The Oil Report

April 2010

Blackstone's oil collection includes oil from Spain and Germany, as well as some weirdo brands.

Oil the News that's Fit to Print!

Got a sample sitting in the garage that you've been meanting to send in? Now is the time! We will be raising at some point this year, so get your sample in now when it's still just $22.50. Our bulk prices will remain the same for a while longer (6 for $19.00 each). Click here to buy a batch of bulk samples, or here to request a free sampling kit.

To All the Oils I've Loved Before

by Ryan Stark

I get asked on a regular basis what type of oil is the best, and we typically don't give out recommendations because we see very little difference between brands. But that doesn't mean I don't have favorites. For me, there is a lot more that goes into picking a favorite oil than just how well the engine wears while it's in use.

One factor is what Dad used. I can remember "helping" change oil with him back in the '70s when the oil cans were round and you had to jab a separate spout into the can just to pour the oil out. Back then he was a Pennzoil man and I didn't think to question why, but if I had, he probably would have said because it's what his Dad used. So when I started buying my own oil and changing it, I thought about using Pennzoil, but being a bit of a rebel in my teenage years, I wasn't going to do everything like Dad did.

I started out liking Texaco Havoline. It came in a cool black bottle and Texas was far away from Indiana so the oil was kind of exotic. I used it for years and my engine never blew up so it must be good oil right? Then I found Castrol GTX. Their white bottle wasn't all that special, but they did offer a free NFL hat if you bought a case. That was an excellent reason to switch in my mind, and I still wear my Detroit Lions had with pride. (Yes, that's right, I'm a Lions fan, and mark my words, they will win it all someday! If the Saints can win it, there's always hope for the Lions.)

My engine ran for years on Castrol and never blew up, so that must be good oil, right? Then Castrol quit offering hats, so it was time to switch, and I decided to try Quaker State. Made from sweet Pennsylvania crude, I'm sure. They had a cool green bottle and my engine never blew up using it, so it's good oil. But, I was never completely sold on Quaker State, and when I found Wolf's Head oil, I know it was time for a change. I'm not sure, but I suspect it's made from the first pressing of dead wolves' heads, and while the animal lovers might not approve, it's better than Baby Seal Head oil, so I didn't feel too bad running it. That oil seems to work just fine, my engine never blew up using it, but it was kind of out of the way for me to buy it, so I switched again.

This time I cheaped out and went with Meijer oil. For those who don't know, Meijer is a big superstore like Wal-Mart, and after running a test on it, it turned out to have the exact same additive package as Castrol, my former favorite, so I was sold. Until this point I had steered clear of non-name brand oils (their bottles aren't very pleasing to the eye), but then I realized that big chain stores don't really make oil, they just buy it from a major oil company and repackage it as their own. This revelation sold my father on Wal-Mart's Super Tech oil and almost sold me on Meijer forever, but then my wife started doing all the shopping. I never made it to Meijer anymore, so once again it was time to switch.

Since then I have never really settled on one brand. Working at an oil lab, I'm interested to see what different oils people are using, so I switch on a regular basis and I mostly go with what's on sale. Valvoline, Pennzoil, Mobil, Kendall, it doesn't really matter. The fact of the matter is, I love looking at all of the different oils available. I've been know to stop by the oil aisle when I didn't even need any oil, just to see what's out there. The most fun is looking at oils from other countries. Much to my wife's dismay, I bought some oil in Spain when we were on our honeymoon. I have been to Germany several times and once bought some oil in a gas station outside Munich that cost 25 euros/liter. That works out to roughly $34.00/quart. Wow! (If you are wondering why German car makers suggest running the oil an extremely long time, it's because their oil is so expensive.) I'm too cheap to go with synthetics, but I can still be swayed by a cool-looking bottle every now and then. And given my fondness for a low price, I recently found a new favorite oil.

All kidding aside, we really don't care what oil you use. Some people swear by this oil or that oil, but they all do the same thing and we honestly don't see any appreciable difference in wear when people switch brands. As we like to say, oil is oil. We're sticking with it.

Report of the Month

If you read the blurb on the email, you already know what's wrong with this Dodge Ram's relatively new (14,000-mile) engine. You can read more about it below.

(To learn where the various elements might be coming from, click here.)

ELEMENTS IN PARTS PER MILLION								
	MI/HR on Oil	1,000	UNIT/ LOCATION AVERAGES	2,418	3,428	2,843		UNIVERSAL AVERAGES
	MI/HR on Unit	14,000		10,032	7,274	3,435		
	Sample Date	10/27/09		5/2/07	3/13/07	8/31/06		
	ALUMINUM	49	17	4	7	9		3
	CHROME	18	9	4	8	7		2
	IRON	116	61	27	49	50		23
	COPPER	67	40	20	60	11		4
	LEAD	11	4	0	3	1		2
	TIN	0	1	2	1	0		1
	MOLYBDENUM	26	39	46	40	45		27
	NICKEL	3	2	1	1	1		0
	POTASSIUM	6	3	1	1	3		4
	BORON	14	34	46	35	39		80
	SILICON	124	46	8	18	35		7
	SODIUM	8	6	5	3	6		4
	CALCIUM	1215	180	1570	1943	1927		2740
	MAGNESIUM	464	1664	854	432	454		243
	PHOSPHORUS	8047	2871	990	1243	1203		1079
	ZINC	7675	2917	1174	1455	1365		1270
	BARIUM	0	0	0	0	0		0

PROPERTIES		Values Should Be*					
SUS Viscosity @210°F	57.2	64-76	72.3	69.7	69.9		
cSt Viscosity @ 100°C	9.41	11.3-14.8	13.55	12.87	12.94		
Flashpoint in °F	345	>415	400	365	390		
Fuel %	7.0	<2.0	1.5	5.0	2.5		
Antifreeze %	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Water %	0.0	<0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Insolubles %	0.5	<0.8	0.6	0.6	0.6		
TBN							
TAN							
ISO Code							

*THIS COLUMN APPLIES ONLY TO THE CURRENT SAMPLE

This Dodge Ram was used in a racing application and had not been rebuilt in 13,000 miles. And, as the owner said, to say he used too much nitrous would be an understatement. The engine routinely left the line at 1200 or 1300 F, and at peak it reached 1700F. It had no air filter at all. A complete teardown revealed perfect bearings, good rods, and no cam wear. But the #6 cylinder, which is closest to the firewall and didn't get much airflow anyway, swelled up from the heat (1750 degrees F) and melted part of the skirt to the cylinder wall. One new piston later, the engine was good to go again!