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Checked your oil lately?

Are you one of the growing number of car owners who seldom checks your oil between changes? If so, you could be in danger of engine trouble.

Low oil levels cause increased wear of internal engine parts, reduced fuel efficiency and lower horsepower. These problems occur because, over time, oil viscosity increases, which means the oil becomes thick and sticky. Kendall Motor Oil researchers have found that, if a car is one quart low on oil, viscosity increases dramatically, and oil has trouble flowing to engine parts.

Because this sludgy oil flows less easily, the engine can become starved for oil, increasing friction, corrosion and wear. This can eventually lead to engine failure.

"If you were to check the oil levels in cars on the road today, you would find that more than half of them would be at least one quart low — amazingly, some even two quarts," says Keith Bator, a Kendall Motor Oil engineer.

Reasons for low oil levels

There are several reasons for these low oil levels. One reason is that new cars use less oil than older models. People will usually check the oil several times after purchasing a car, and then cease checking when they notice that oil levels are consistent.

These new car owners fail to realize that, as time goes on, their engines will consume more oil, increasing chances for engine failure. Kendall engineers remind motorists that, as a car ages, it is even more important to check the oil level with each gas fill-up.

"The more miles that are put on an oil, the more consumption you will experience," says a Kendall engineer. Your engine may also develop an oil leak, so it is important to monitor oil levels closely.

Another reason that today's automobiles are low on oil is the disappearance of full-service gas stations. There are few stations that still check your oil when you pull in for gas. Consequently, there is no constant reminder of the importance of maintaining a proper oil level.

Checking your oil is a quick and simple procedure. You will need only an old cloth or a paper towel, and motor oil to add if the level is low. Make sure the car is on level ground and has been turned off for at least 15 minutes. This will allow all oil to drain into the oil pan for an accurate reading.

How to check oil

Step One: Locate the dipstick (a thin metal rod with a circular, ring-like handle showing, usually near the middle-front of the motor.)

Step Two: Pull the dipstick out completely and wipe off the oil-coated end with the cloth. Re-insert the dipstick so that it is all the way back in place.

Step Three: Remove the dipstick again and read the oil level according to the marks indicating the proper fill range.

If the level is low, you will need to add oil by pouring the amount needed into a separate filler tube or opening, often with a cap marked "oil" (check your owner's manual for the exact location). Kendall engineers recommend a premium SAE 5W-30, 10W-30 or 10W-40, such as Kendall Superb® 100, because these multi-grade oils are made for year-round use. They easily adapt to a wide range of temperatures.

Costly engine repairs are less likely with proper care. So remember, check your oil level frequently, add more oil if the level is low, and change your oil every 3,000 miles. These simple steps will prolong the life of your engine.

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