

# Under the Hood



The newsletter of CATHERINE'S Auto Repair & Service

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1916 Piedmont Circle, N.E.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30324  
404.875.7212

**Northside Location**  
1172 Northside Drive, N.W.  
Atlanta, GA 30318  
404.817.7640

SPRING 2003

## OUR MISSION:

To provide high quality auto repair with integrity, honesty, and excellent customer service, all at a fair price and with a personal touch!

## catherine's corner

Welcome to the first edition of our quarterly newsletter! Our goal with this newsletter is to provide you with useful information about your vehicle - including maintenance, repair, driving safety, buying a used car, etc - so that you can make educated decisions to serve your best interest. We will also update you on any changes in our business, upcoming car care classes, and current specials. We hope you find this helpful and enjoyable to read. Please give us your feedback or let us know if you have topics that you'd like to see addressed; stop by, call or e-mail: [cs@catherinesautorepair.com](mailto:cs@catherinesautorepair.com).



photo by Fred Bennett

*Catherine*

## The 3,000-Mile Oil Change - Maintenance or Myth?

by Catherine Simpson

How often should you have your oil and filter changed? All the "quick lube" places tell you 3 months or 3000 miles. Clark Howard challenges that, and says you may be able to go at least 5000 miles. Your owner's manual may indicate your vehicle is fine for 7,500 miles. Why all the differing opinions, and more importantly, who should you listen to? Well, the short answer is - it depends!

One fact that the automotive industry will agree on is the importance of regular oil changes to prolong the life of your engine. But just how regular those oil changes need to be varies due to several factors. First, and often most confusing, is the issue of "normal vs. severe" driving conditions. Most owner manuals will have two different maintenance schedules based on these definitions - with "normal" allowing

for less frequent servicing, and "severe" requiring heavier service. Many customers tell us, "Oh, I don't drive too much, just around town," assuming that puts them in the less severe category, when usually the exact opposite is true.

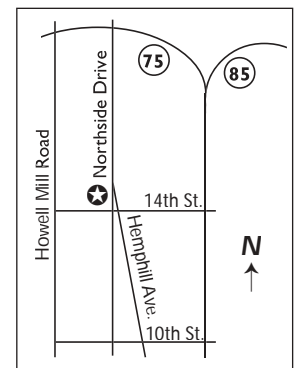
Ideal, or "normal", driving conditions - in other words, what your engine prefers - is trips over 10 miles, cruising on the highway, at moderate temperatures and loads, in a relatively clean-air environment. If your driving habits fit this category, you may not need your oil changed as often. "Severe" driving consists of short or frequent trips less than 10 miles, extreme outdoor temperatures, stop-and-go city driving or extensive idling in traffic, towing or heavy loads, and a dusty or polluted environment. If any of this description fits your driving profile, then your engine would appreciate more frequent oil changes.

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## "braking" news

### We're expanding!

Catherine's Auto Repair is opening a second shop! Our new location is at 1172 Northside Drive, near the corner of 14th Street. We have been so busy at the current location that we decided it was time to expand. This will allow us to serve you better with a quicker turn-around time for repairs and service (those of you who have had to contend with our recent 3-day backlog can appreciate this). We promise to continue our same commitment to quality, honesty, and service at a fair price at both shops. We've hired several excellent new technicians, we're moving in some new equipment, and we should be up and running by mid-March. Stop by and say "hi" or give us a call to make an appointment at 404-817-7640!



Treat your car to  
**Catherine's Specials -**  
See Inside...

# Grand Opening Special!

# \$17.99

(includes oil change, lube & filter)

Valid at New Location Only  
Expires May 31, 2003

## shop talk

### Online Appointment Scheduling NOW Available!



If you are one of the many who prefer to do everything online these days, check out our website for our new appointment scheduling. You can set an appointment for yourself at either shop, and then choose to receive an e-mail reminder. Go to [www.catherinesautorepair.com](http://www.catherinesautorepair.com). However, for those of you who still prefer the good old fashioned telephone, we welcome your call.

### Catherine's Receives AAA - Approved Repair Shop Designation!

This past October, Catherine's Auto Repair received the stamp of approval from AAA. They randomly surveyed a number of our customers to ensure that we had a high satisfaction rating (ours was 98%), and they inspected our shop for safety, cleanliness, and the latest in diagnostic tools and equipment. They also require that most of the technicians have some ASE certification; this was easy for us as the majority of our techs are Master certified. We are pleased to be one of the few shops in the metro Atlanta area to be AAA-approved.



## tech tips

As we're finding the rainy season now upon us, don't forget to inspect your wiper blades. Are they old, cracked, and brittle? Do they leave streaks across your windshield, reducing visibility? It's a good idea to replace your wiper blades at least once a year. And try applying some Rain-X or paste car wax on your windshield; it creates a protective barrier, allowing the water to form beads and roll off. This will make your wiper blades even more effective, leaving you with a clear view.



## cover story

Continued from cover

How do these different driving conditions affect the engine oil? Driving with the engine cold or under heavy loads, for example, requires more gas; but this excess gas can result in unburned fuel slipping past the engine piston rings, and contaminating the oil. Also, normal condensation in the engine crankcase does not sufficiently burn off when the engine is not allowed to reach and/or stay at operating temperature due to short driving trips. This moisture accumulation causes "sludge" buildup over time, which can clog oil passages and damage the engine.

These same combustion by-products that contaminate engine oil more easily with "severe" driving conditions also usually increase in older cars and/or higher mileage engines. Newer cars tend to have improved emission controls that produce cleaner running engines and don't contaminate the oil as quickly. The same holds true for well-maintained cars; an old air or fuel filter and worn-out spark plugs will create more contaminants that can make the oil dirty and abrasive.

Then there's also the dreaded "months vs. miles" question, and which is best to follow. Let's say six months have passed since your last oil change, but you have only driven 3,000 miles.



Look at the nature of those miles - are they low because you took MARTA to work and let your car sit in your driveway most of the time? Or did you drive 15 miles every day, but sit in traffic for over an hour to make those miles? If so, remember that your engine is working just as hard idling during that hour as it would be accumulating miles. It would be more accurate if there was a way we could measure oil change intervals by number of engine revolutions rather than by miles.

Another factor in this debate is your long-term goal with your vehicle. For example, do you like to trade in your car for a newer model every three years, or do you plan on still having your car 8 years from now, or more? If you are the type who wants an engine to last as long as possible, frequent oil changes are your best bet. But if you rarely keep a vehicle with a mile over 30,000, then long-term preventive maintenance is probably not your biggest concern. However, one thing to remember is that proof of regular maintenance can increase your car's re-sale value to an individual, as well as uphold your manufacturer's warranty.

The type of oil you use - regular or synthetic - also comes into play here. We won't examine the pros and cons in this article of which to use as that is a much lengthier discussion. However, most automotive experts contend that the oil change interval can be extended safely up to 10,000 miles when using synthetic oil.

One more point to bear in mind is that an "oil change" is usually more than just replacing your engine oil and filter. It's a time for your fluids to be checked and topped off; tire pressures to be adjusted; belts and hoses to be inspected. If

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you regularly do your own 21-point inspection, then frequent trips to a repair shop or oil change facility may not be as high a priority for you. But if a tire gauge and a transmission dipstick are foreign items to you, regular visits to a mechanic that you trust may give you peace-of-mind. Granted, you could schedule regular car check-ups without having the oil changed, but the cost would end up about the same.

Now let's do some math. Over a period of 100,000 miles (which is 8 years for the average driver), following the 3,000-mile interval will result in 33 oil changes. Assuming the average price of an oil change (using regular, not synthetic, motor oil) to be \$20-\$25, the total cost will be \$660-\$825. Increasing the interval to 5,000 miles and 20 oil changes, the total cost decreases to \$400 - \$500. And the respective numbers for a 7,500-interval are 13 oil changes at a cost of \$260 - \$325. The greatest possible savings are \$565 which, when divided over an 8-year period, averages out to less than \$6 per month. This cost can be viewed as cheap insurance against a possible \$4000 replacement engine. (There is an environmental angle to consider here as well: some argue that it is a waste of natural resources to replace your oil and filter more than is necessary, but others assert that infrequent oil changes contribute to decreased fuel economy and increased emissions.)

We at Catherine's Auto Repair recommend replacing your engine oil and filter every 3 months or 3,000 miles as a general guideline. But you are the one who needs to take into account your individual circumstances and personality type. What are your driving habits and environment? How old is your car and how well do you maintain it? How long do you intend to keep your vehicle, and are you concerned with the re-sale value? What kind of oil do you use? Do you perform routine inspections on your car, or rely on your repair shop for that service? Where do you place yourself on the "fear factor" spectrum with respect to your car, i.e., would you rather play it safe and maybe pay a bit extra, or do you favor saving some money while knowing there are some risks? And finally, are you a procrastinator? If you aim for a 3,000-mile interval, will you eventually get around to it by 4,000? If your goal is 7,500, will you push it as far as 10,000? You are the only one who can weigh all these considerations, and then make a decision that will serve you and your vehicle best. 🔧



## car care classes

The response to our recent car care class was so great that we've decided to offer it on a regular basis. This is a very basic class which will cover some hands-on learning such as how to jump start a car; how to change a flat tire; how to check your tire pressures; how to check your fluids, belts, hoses, etc. We will also take you on a "tour" of a car, allowing you to see the various components under the car and under the hood. And finally we will discuss how you can get the most out of your experience as a vehicle owner - including preventive maintenance (what to do and when), understanding the noises and warning lights in your car, how to handle a car emergency, tips on buying a used car, and much more! The upcoming class is open to men, women, and teenagers and will be held on **Saturday, April 26 from 9 am until noon**, at the Piedmont location. Please call to sign up as space is limited, 404-875-7212. There will be no charge for this class. For those of you who expressed an interest in a more advanced class, and another women-only class, we will keep you posted on new developments.



photo by Rebecca Godbey



photo by Rebecca Godbey

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• **Annual Maintenance**

• **Package**

• **\$ 9 9**

• Includes up to 4 oil changes

• 2 tire rotations and balancing

• 1 alignment (over \$200 value)

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• **Valid for 1 year**

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Make your next appointment online!  
[www.catherinesautorepair.com](http://www.catherinesautorepair.com)

## at the watercooler

**W**e are really going to miss Ryan! He is currently on leave as his National Guard Reserve Unit has been mobilized for active duty. Many of you have met Ryan, an ASE Master certified technician, since he has been with us from the beginning. We'll be keeping him in our thoughts and prayers, and hoping for his safe and speedy return.

A lot of you have asked about Kim, our part-time office manager. She gave birth to a healthy baby boy last September, and has returned from maternity leave. She and Reese are both doing very well, and we are happy to have her back!

Also quite a few of you have wondered how Fred, one of our other "original" Master technicians, is doing. He broke his leg in an accident in late October (it wasn't an on-the-job accident), and was absent through mid-January. He is healing slowly but surely, and isn't quite ready to be working on cars again, but is glad to be helping out up front with the customers and the telephone. We're certainly glad to have him back too!

Want to find out more about our employees? Check out our website to see their pictures and bios. The newest employees will be added soon, so keep checking back.

## car quiz

**Q:** What does the letter "W" in 5W30, 10W30, 10W40, etc. stand for?

- a. weather
- b. weight
- c. winter
- d. work

**A:** Although many people believe the "W" stands for weight, it actually stands for winter. The numbers refer to the oil viscosity (which is a measurement of the oil's resistance to flow at specific temperatures). The higher the number, the more resistant to flow (i.e., thicker) the oil will be at high temperatures; and conversely, the lower the number is, the more easily the oil will flow (i.e., thinner) at colder temperatures. The "W" or "winter" designation after the first viscosity rating indicates that the oil meets the Society of Automotive Engineers low temperature requirements. Multi-grade oil protects your engine in both cold and hot extremes.

[www.catherinesautorepair.com](http://www.catherinesautorepair.com)



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**2nd Location NOW OPEN! Details inside...**