

Why Should You Change Your Oil?

There it is again. It glows, very much like a mean red eye staring you down when you get behind the wheel. Hey. Psst. You there. Change your oil. Do it now. It won't go away on its own. The longer you ignore it, the brighter it gets, as if to tell you that your vehicle is warming up for a major breakdown.

Let it get to that point, and you'll realize -- there's a reason it's called an idiot light. After all, the first step to successful vehicle maintenance is simple: do it. The second is even easier: do it exactly as you're told to by your technician and in your owner's manual.

It makes good sense. Yet for many people it's an ongoing challenge. The cost of an oil change won't usually break the bank; therefore the number #1 excuse is the convenience factor. You don't have the time or forget to get it done. So when you put it off you create the scenario you most dread - a major repair costing thousands of dollars.

Unfortunately, fear and loathing is to be expected. We've all had at least one experience with price gouging or unnecessary repairs. This is the best reason to find a reputable repair shop.

Some people think they save money if they do their own oil changes. Sure you can purchase the oil and filter from your local department store, put your vehicle up on jack stands, drain the oil and replace the filter while lying on your back in the dirt, but, that may only save you \$10.00, not to mention, you have to properly dispose of the old oil and filter. Ultimately, you're doing your vehicle a disservice. When your vehicle is up on the lift at the repair shop, trained professional technicians take this opportunity to look over many of the vehicles critical components, analyzing the condition of these components and advising as to the overall condition of the vehicle. That in itself is well worth the added few dollars not to mention the peace of mind you get by knowing the true condition and concerns of your vehicle.

The two most important things a car owner should do is keep his or her car serviced as per recommended service intervals, find an auto repair shop they can trust - and stick with them. It's important to follow the automaker's service schedule because it is a good way to discover potential manufacturing defects. Part of the factory-scheduled service is designed to help keep a car running correctly.

How often should you change your oil?

Most vehicle manufacturers recommend changing the oil twice a year or every 6000 miles in passenger car and light truck gasoline engines. For diesel engines and turbocharged gasoline engines, the usual recommendation is every 3,000 miles or three months.

If you read the fine print, however, you'll discover that the twice a year, 6000 mile oil change is for vehicles that are driven under ideal circumstances. What most of us think of as "normal" driving is actually "severe service" driving. This includes frequent short trips (less than 10 miles, especially during cold weather), stop-and-go city traffic driving, driving in dusty conditions (gravel roads, etc.), and driving at sustained highway speeds during hot weather. For this type of driving, which is actually "severe service: driving, the recommendation is to change the oil every 3,000 miles or three months. For maximum protection, most oil companies say to change the oil every 3,000 miles or three months regardless of what type of driving you do.

A new engine with little or no wear can probably get by on 6000 mile oil changes. But as an engine accumulates miles, "blowby" increases. This dumps more unburned fuel into the crankcase which dilutes the oil. This causes the oil to break down. So if the oil isn't changed often enough, you can end up with accelerated wear and all the engine problems that come with it (loss of performance and fuel economy, and increased emissions and oil consumption).

Regular oil changes for preventative maintenance are cheap insurance against engine wear, and will always save you money in the long run if you keep a car for more than three or four years. It's very uncommon to see an engine that has been well maintained with regular oil changes develop major bearing, ring, cam or valve problems under 100,000 miles.

What About The Oil Filter?

To reduce the costs of vehicle ownership and maintenance, many car makers say the oil filter only needs to be replaced at every other oil change. Our auto technicians will tell you this is false economy.

The oil filters on most engines today have been downsized to save weight, cost and space. The "standard" quart-sized filter that was once common on most engines has been replaced by a pint-sized (or smaller) filter. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that a smaller filter has less total filtering capacity. Even so, the little filters should be adequate for a 3,000 mile oil change intervals -- but may run out of capacity long before a second oil change at 6,000 or more miles. **Replacing the oil filter every time the oil is changed, therefore, is highly recommended.**

An engine's main line of defense against abrasion and the premature wear it causes is the oil filter. The filter's job is to remove solid contaminants such as dirt, carbon and metal particles from the oil before they can damage bearing, journal and cylinder wall surfaces in the engine. The more dirt and other contaminants the filter can trap and hold, the better.

In today's engines, all the oil that's picked up by the oil pump is routed through the filter before it goes to the crankshaft bearings, cam bearings and valve train. This is called "full-flow" filtration. It's an efficient way of removing contaminants, and it assures only filtered oil is supplied to the engine. In time, though, accumulated dirt and debris trapped by the filter begin to obstruct the flow of oil. The filter should be changed before it reaches this point, which is why the filter needs to be replaced when the oil is changed.

If you wait too long to change the filter, there's a danger that it might become plugged. To prevent this from causing a catastrophic engine failure due to loss of lubrication, oil filters have a built-in safety device called a "bypass valve." When the pressure drop across the filter exceeds a predetermined value (which varies depending on the engine application), the bypass valve opens so oil can continue to flow to the engine. But this allows unfiltered oil to enter the engine. Any contaminants that find their way into the crankcase will be pumped through the engine and accelerate wear.

This service, like all services performed at Russo's Auto Service and Collision , is advised based on manufacturer's recommendations, or as needed as determined by our inspection and based on industry standards.