



TAKE THE WHEEL

Service recommendations for items not covered in owner's manuals are now available. ■ Steve Relyea

ADDRESSING NEGLECT

Following a vehicle's service schedule is usually straightforward—normal service or severe? But what about items or services that aren't listed? Or that are listed only to "inspect," without a replacement interval? Or a vehicle that has gone beyond the mileage listed in the manufacturer's service schedule?

For these, the Automotive Maintenance and Repair Association (AMRA) is developing Uniform Maintenance Service Recommendations (UMSR). Two have been released: one for Brake Fluid and one for Chemical Engine Decarbonization and Contaminated Oil System Service.

These recommendations are meant to help shops address the concerns of consumers who have received different opinions from different shops, or from their owner's manual and a shop, the association explains. They're also meant to address the concerns of regulators who have accused service providers of inappropriately recommending maintenance because the manufacturer did not require that service to keep the warranty in effect.

Each UMSR covers circumstances not addressed by vehicle manufacturers, explained AMRA President Lawrence Hecker. If the OEM recommends a service interval, the AMRA recommendations default to that. If the OEM *doesn't* address an item or service, or if its recommended service intervals stop after a certain mileage has been passed, the new recommendations are meant to pick up the slack.

"The objective isn't to counter the manufacturer, unless we have evidence to that effect; the objective is to cover the areas that the manufacturers don't address," Hecker said.

The AMRA is currently working on recommendations for power steering fluid, suspension parts, including

shocks and struts, and batteries.

Power steering fluid is one of those items that some manufacturers either don't address or recommend only "inspecting" at certain intervals. In practice, Hecker said, this means some dealers check only the fluid level, not the condition of the fluid.

"We're identifying the different conditions of the fluid at the point that it deteriorates and then we'll be making a recommendation, I expect, for changing the fluid when a certain condition or a certain mileage exists."

Shocks, too, deteriorate gradually. AMRA volunteers are now testing the shocks of different sorts of vehicles, on different sorts of test equipment. From that, they hope to identify the point at which performance degrades beyond a certain specification.

"We're testing batteries, too, to try to determine at what point a battery is close to the end of its useful life," Hecker said. "You can always tell when a battery's dead, but most people want to know the week before."

To develop recommendations, the AMRA invites the participation of service providers; manufacturers of vehicles, parts, chemicals and equipment; educators, automotive engineers; regulators, and consumer advocates. Participation is not limited to members of the AMRA—all are welcome.

"We're coming up with recommendations for folks who want to keep a car a long time—say, over 200,000 miles—and not replace major components if they can avoid it," Hecker said. "These are recommendations that shops would make to their customers, and then it's the customer's decision based on how they use the car and long they want to keep it."

For more information about the AMRA and its Uniform Maintenance Service Recommendations, call Lawrence Hecker at (301) 634-4954 or visit www.4amra.com. **IAPA**

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