



Engine Ticking or Knocking — What It Usually Is, and What It Costs

How real visits for an engine tick 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 water pump

About a third of all these visits end in one of these two

Serpentine belt **\$120 – \$292**

Water pump **\$261 – \$651**

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

THE FIX INVOLVED	SHARE OF THESE VISITS*	TYPICAL COST†	MEDIAN
Serpentine belt	20.8%	\$120 – \$292	\$182
Water pump	16.2%	\$261 – \$651	\$394
Drive belt	13.8%	\$111 – \$321	\$185
Alternator	10.3%	\$302 – \$563	\$414
Timing components	8.9%	\$261 – \$587	\$390
Exhaust component	6.7%	\$117 – \$476	\$232
Power steering	5.5%	\$142 – \$510	\$289
Brake pads	5.2%	\$223 – \$554	\$355
Brake rotors	4.1%	\$194 – \$447	\$303
Other, rarer causes	smaller shares — exhaust manifold leaks, lifters, injectors, low oil	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

- **Tick that follows engine speed** — A tick that speeds up exactly with RPM and changes when accessories load is usually a pulley, tensioner, belt, or water-pump bearing — the accessory family that dominates these visits.
- **Tick loudest on cold start** — A cold tick that fades as the engine warms is often a small exhaust-manifold leak sealing itself as the metal expands — or lifters waiting for oil pressure.
- **Deep knock under load** — A hard, deep knock that gets worse under acceleration is the serious end — timing components or the bottom end.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE SHOP

Expect an oil-level check first — a tick from low oil is the cheapest fix on this list. Then a listen with the engine loaded: pulleys and accessories are the common answers, an exhaust manifold leak the classic cold-start tick. A deep knock under load is the serious tail; stop driving and get it heard.

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.