

What Are the Symptoms of a Starter Going Bad?

A car starter motor is responsible for supplying the physical force necessary to help start a car's engine. By engaging and spinning a car's engine flywheel, a starter motor performs a vital automotive function. This function becomes all too apparent when a starter motor fails.

No-Start Condition

A bad starter motor will often times present itself when a car fails to crank over (engine fails to turn). The car battery supplies the car starter motor with the [power](#) to turn, or start, the engine. If the car starter motor is faulty, it will not be able to utilize the power from the car battery, resulting in a no-start condition.

Starter Noise

Many times a bad starter motor will make noise (clanking, clicking, or grinding) when the ignition key is turned and the starter is engaged. This type of starter noise is normally indicative of a starter motor that is worn and about to fail.

Starter Solenoid Dysfunction

A starter solenoid, which is a small mechanical attachment located on the top of a starter motor housing, is responsible for engaging and disengaging the starter gear with the engine flywheel. Many times the starter solenoid will wear out or fail, rendering the actual starter motor (which may still be functioning) ineffective.

Starter Solenoid Smell/Smoke

A burnt smell and/or smoke coming from a starter motor is indicative of an electrical problem with the electrical wires and connections within a starter motor. Battery power is carried directly to a starter motor via a series of small electrical wires that attach directly to the starter solenoid. Any problem with these wires can cause a short, which can cause a burnt smell and/or smoke.

Non-Retracting Starter Gear

A rare, but serious, starter motor problem involves a non-retracting starter motor gear. After a car's ignition system is activated and the starter motor engages with the engine flywheel, the starter gear is supposed to retract to its original "non-activated" position after a car starts running. A starter gear that does not retract is a sign that a starter motor is bad and needs to be replaced.