

Use right octane fuel to keep engine purring

Dear Tom and Ray: For umpteen years, I have had a choice of 87 octane, 90 octane and 92 octane gas. I always purchased 87 octane because it was the least expensive. And my cars have always performed well on 87 octane.

I now have a car that has a sign on the dash that says "Premium Unleaded Fuel Only." Why does the manufacturer tell me to use 92 octane, and how important is it that I pay attention to this?



Click and Clack Talk Cars

By Tom and Ray Magliozzi

and that's why the manufacturer of your car requires it.

— Norma
Tom: Here's why. The lower the octane, the lower the temperature at which the gasoline explodes in the cylinders. And in certain "high compression" engines like yours, 87 octane gasoline explodes too early, those early explosions are known as "pinging" and they eventually cause engine damage.

Ray: Premium gas (probably 91 or 92 octane, whatever is specified in your owners manual) explodes when it's supposed to in your engine,

complete waste of money.

Ray: And I guess that's the good news we can give you, Norma. You don't have to waste your money springing for 94 octane. You can stick with the cheap, 92 octane.

Dear Tom and Ray: I would like to install platinum-tipped spark plugs in my 1987 Chevrolet Celebrity, but have been told that they will not work in a car that has a fuel-injection system.

I contacted General Motors in Detroit, and they said they only recommend their own spark plugs. Can I use the platinum-tipped plugs?

— Harold
Tom: Sure you can, Harold. GM didn't say the platinum-tipped plugs do any harm; they just said that they only recommend their own brand.

Of course they only recommend their brand. They make money when you buy their brand. If they could get away with it, they'd sell

"genuine" GM air for your tires.

Ray: And GM is not alone. Most manufacturers tell you not to use anything but "genuine" or "original" (fill-in-the-blank) parts and fluids. In general, this is bull feathers. As long as the parts and fluids you use meet or exceed OEM (original equipment manufacturer) specifications for your car, they should be fine.

And the packaging on the product should tell you whether or not that's the case.

Tom: The platinum-tipped plugs simply last a lot longer than conventional plugs. And a lot of new cars—all of which are fuel injected—are using them these days. In fact, if you put platinum-tipped spark plugs into an '87 Celebrity, I'll bet you 20 bucks the plugs outlast the car by at least 50,000 miles!

Dear Tom and Ray: I recently bought a '94 Ford Aspire, and while I'm a long-time Ford owner, I've

never owned a small car. I love my new little car, but I have noticed after starting it, if I turn on the headlights or the fan, the engine speed decreased for a few seconds and the clock display noticeably dims. Power resumes after a few seconds.

Should I take it back to the dealer for service, or is this just a feature of owning a small car?

— Jackie
Ray: You should take it back, Jackie. My guess is that one of the gerbils that powers this car fell off his wheel and needs to be coaxied back on with some gerbil treats.

Tom: Actually, what's happening is that the car is almost stalling.

When you turn on a major accessory like the headlights of the air conditioner (is that what you mean by "fan"?), you suddenly need a lot of power.

And where does the power come from? From the engine.

Ray: And in your case, since the Aspire engine is about the size of a

Singer sewing machine, those accessories demand enough power to drag down the speed of the engine.

Tom: To make sure it doesn't stall under those circumstances, there's a device called the idle speed control which is supposed to automatically boost the engine idle speed.

And it's supposed to work almost instantaneously.

So if yours is taking a few seconds to respond, it's obviously not working properly.

Ray: So the answer is yes, you should ask your dealer to fix the problem. And if he tells you "They all do this," your response should be, "Then they all need to be fixed, and let's start by putting a new idle speed control on mine."

Got a question about cars? Write to Click and Clack Talk Cars in care of The Republic, 333 Second St., Columbus, IN 47201. We can't answer your letter personally but will run the best letters in the column.

Anti-lock braking failures prompt federal investigation

By Robert Manor
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

The anti-lock braking systems on many Chrysler Corp. minivans built in the 1990s have failed, prompting a federal investigation.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration and others involved in auto safety have compiled nearly 2,000 reports of anti-lock brake failure on Chrysler cars and minivans.

Not all failures are reported, and the total number is certain to be much higher.

Although Chrysler has denied that its anti-lock brakes are unsafe, the car maker has also said it does not know why so many are failing.

"We haven't been able to figure that out," said Lindsay Brooke, a spokesman for Chrysler.

Some failures are disquieting but minor. For example, a warning light that inexplicably flashes and a brake pedal that feels soft.

Others are terrifying — total loss of braking without warning.

Most of the failures involve minivans, Chrysler's best-selling vehicle. Safety-conscious drivers often order anti-lock braking systems as an option when buying minivans.

Chrysler would not disclose how many minivans and cars it sold with anti-lock brakes between 1990 and this year, but the number runs into the millions. Trade journals report that last year alone, Chrysler built more than 1 million vehicles with anti-lock braking systems.

Often the brakes fail at low speed, perhaps explaining why no deaths have been reported to the government. Fifty-five accidents and 29 in-

The List

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration is investigating anti-lock braking failures on the following Chrysler vehicles:

Model year 1991 through 1993:

- Plymouth Voyager and Grand Voyager.
- Dodge Caravan, Grand Caravan, and Caravan C/V.
- Chrysler Town and Country minivans.

Model year 1990 through 1993:

- Chrysler New Yorker, Fifth Avenue, Imperial.
- Dodge Monaco and Dynasty.
- Eagle Premier cars.

The agency has also received complaints about anti-lock braking problems on model year 1990, 1994 and 1995 Caravans, Voyagers, Town and Country minivans, and model year 1994 New Yorker and 1995 Neon passenger cars, but has not opened a formal inquiry on those vehicles.

—St. Louis Post-Dispatch

the Dodge Caravan, Plymouth Voyager, Chrysler Town & Country — built at the company's assembly plant in Penton, Mo., and a plant in Canada.

Federal authorities are formally investigating braking problems in 1991 to 1993 minivans, when 318,000 were sold with ABS.

ABS failures are also appearing among the hundreds of thousands of minivans and other Chrysler vehicles for the 1994 and 1995 model years.

The company is using a different anti-lock braking system on the vehicles it builds this year for the '96 model year.

Anti-lock brakes are intended to stop a vehicle from skidding on slick surfaces by applying and releasing brakes many times a second.

Working properly, they provide near normal braking in situations where a car would otherwise go out of control.

Internal Chrysler documents and minutes of a meeting with AlliedSignal, the Chrysler supplier that builds the anti-lock braking system, show Chrysler knew of an unusual number of ABS failures as early as 1992.

In that year, the companies discussed ABS problems that included hard braking and failure of the brakes to slow the car. One Chrysler executive present said the malfunction "was characterized by many people as pedal to the floor."

Government records show that when the pedal sinks to the floor, or ten all braking ceases.

Many times, mechanics can find no reason for the malfunction.



Going, going, gone
Simon Kidston of Coys Auctioneers inspects the 1935 Alfa Romeo 6C 2300 sports car, which originally belonged to Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, at Chiswick House in London. The car, which Mussolini kept until 1939, was auctioned for \$225,000.

Study says little room remains for improving fuel efficiency

By Pat Griffith
The Toledo Blade

WASHINGTON — A study commissioned by the American Iron and Steel Institute has concluded that improvements in fuel efficiency for U.S.-made autos, sport-utility vehicles and light trucks have gone about as far as they can go without imposing significantly higher costs on buyers for no environmental gain.

According to the study, a 30 percent increase in federal Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards would add \$1,500 to the price of a car and more than \$2,000 to a van or light truck and cost American consumers collectively almost \$10 billion a year.

The analysis by Charles River

Associates, a consulting firm that works with many manufacturing and metals industries, was released at a press conference Sunday by representatives of the steel and auto industries.

Thomas Usher, CEO and chairman of USX Corp. and chairman of AISI's board of directors, said it was the first cost-benefit analysis of the likely impact of any new federal mandate to improve fuel standards.

Currently, manufacturers must meet a standard of 27.5 miles per gallon as an average for all the cars they market. For light trucks, the CAFE standard is 20.7 mpg for 1996 and 1997 models.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Office in the Department of Transportation has until next March

to decide on truck standards for the 1998 model year.

The agency has sent out a notice through the federal register asking for worldwide comments on potential standards for light trucks, which includes mini-vans and sport-utility vehicles, going into the next century.

There have been suggestions by some in Congress that the CAFE standard be raised by as much as 25 percent over the next 10 years.

The study done for AISI assumed a 30 percent increase in CAFE standards between 1995 and 2010. Under that scenario, the study concluded that vehicle sales between 2000 and 2010 would drop by approximately 375,000 units a year because of higher costs.

What Affected Owners Should Do

If your Chrysler vehicle is experiencing anti-lock braking problems here is what to do:

- Take the vehicle to a Chrysler dealer immediately. Do not seek repair at an independent shop. ABS problems can be complex and require a factory-trained mechanic.

- If the brake failures are serious — full or partial loss of braking — do not drive the vehicle. Have it towed to a dealer.
- If the vehicle's warranty has expired, remind the dealership that

Chrysler is limiting customers' cost of repairs to \$600. Chrysler says it is making this offer on a case-by-case basis, however, and repairs can otherwise cost as much as \$3,000.

- Appeal to Chrysler if the company declines to limit the cost to \$600. Chrysler's customer service number is (800) 992-1997.

- You can also complain to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration by calling (800) 424-8393. The agency is investigating anti-lock

braking failures involving Chrysler vehicles and is compiling information from consumers to see if a recall is warranted.

- Complaints can also be filed in writing with the Center for Auto Safety at 201 S Street NW, Suite 410, Washington D.C., 20009.

The center, a nonprofit advocacy group, wants Chrysler to recall its vehicles with ABS and pay the entire cost of repair.

—St. Louis Post-Dispatch

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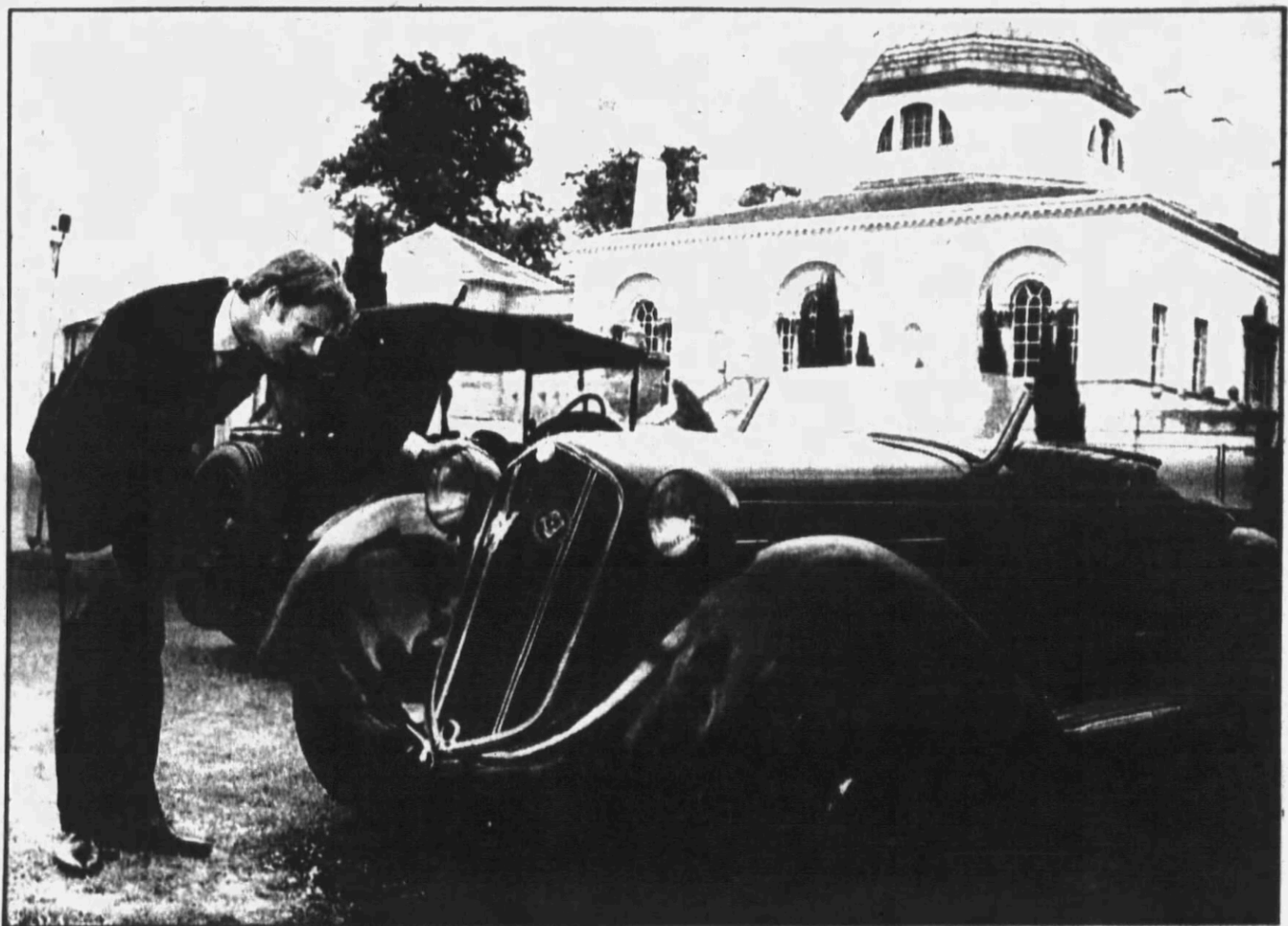
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Associated Press

Going, going, gone

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