

# WHY FLUIDS MAINTENANCE

## Should Be Included in Every MPI

The truth about 'lifetime fluids,' and the bottom-line impact of including fluids in your inspections.

BY RON MCELROY

New car sales may be the face of all dealerships but fixed ops generate approximately 60 percent of all profits. One of the most important tools or process within this department is your multi-point inspection (MPI). It is your key to identifying and maximizing additional service opportunities.

Surprisingly, the most neglected MPI category is vital fluids maintenance, which includes transmission, power steering and brake fluids as well as gear oils. It is also one of the highest-margin categories, on average \$108 per service.

### FIRST CONTACT SETS THE TONE

Completing a MPI at customers' first visit and all subsequent intervals, and walking them through the inspection and testing results, are essential in developing trust and confidence in your maintenance practices and services. This is your opportunity to demonstrate the consistency, quality and credibility of your inspections and service recommendations. This also is when and where loyalty and retention to your dealership are developed and maintained.

The bottom line: A thorough and complete MPI dramatically increases your opportunities to increase ticket averages and overall sales, with no increase in marketing costs or car counts.

In the past decade, there has been a paradigm shift in why and when to recommend vital fluid services. It is not just original equipment manufacturer (OEM) time-in-service or mileage anymore. Fluid condition is the most important qualifier in determining when to recommend and perform fluid preventative maintenance.

Why, then, are vital fluids omitted from many OEMs' lists of preventative maintenance service? Manufacturers have been courting higher J.D. Power customer satisfaction ratings by marketing their cars as having a lower "cost of ownership." One way to accomplish this is to reduce or eliminate servicing vital fluids. They promote their cars as being supplied with (protected by) "lifetime fluids," no servicing needed – just gas up and go.

### WHY FLUID TESTING IS NECESSARY

Historically, OEMs have specified vital fluid service intervals based on time-in-service or mileage – one recommendation for normal driving conditions and an

accelerated recommendation for severe driving conditions. Additionally, today's vital fluids are subjected to increases in heat torque that shorten their lifecycle. Yes, chemical engineering is better than ever; however, no fluid alchemy exists that prevents fluid breakdown. This prompts the question: Are "lifetime fluids" a product of technology or a marketing strategy?

### MANY VEHICLE OWNERS' MANUALS STATE:

*Regular maintenance is essential to obtain the highest level of performance from your vehicle. In addition to scheduled maintenance, your vehicle requires ongoing general maintenance such as fluid checks and visual inspections. Be sure to perform these procedures regularly to ensure the most trouble-free operation of your vehicle. With proper maintenance and care, your vehicle will last longer and deliver economic efficiency and more dependable performance.*

If the goal is to service fluids before they become depleted, then fluid diagnostics is the best strategy to identify when services should be recommended and performed.

### OEMs RETHINK 'LIFETIME FLUIDS'

Some OEMs, it should be noted, have recently retreated from their "lifetime fluids" stance. Many have returned to time-in-service recommendations, especially when the vehicle is operated under severe driving conditions, which is the case for most cars.

An analysis card for fluids like power steering and transmission can be very influential on customers.





The first discussion between a service advisor and customer about an MPI should cover vital fluids.

The California Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR) recognizes this conundrum and has published its stance on recommending services, especially those that are not covered or recommended by the OEMs. The BAR's "Preventative Maintenance Services Best Practices" are as follows:

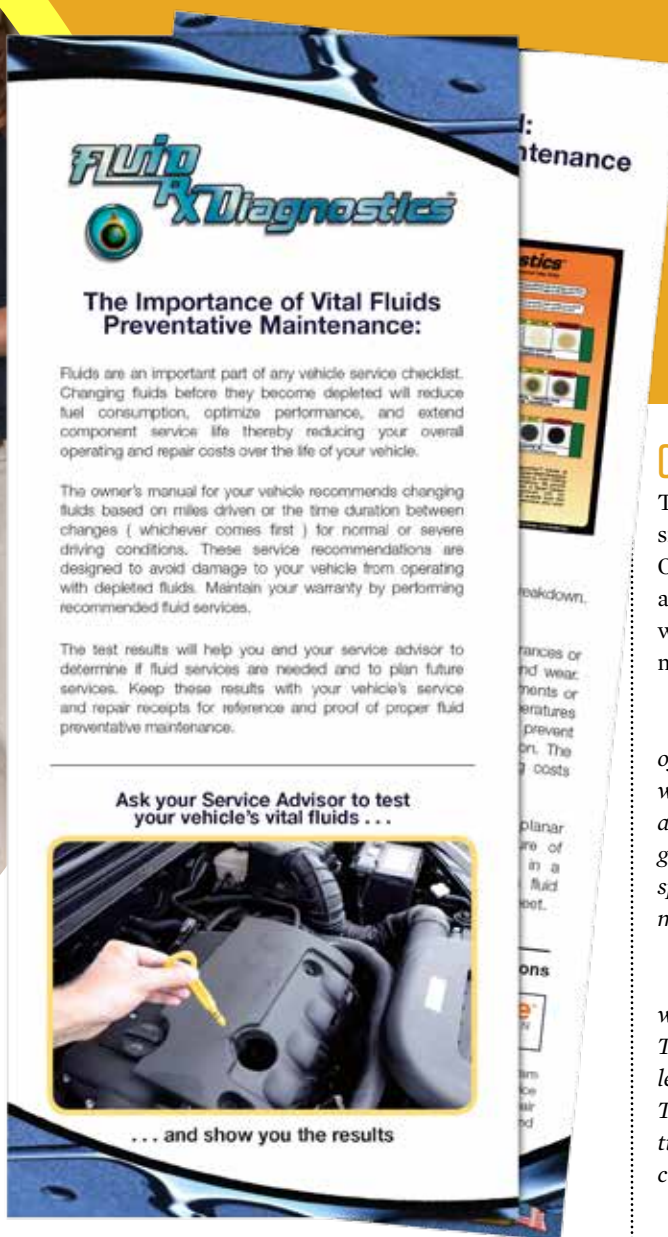
- ✓ Obtain customer authorization and inspect the vehicle before making service recommendations.
- ✓ Openly and honestly communicate with your customer.
- ✓ Ask customers about vehicle driving conditions.
- ✓ Ask customers about driving habits and vehicle maintenance repair history.
- ✓ Communicate maintenance service recommendations made by the manufacturer.
- ✓ If recommending an accelerated maintenance service that deviates from the vehicle manufacturer's recommendations, explain why.

The MPI is all about empowerment. When you provide your technicians and service advisors with the tools and means to communicate clearly with integrity, you empower your customers to base their preventative maintenance decisions on credible information and visual aids that speak to the problem as well as the solution.

## 7 STEPS TO INCLUDE FLUIDS IN A MPI

The following seven-point process provides a program to add fluid diagnostics to your MPI that is simple to implement.

- 1 Offer a complementary fluid analysis as part of your MPI.



- 2 Ask customers for permission to perform the tests, and give them a brochure or explain the technology being used and the benefits of proper fluid preventative maintenance.
- 3 Perform the fluid test ASAP in accordance with fluid sampling guidelines, and document the results.
- 4 Walk through the OEM's fluid service recommendations and then share the results of each fluid test with your customer. Point out which fluids are "GOOD" as well as those that require service.
- 5 Explain to your customer that changing fluids before they become depleted can reduce fuel consumption, optimize performance and reliability, and extend the vehicle's service life.
- 6 Offer to perform all required or suggested fluid services, and give your customer the cost and a time estimate for completing them.
- 7 After servicing a fluid, perform a post-fluid test to ensure the service was successfully completed. The fluid must test "GOOD," or the service must be repeated.



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Ron is the founder or co-founder of five companies. In his career, he has received two "best new product" awards and four "product innovation" awards for automotive products that integrates electronics into OEM systems and change the dynamics of fluids preventative maintenance services.

**"Yes, chemical engineering is better than ever, but no alchemy can prevent fluid breakdown."**

## ONE SERVICE MANAGER'S STORY

The most authoritative voices come from the professionals who implement these programs on a daily basis. One such professional is Don Fritz, service manager at Rogers Toyota in Lewiston Idaho. Here is what he wrote about adding fluid diagnostics to his department's MPIs:

*"I don't think I have ever actually discussed the results of implementing fluid testing in my service department. I was introduced to the fluid diagnostic sheets a few years ago in the Tacoma, Washington area. It sounded like a great way to tie fluid conditions into our multi point inspection instead of just recommending based off of time, miles or color."*

*"The beauty of being able to present inspection results with confidence to customers showed immediate results. The "RED," "YELLOW," "GREEN" theme works seamlessly with our MPI's "PASS," "CAUTION," "FAIL." This generated additional confidence that led to definitive word tracks that the advisors began using, and they closed more sales."*

*"The first time I saw this make a significant impact was when I implemented the process in one of my express service lanes. We averaged nearly 40 cars per day but we were consistently at the bottom of the list compared to our other stores in the group. Fluid exchange services were tracked monthly by the organization, and the results were emailed and posted. We began using the diagnostic sheets, gave the advisors simple menus and a few word tracks, and the needle moved quickly! We went from the bottom of the list to the number 2 or 3 position, which was over much larger stores in the group."*

*"I implemented this process at the dealership I am at, and we immediately saw a 300% increase in fluid exchange services. We are pacing for much more than that, since everyone has acclimated to the process and believe in the product. Seeing is believing; this eliminates any argument out of presenting fluid conditions to your customers."*

## IMPROVING YOUR BOTTOM LINE

Every day, hundreds of vehicles roll out of service bays with at least one depleted fluid. This contributes to the generally accepted projections of \$80 billion-plus of unperformed vehicle services for 2015. If your MPI does not include fluid diagnostics, then your techs and service advisors are missing the opportunity to get your customers to say, "Yes" to needed fluid services. **SD**