission in Neutral: Sounds could have a simple and inexpensive solution, as with many of the problems on our list, adding or replacing the transmission fluid sometimes does the trick. Bear in mind that as is the case with engine oil, different vehicles do best with the specific formulation called for in the owner's manual. Alternatively, lots of noises from the transmission while it's in neutral could signal something more serious, like mechanical wear that will need replacement of parts. In this case, common culprits are a worn reverse idler gear or worn bearings, possibly coupled with worn gear teeth.

4. Slipping Gears: in a normally functioning transmission, the car stays in the gear you designate, or that the computer designates for a given RPM range, until you or the computer initiate a gear shift. When you mash the gas pedal to avoid an out-of-control vehicle, the thing you want is a transmission that doesn't get power to the wheels. No need to scratch your head over whether this is trouble or not: if it happens, you know it's time to have your transmission examined.

5. Dragging Clutch: Here's another transmission trouble sign that haunts manual transmission drivers, the dreaded dragging clutch. A dragging clutch is one that fails to disengage the clutch disk from the flywheel when the driver pushes in the clutch pedal.

When the driver attempts to shift gears, they cannot because the still-engaged clutch is still spinning along with the engine. The driver is abruptly made aware of this by grinding noise that ensues with each attempt to shift. More often than not the problem is too much slack in the clutch pedal.

6. Leaking Fluid: Automatic: Leaking transmission fluid is probably one of the easiest ways to identify that your transmission needs attention. Automatic transmission fluid is vital to your car's shifting capabilities, so a little fluid on your driveway can quickly turn into a major problem. Automatic transmission fluid, typically bright red, is clear and a little sweet smelling when everything is working correctly.

When you check your automatic transmission fluid, make sure it is not a dark color and that it doesn't have a burnt smell. If it is, you'll need to take it to a transmission specialist and have it checked or replaced. Manual: If you have a manual transmission, checking the fluid levels may not be as easy as simply lifting the hood and reading a dipstick. Manual transmission fluid has to be checked right at the transmission case, usually through the fill plug.

Again, if you suspect your transmission is losing fluid have a transmission specialist locate the leak and have it repaired properly.

7. Check Engine or Overdrive Light is on or Flashing: These Lights can be a great early indicator that something is starting to go wrong with your transmission. In newer vehicles these are sensors throughout the engine that pick up irregularities in the engine and notify the computer that there's something wrong

in a particular area. In the case of transmissions, these sensors can pick up vibrations and early problems that you may not even be able to feel or see.

8. Grinding or Shaking: Depending on whether you have a manual or automatic transmission, your vehicle may respond differently when your transmission isn't working correctly. With a manual transmission, a common sign of trouble is a grinding sound or feeling when you shift into a gear. If you fully engage the clutch, shift and then hear a grinding sound, you may have a worn clutch or you may just need to have it adjusted. For automatic transmissions problems, you'll most likely feel the vehicle shimmy into each gear rather than the typical almost unnoticeable shifts, or the transmission will make a jarring transition into the next gear.

9. Whining, Clunking and Humming: It's difficult to nail down exactly how your vehicle may sound if there's transmission trouble, but one thing's pretty certain, you'll probably get a that-doesn't-sound-right feeling when you hear it. Every vehicle is built differently, so the sounds they produce can vary greatly. If you have an automatic transmission, there's a good chance you may hear a whining or humming or even slight buzzing sound. With a manual transmission, the sounds will usually come across as a bit more abrupt and mechanical sounding. If you shift gears and hear a clunking sound, then you definitely need to have it checked out by a transmission specialist. But a clunking sound from underneath your vehicle may not always point to a transmission problem. Your constant velocity joints (CV Joints), or even your differential could be the culprit. The sounds you hear may happen from time to time at first, but if you neglect these noises, they'll occur more frequently as time goes on and could possibly cause more damage.

10. Lack of Response: Transmissions are designed to go into the correct gear every time, so when they hesitate or refuse to go into gear, it's a sure sign there's something wrong. With manual transmission problems, you may notice after shifting into a gear that the vehicle's engine will rev up, but the vehicle won't be moving as quickly as the engine is running. In this case, a worn-out clutch or more serious transmission problem may be occurring. Automatic transmissions can have the same lack of response problem, but will usually manifest the issue while engaging the "Park" or "Drive" selection. The vehicle should shift quickly into either of these modes, but if your transmission hesitates to go into either one, this could be an indicator that something could be going on with your transmission.