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Help Your Car Keep Its Cool

If your car's cooling system isn't working properly, the engine will run hot and destroy the engine parts. Sooner rather than later, the Automotive Parts & Accessories Association (APAA) warns, the engine will have to be replaced.

Why is the cooling system so important? A gallon of gasoline contains about 120,000 BTUs (British Thermal Units). About a third of these are absorbed through the entire cooling system.

"In short," says APAA's Tim Tierney, "nearly one gallon out of every three that your vehicle uses is converted into heat that the cooling system must absorb."

Years ago, car owners were advised to drain the cooling system in the spring. Alcohol then was the most frequently used antifreeze ingredient and it boils at an even lower temperature than clear water.

Engines today carry heavier loads. They frequently drive air conditioning compressors, power accessories, automatic transmissions and higher generation loads. Sometimes they tow camping trailers.

These make the engine run hotter, Tierney points out.

Some car owners remove the engine's thermostat for the summer, he says. "This misconception goes back to the days when car owners drained alcohol-based antifreezes.

"They removed their thermostats thinking that the engine would run a little cooler during the summer months.

"Instead, what it did was harm the engine by causing it to run longer below the temperature for which it was designed. So the engine wore out faster, used more fuel and emitted more pollutants through the tailpipe.

"In short, it never was a good idea."

Tierney says the four key elements in a cool-running engine are the radiator, the radiator cap, the water pump and the tightness of the belt that drives the pump. "The coolant assures that all but the belt will be in shape to do their job more effectively.

"Actually, the cooling system works harder during the summer than during the winter.

"Keeping clean antifreeze solutions in the cooling system is one of the cheapest and most effective preventive maintenance procedures available to realize dependable and low cost-per-mile operation over the life of the vehicle."

Don't Tamper With Emission Controls

Car owners who alter the car's emission control system in the hope of getting better gasoline mileage are warned that it can add to their expenses. It's also illegal.

The Automotive Information Council (AIC) points out that tampering can reduce the efficiency of the engine system by upsetting the balance of the elements. Result: Lessened fuel economy and performance.

In addition, at trade-in time a dealer might deduct the cost of restoring the emission devices in order for him to sell the car within Environmental protection Agency regulations.

Tampering also could void warranty coverage of the engine and its components.

And tampering will add to air pollution. Motorists are warned not to substitute leaded fuel in cars which require non-leaded gasoline because it can clog and ruin the expensive catalytic converter. Enlarging the gas filter neck to allow use of leaded gasoline is considered tampering, as is use of a non-certified carburetor.

Emission control is part of the total design and function of the engine, including the carburetor, distributor, fuel pump, manifold and others. If one of these is altered, it likely will affect the others, usually adversely.

The EPA considers tampering as removing, disconnecting, damaging or in any way rendering ineffective any emission-control device or element of design installed on a vehicle.

These include the engine items mentioned, plus the catalytic converter, air pump, vacuum lines and other.

For maximum operating efficiency and economy, the Automotive Information Council urges motorists to follow common-sense driving habits and to follow the maintenance schedule outlined in the owner's manual.

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