



Car Overheating — What It Usually Is, and What It Costs

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

Thermostat or radiator

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

Thermostat **\$165 – \$408**

Radiator **\$189 – \$624**

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

THE FIX INVOLVED	SHARE OF THESE VISITS*	TYPICAL COST†	MEDIAN
Thermostat	41.1%	\$165 – \$408	\$262
Radiator	32.7%	\$189 – \$624	\$401
Water pump	20.2%	\$261 – \$651	\$394
Hose	12.4%	\$103 – \$387	\$207
Serpentine belt	9.5%	\$120 – \$292	\$182
Radiator hose	8.5%	\$130 – \$386	\$234
Drive belt	5.1%	\$111 – \$321	\$185
Head gasket	4.9%	\$253 – \$1,418	\$822
Sensor	3.7%	\$180 – \$433	\$287
Other, rarer causes	smaller shares — cooling fans, hoses, head gaskets, temperature sensors	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

- **Overheats in traffic, fine on the highway** — Idle-only overheating points at airflow — radiator fans or a clogged radiator core — because at speed the wind does the fans' job.
- **Overheats everywhere** — Constant overheating with no visible leak is the thermostat's signature (stuck closed) or a failing water pump not moving coolant.
- **Losing coolant too** — If the level keeps dropping, you're in coolant-leak territory — radiators, hoses, and water pumps lead those outcomes.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE SHOP

Expect a cooling-system pressure test and a check of fan operation before parts are named — overheating has many causes and the cheap ones (thermostat, a hose, low coolant) are worth ruling out first. A head gasket is the expensive answer and should come with a combustion-gas test to prove it. Stop driving an overheating engine; the repair only gets bigger.

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.