



Squealing Noise — What It Usually Is, and What It Costs

How real visits for a squeal ended at independent shops across the US — the part actually replaced, how often, and what it cost when it was the only fix.

Serpentine belt or drive belt

Nearly half of all these visits end in one of these two

Serpentine belt **\$120 – \$292**

Drive belt **\$111 – \$321**

typical cost when it was the only fix
(parts + labor)

THE FIX INVOLVED	SHARE OF THESE VISITS*	TYPICAL COST†	MEDIAN
Serpentine belt	46.9%	\$120 – \$292	\$182
Drive belt	28.7%	\$111 – \$321	\$185
Brake pads	8.4%	\$223 – \$554	\$355
Water pump	8.1%	\$261 – \$651	\$394
Power steering	7.7%	\$142 – \$510	\$289
Alternator	7.3%	\$302 – \$563	\$414
Brake rotors	5.7%	\$194 – \$447	\$303
Idler arm / pulley	4.4%	\$116 – \$344	\$198
A/C compressor	2.2%	\$337 – \$988	\$677
Other, rarer causes	smaller shares — pulley bearings, power-steering pumps, water pumps, brake wear indicators	varies	—

*Share of visits whose repair involved this part; combined repairs count toward each part, so shares overlap and don't add to 100%. †Middle half of real invoices when this was the only fix — parts + labor, all vehicle types.

WHICH ONE IS YOURS? LISTEN FIRST

- **Squeal at startup or with the A/C** — A squeal on cold start that fades, or one that appears when the A/C or steering loads up, is belt territory: a glazed or loose serpentine belt, a tired tensioner, or a drying pulley bearing.
- **Squeal while rolling that stops when you brake** — That's the brake-pad wear indicator, not the belt — the brakes-squeaking records tell that story, and catching it at the squeal stage is what keeps rotors off the bill.
- **Squeal under the squeal** — A belt that keeps squealing after replacement is a message: something it drives is dragging — commonly the water pump, alternator, or power-steering pump bearings, the heavier outcomes in this family.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE SHOP

Expect the shop to run the engine and load the accessories — a squeal that changes with the A/C or steering is the belt, tensioner or a pulley. A squeal that stops when you brake is brake pads, a different job. If a new belt still squeals, something it drives is dragging — ask which.

ABOUT THIS DATA · HOW TO USE THIS BRIEF

Vehicles **all makes and models, US fleet**

Data confidence **High** — *large sample, stable shares*

Records through **July 2026**, refreshed continuously

Source **paid invoices from independent US repair shops**

Take it to the shop. It tells you what the likely answers are and what each one should cost — so when the diagnosis comes back, you already know whether the number fits. Vehicle-specific price reports for the common fixes are on fixdozer.com.

NOT A DIAGNOSIS This brief describes how other owners' visits for a squeal ended. Your vehicle, its history and the shop's testing decide yours. FixDozer does not perform repairs and receives nothing from shops.