

“Green” alternatives for car care becoming common

BY TOM TRACEY

Special to the Record-Eagle

Environmentally-friendly products have ventured beyond the organic section of the supermarket and are now available at the local auto parts store.

While some of these products just happen to be easy on the environment: their real strength lies in their superior performance over previous technologies.

Although not everyone is in the market for an electric car, enough customers purchase “green” (when offered a choice) to prompt local retailers to carry these items:

Cars

Currently, three gas-electric hybrid cars are available for consumer purchase: the Honda Insight, the Honda Civic Hybrid and the Toyota Prius. Blending the advantages of easy fuel availability with the low environmental impact of electricity, these hybrids were launched to bridge the gap between pure

electric cars (which were impractical without sufficient charging stations) and pure gasoline cars (which have environmental issues)

Toyota is planning to sell 47,000 Prius cars in 2004 at \$20,500 retail. The Prius gets 60 miles per gallon (city), seats five and may provide a federal tax deduction. See www.toyota.com for details.

Cleaners

The emergence of citrus-based waterless hand cleaners has been especially popular with repair technicians; their natural acidity cuts right through grease, while their non-caustic formula remains gentle on the hands.

Another simple cleaner (which even has “green” as part of its name) has been used to clean automotive metal, plastic, vinyl and even upholstery surfaces for 25 years. Its non-toxic and biodegradable formula was discovered while inventing a milder cleaner for coffee roasters. Composed of water,

surfactants, wetting agents and emulsifiers, this “green” product contains no bleach, ammonia, flammable materials, formaldehyde or petroleum distillates. As an all-purpose spray cleaner, degreaser and deodorizer, it can be used as a safer alternative to hazardous and toxic cleaners for removing grease, oil and dirt. More details are available at www.simplegreen.com.

Coolants

Conventional coolants have the unfortunate duality of being highly attractive to animals yet highly toxic to their systems.

By replacing traditional ethylene glycol with synthetic propylene glycol, coolant manufacturers have given an added margin of safety to pets and wildlife. The propylene glycol formula offers similar protection against corrosion, boil-over, and freeze-up as conventional antifreezes. Even better, their low toxicity protects unsuspecting animals from ingesting a lethal dose

(as little as a few spoonfuls) due to a leaking radiator hose or inadvertent splash-over during filling. See www.prestone.com for details.

Lubricants

Synthetic motor oil is an example of a win-win situation over conventional petroleum oil. Even after refining, some debris (such as asphalt) remains in conventional oil, only to reappear later in the engine as sludge and exhaust emissions. The superior cleanliness and temperature stability (from minus 54 to plus 400 degrees Fahrenheit) of synthetic oil keeps engines running cleaner, cooler, longer and more economically than conventional oil.

In fact, performance cars such as the Corvette, Viper and all Porsches leave the factory filled with synthetic oil, as do three-quarters of NASCAR vehicles. However, customers may balk at the initial price (four times higher per quart than conventional oil), until they factor in sav-

ings on gas and engine life.

Other synthetic lubricants are also increasingly being recommended for such applications as rear differentials in tow vehicles and transfer cases in four-wheel drive vehicles due to their superior performance in extreme conditions. Information is available at www.mobil1.com.

Recyclers

One way to reduce contaminants is to avoid producing them altogether. By obtaining replacement parts from an auto parts recycler, a good part is put back in service, and resources are saved for future use. Even non-serviceable parts such as dead batteries and worn tires get a second chance at life when their inert materials are salvaged for other uses. In Traverse City, contact Bay Area Collision at 929-1809 or Gene's Auto Parts at 943-8044 or at their Web site:

www.genesautoparts.com.

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