

Q&A



Bob Weber is a writer and mechanic who became an ASE-certified Master Automobile Technician in 1976. He maintains this status by seeking certification every five years. Weber's work appears in professional trade magazines and other consumer publications. His writing also appears in automotive trade publications, Consumer Guide and Consumers Digest. Send questions along with name and town to motormouth.tribune@gmail.com.

Q: During the past year, we have driven only once a week to our grocery store, five miles away. One person thinks it would be good for the 2011 Ford Escape to go onto the freeway occasionally, up to speed for a few miles. The other person thinks this is unnecessary because on these cold nights he puts the battery charger on the night before. What do you think?

— M.P., Minneapolis

A: Although driving the vehicle occasionally is not necessary, I still do it just to get a change of scenery on a sunny day. I consider three car lengths adequate for social distancing and I am helping the economy by spending money ... on gas.

Q: I was recently having my car serviced. The dealer did the tire rotation and reported that one of my aluminum wheels was very slightly out of round, a pothole for sure. It was subtle but visible. He asked if I had any issues with driving it. I said no. He suggested replacing the wheel and that would cost almost \$900 for one wheel. He commented that there are aftermarket services that will repair the damage. He also said, that if it's not so bad that you don't notice it, it's probably not that big of a deal. I'm inclined to live with it and evaluate its impact on tire wear.

— T.J., Lake Zurich, Ill.

A: It may simply be cosmetic damage. I would live with it, but I would also keep an eye open for the low tire pressure warning light on the dash. Wheel repair is certainly a money saving option and there are several companies in your area. Some large wheel repair shops may have your wheels in stock and able to ship right away, repair yours and put it in their stock.

Q: I have a 2020 Subaru Forester and it has something called a "vehicle descent assist" feature, which I'd love to use, but, according to the manual, it is designed to turn off when the vehicle reaches 25 mph, which it does! This makes no sense to me. Any thoughts or suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

— M.F., Bristol, Conn.

A: Hill decent control is helpful if you are driving off-road and going down a steep slope. It is not of much good for everyday driving. But if you want to get out and get dirty, you will like it.

Q: I wonder if the Intelligent Q: I own a 2010 Toyota Tacoma truck with 42,000 miles on it. Several years ago, when I had an oil change, the dealership put in synthetic oil instead of regular oil. A couple of months ago, the dealership did the same thing. Will this damage my vehicle? Should I just switch to synthetic?

— M.E., Las Vegas

A: Synthetic oil will certainly not damage your engine. You may use it exclusively if you like. But if you want to switch back to traditional oil recommended in the owner's manual, there will be no harm.

Q: What does it mean to buy a certified car? When I got my used 2018 Toyota Camry SE nearly a year ago, they played up the certified car bit, but I found out later that it does not mean anything. I feel this dealer is doing an injustice to their customers. I tried to get that answer from the dealership manager and others. No one can answer. In their shop no one can answer questions regarding the information on my dash screens. It also jerks when changing gears, but they will not look at it. Toyotas should be great cars, but not this one.

— M.B., Austin, Texas

A: Did you buy the car from a Toyota dealer? Certified Previously Owned cars usually have fewer miles and may have had better care. They usually have extended warranties. CPO cars pass a multipoint inspection to verify that repairs are not imminent. Of course, you will pay a little more than for a comparable car that has no CPO, but it is a more reliable purchase. It sounds like you may have been taken by a not-so-honest used car lot. Independent dealers can slap CPO signs on anything. It is just a meaningless piece of paper.

Q: Oil-Life Management 10,000-mile standard set forth in the owner's manual can be trusted. Will it protect the engine versus the 5,000 mile-standard the dealer recommends? Normal vehicle usage is assumed. Also, my question is whether or not the warranty would be affected.

— P.J., Naperville, Ill.

A: Yes, oil life monitors can be trusted. Automobile manufacturers don't want people to stop buying their vehicles because they break down, so they are careful to put the best information in the owners' manuals. Following the recommendations saves you money while reducing the amount of petrochemical waste. Neither following the monitor nor changing the oil more often will affect the warranty.

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