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No matter what type of transmission you have, regular transmission fluid checks should be part of your maintenance routine.The bad news… one type of transmission makes the process much more difficult.The good news… you likely don’t have that transmission.Keep reading to learn step-by-step how to check your transmission fluid, how often to do so, and what specific thinks you should be looking for in the fluid itself.Checking Automatic Transmission FluidThe majority of car manufacturers will tell you to replace your automatic transmission fluid anywhere from 100,000 to 150,000 miles. If you aren’t sure, check your owner’s manual to see the exact recommendation from your vehicle’s manufacturer.However, if you were to ask 10 professional mechanics how often to change your transmission fluid, the majority would likely tell you the transmission fluid change interval should be much sooner.Either way, you should regularly inspect the level (and condition) of transmission fluid that you have. If you have a dipstick and filler tube in your transmission, you can inspect the fluid level yourself. Otherwise, have a mechanic inspect your transmission fluid for you.Here are a few helpful tips to investigate the condition of your automatic transmission fluid:Check Fluid LevelAlways check the fluid level first. When using the dipstick, see if the fluid level of the automatic transmission falls between the “add” and “full” labels. If it does, then the fluid level is normal. But if the level is on “add” or below it, then the fluid level is too low and needs to be replaced.A low fluid level will cause the transmission to be much slower in its engagement. On the other hand, if the fluid level is too high, then air will start to mix with it and cause all kinds of problems with shifting. You will notice a lot of sounds and slippage too.If the transmission is overheated, then this is another reason to check the transmission fluid level. Just put it in the park position and let the engine remain idle. Change gears to every position available before proceeding to check the fluid level. This will provide a reading that is much more precise.Related: What is a “Normal” Transmission Temperature?Check Fluid ConditionTransmission fluid that looks foamy or contains lots of bubbles is likely the result of too much fluid in the automatic transmission. This could also be due to having a transmission vent that is plugged or merely using the wrong type of fluid in there.Transmission fluid that looks brownish could be the result of a contamination problem with the coolant. The radiator may be leaking from its fluid oil cooler which is responsible for mixing the transmission fluid with the coolant. Fix this problem right away if you notice it.Related: 3 Symptoms of Burnt Transmission FluidCheck Fluid ColorYou could test for fluid oxidation by merely sniffing or doing a blotter test. Take a clean paper towel and place a couple of drops of automatic transmission fluid onto it. After about 30 seconds, see what color the fluid is and whether it has spread out.If it has spread out and looks light brown, pink or red, then it is in good condition. If it has not spread and has a very dark brown color, then it means there is fluid oxidation. Therefore, change or flush the fluid right away.Related: Average Cost to Change Transmission FluidHow to Add Automatic Transmission FluidIf you have checked the fluid level in your vehicle’s transmission and found it to be low, fluid must be added. Follow these steps:Using your owner’s manual determine the correct automatic transmission fluid your vehicle requires.Purchase several quarts of this specific fluid. Unused fluid can be saved for future use. Or if unused containers have not been opened, you should be able to return them to your parts store for a refund.Check the transmission fluid following the procedure specified for your car. Your owners manual should guide you in this regard. See ‘Check Automatic Transmission Fluid’ above.If the fluid level is low, the transmission dipstick will not indicate how much to add. You do not want to overfill the transmission. So begin by adding ½ quart of fluid.Repeat Step 3 above. If the dipstick shows the transmission is now full, the job is done. Wipe the dipstick clean and reinstall it.If more oil is required, add a sparing amount again and repeat the checking procedure. Repeat this process until the oil level reaches the full mark.Note: Some newer cars no longer provide a dipstick for checking and adding automatic transmission fluid. If this is the case for your vehicle, you will need your dealer or favorite mechanic to periodically check the fluid level and add fluid as necessary. Check Manual Transmission FluidManual transmission fluid (gear oil) helps lubricate and cool down the manual transmission. Anytime you have problems shifting your vehicle or you hear grinding sounds while changing gears, you should see if your transmission fluid is at the level it’s supposed to be at.It is good to know how to check these fluid levels regardless of whether you’ve had problems with it. The fluid levels should be checked on a regular basis so that you can prevent your transmission from getting damaged in case the fluid does go bad or gets low.A dipstick would help you check the manual transmission fluid levels but unfortunately, most manual transmission vehicles don’t have one. This means you must take off the filler plug and check the level of fluid yourself.On the side of the transmission, you can unscrew the filler plug which is located there. Although, some transmissions have the filler plug located on the top instead. If necessary, use a jack or ramp of some kind to lift the transmission and find the filler plug so you can access it.Below the filler, you should see the transmission fluid and a hole to check the level of fluid. Just put your finger in the hole to do this, as long as the owner’s manual for the vehicle states that it’s okay to do that.While you observe the level of fluid in there, take notice of its color and the smell. If the color is dark or has a burning smell to it, then it needs to be replaced. There should also be no metal pieces in there either.How to Add Manual Transmission Fluid If you have checked the fluid level in your vehicle’s manual transmission and found it to be low, fluid must be added. Follow these steps:Using your owner’s manual determine the correct fluid (gear oil) your vehicle requires.Purchase several quarts of this specific oil. Unused oil can be saved for future use. Or if unused containers have not been opened, you should be able to return them to your parts store for a refund.You will also need a transmission fluid hand pump. These are available at your parts store. The pump will fit into the fluid container and be screwed in place. It will include a length of plastic tubing which can be inserted into the transmission fill port for adding oil.Gear oil will get thick and more viscous when cold. Under cold conditions it can be difficult to pump with the hand pump you purchased. Store your gear oil cans inside your home until you are ready to add oil to your manual transmission. Or warm them prior to opening them in a bucket of hot water.Check the transmission gear oil level following the procedure specified for your car. See ‘Check Manual Transmission Fluid’ above. It is unlikely that this procedure will be described in your owner’s manual. A shop manual for your specific car could prove helpful for this and many other service procedures.Install the pump into the gear oil container. Place the end of the plastic tubing into the transmission fill port. Press the pump plunger repeatedly adding fluid to the transmission until it reaches the level of the fill port.Remove the plastic tube from the fill port. Wipe the fill plug clean and reinstall it into the fill port. Tighten snugly. We outline how to check transmission fluid in manual or automatic cars, and change it if it is needed.The transmission is one of the most complex and at the same time one of the most important components in a car. It sits between the engine and the drive train and has the task of metering the torque generated and transmitting it to the wheels. The special thing about the gearbox is its structure. It consists of many large and small gears that mesh precisely with one another.Manufacturers use transmission fluid to minimize mechanical friction and prevent the proverbial sand from getting into the gearbox. But is transmission oil durable enough to last the life of a car? And how do you check it and change it if needed? If this is your first time, read how to get first-time DIY car servicing right.Transmission fluid is not changed as often as engine oil. While the latter should be renewed every one to two years, new transmission fluid is usually only added once in the vehicle’s life. Contrary to popular belief, this recommendation does not only apply to vehicles with a classic gear shift. Even if you have an automatic vehicle, you should think about changing your transmission fluid after a few years. Also useful is knowing How to test a relay, with a step by step guide to check and replace relaysSome manufacturers recommend changing the transmission oil after 150,000 to 180,000 kilometers. Many car workshops recommend changing the gear oil after 50,000 to 100,000. Whether or not it makes sense to change the transmission oil is primarily determined by how the car is used.If the car is mainly used on short journeys with many gear changes, an oil change is recommended after 100,000 kilometers at the latest. The type of transmission (automatic or manual transmission) does not matter when it comes to the change.Also read How to test a car battery in this simple step-by-step guide and it is also handy to know how often to rotate tires.Over time, all oils lose their viscosity and their ability to lubricate mechanical parts deteriorates. In the case of gear oil, this can be noticeable as follows:With manual transmissions: engaging the first gears is jerky and difficult. The problem is more pronounced with cold starts.The gears change with a time delay. After engaging a higher gear, it takes time for the transmission to respond.In both cases, it is advisable to check the transmission fluid. It is also advisable to check the oil level if oil stains appear under the vehicle. An indication of insufficient or insufficient transmission oil can also be if there are jerking movements while driving or if the fuel consumption increases for no apparent reason. In the worst case, continuous driving with used or insufficient transmission oil can result in transmission damage.The following signs indicate that there is not enough fluid in the transmission or that it is time to replace it:Extraneous noises and vibrations when switching;switching problems can occur in winter if the part has not yet warmed up;in vehicles with automatic transmission, the dynamics can deteriorate;jerky switching;delayed switching operations;an automatic transmission shifts up or down when it shouldn’t.The quality of the fluid and its level can be checked visually. However, the effort required for how to check for transmission fluid in automatic and manual transmissions is different.When to change a timing beltWith manual transmissions, since the gearbox is in the middle under the car, the vehicle has to be on a lifting platform. A jack is not enough for this. After removing the gearbox cover, you will find an oil filler plug on the side of the gearbox. After unscrewing it, insert a wire into the hole to check the level. A special tool (a syringe) is required to refill the transmission fluid with manual transmissions.Prepare all the necessary tools and chemicals: a wrench, WD-40, and a metal brush, as well as clean towels or paper towels. You may also need fluid, however, and be careful: you should use what is currently in the transmission. Information about the fluid used in your model should be given in the vehicle manual. If this is not the case, however, seek professional help.Put your car on a lift or over an inspection pit. Unless you have such equipment and your vehicle is front-wheel drive, remove the left front wheel to gain access to the inspection window on the transmission case.Now apply the parking brake.If you have just switched off the engine, wait a few minutes for the oil to drain into the oil pan.Use a metal brush to clean the fuel cap and the area around the fuel cap. Wipe with a clean cloth and then with solvent. This will prevent dirt from getting inside the device.With automatic transmissions, you can usually check the level using a dipstick in the engine compartment and top up with oil if necessary. To do this, you should first warm up the engine, switch off the car and shift through all gears again. Then park the vehicle with the engine running and check the fluid level (please note any deviating recommendations in the operating instructions!). But be careful: you must not use just any fluid when refilling! The fluid must match your vehicle and the fluid already in the transmission. It is best to ask your dealer or a car workshop.Automatic transmissions usually have dipstick to check the level of the automatic transmission fluid (ATF). The procedure is as follows:Park your vehicle on a level surface.Open the hood.Find the gear oil dipstick. Usually the handle is light in color, often orange. Information on the position of the dipstick can be found in the vehicle manual, if necessary.Start the engine. Let it run for a while to warm up.If you do not perform the test immediately after riding, cycle through all modes and hold the lever in each position for about three seconds. This helps distribute the gear oil along the channels.Depending on the vehicle model, switch the lever to the “Park” or “Neutral” position. The exact position is often indicated on the dipstick.Apply the parking brake.Refer to the vehicle manual to determine whether the engine must be running or switched off for the check. With some Acura and Honda models in particular, the engine must be switched off here after warming up.First remove the dipstick from the gearbox and then wipe it with a clean, lint-free cloth.Insert the dipstick all the way and then remove it.Look at the dipstick. You will see two marks on it. One shows the transmission oil level when the engine is cold and the second when the engine is warm. They usually have corresponding markings: either “cold” and “warm” or the numbers that indicate the temperature. Since that engine should now be warm, the oil trace on the dipstick must also be at the “warm” mark or a higher temperature, but not above. It is not recommended to measure the transmission fluid level when the engine is cold as the results will be inaccurate.If necessary, top up the ATF in the gearbox. To do this, turn off the engine and use a funnel.Wait for the oil to flow down into the oil pan.Finally, restart the engine and then also check the transmission oil level again.Some models, such as the BMW E46, BMW E39, as well as the Audi A4, Audi A6 or the Volkswagen Passat, are equipped with gearboxes without a dipstick.To check whether the fluid level is sufficient here, proceed as follows:Warm up the transmission to operating temperature by covering a distance of about 15 kilometers.Now place the vehicle on a lifting platform, an inspection pit or a ramp to reach the underbody.Start the engine.Switch to the appropriate mode – “Park” or “Neutral”.Unscrew the inspection plug at the lower end of the gearbox. If the liquid leaks out of the hole, there is no need to refill it. Screw the cap back on.If nothing leaks here, it will mean there isn’t enough oil.Use a special pump or a hose and funnel to pour some ATF through the filler opening until it comes out of the inspection hole.Close the hole again with the lid.Start the engine.Unscrew the lid and repeat the process with refilling.As soon as the ATF drains again, close the hole.Now switch the gear selector switch through all driving modes.Open the inspection opening and add liquid for the last time.Unscrew both the inspection and filler caps.Wipe the streaks off the gearbox.Changing the transmission fluid is not an easy undertaking and not recommended for laypeople. If you still feel confident about replacing the fluid, here are some tips for you.To change the transmission fluid in a manual transmission, proceed as follows:First, find out how much of the transmission fluid your gearbox can hold here. You can find this information in the vehicle manual. In addition to the required amount of liquid, depending on the version of the vehicle, you also need the seal for the transmission pan or an O-ring for the drain screw, some sealant, a container to collect used fluid, a funnel and hose or a syringe, as well as a cloth and a wrench to loosen the fastenings.Before starting, you should drive 5-10 km so that the fluid warms up and becomes less viscous: it will be easier to drain it then.Put your car on a lift, inspection pit, or ramp. If necessary, secure the wheels with wheel chocks.Put your car on a liftRemove the sliding plate.Place a container under the oil panRemove the drain plug (for example on the Renault Megane, as well as the Audi 100 and Audi A6) and then also let the transmission fluid drain out. If there is no drain plug here (such as in the Opel Astra or Chevrolet Lacetti), simply loosen the fastenings of the oil pan, wait until the oil comes out and then remove the component by tilting it to the side very carefully .Then drain the transmission fluid as wellUse a brake cleaner to remove the dirt from the mounting seat of the oil pan or plug threads.Use a brake cleaner to remove the dirt from the mounting seat of the oil pan or plug threadsIf you have removed that oil pan during work, also clean the surfaces of any residues of the old seal, then wipe it off with solvent and insert a new seal with a sealant. Now put that oil pan back in place.Install a new gasket with a sealantIf you have removed the plug, also replace the O-ring and use it to close the drain opening.Use a hose and funnel to add the required amount of fluid to the gearbox. You can also fill them with a syringe through the inspection port.Reassemble everything in reverse order.It is not easy to change the transmission fluid in a car with an automatic transmission. When the fluid is drained, a residue always remains in the gearbox. It is therefore better to have the automatic transmission flushed in a specialist workshop. This process is also possible with manual transmissions and can increase their service life. However, it is also more expensive than just changing the transmission fluid.Replacing the transmission fluid and refilling it in good time help to significantly extend the service life of both manual and automatic transmissions and to ensure long and stable operation. Follow our advice and you will be able to check the oil level and quality yourself so you can decide exactly what to do next here. Why does a car need oil? Well, oil in the engine lubricates the components and saves them from corrosion, friction, and untimely wear and tear. Similarly, the transmission parts also need lubrication for proper functioning. You need to know how to check transmission fluid because the transmission’s health and functions depend on it. When To Check Transmission Fluid? Checking transmission fluid level should be a regular task rather than something to after the problems occur. The symptoms indicated that the damage has already done to the transmission. Also, regular checking of the fluid makes you aware of some smaller issues before they start creating problems. For example, detecting leakages, low fluid level, or degraded fluid at earlier stages will save you the trouble of visiting the repair shop. Check the fluid level on a regular basis. (Photo Source: amsoil) How To Check Transmission Fluid In Manual And Automatic Cars? Before knowing how to check transmission fluid, you have to know the kind of transmission your car has. The process slightly differs depending on whether it is a manual or automatic transmission. How To Check Transmission Fluid In Manual Cars You have to have a dipstick to measure the fluid level of a manual transmission. However, most manual cars don’t come up with one so you have to purchase it separately. The first step is to unscrew the filler plug that sits either on the side or the top of the transmission. There is a hole through which you can put the dipstick or your finger (if recommended in the owner’s manual) to see if the fluid is below the correct level. You should observe the color and smell of the fuel. Dark-colored fuel or a burning smell is not good news. It should also not have any metal piece or sludge in it. The fluid needs replacing if it is not in its normal color or state. SEE MORE How To Check Automatic Transmission Fluid When it is an automatic car, there is a confusion about whether to check transmission fluid hot or cold. Well, you should do the checking in both states because the fluid dilates when it is hot. Add fluid if the level is low. (Photo Source: ford-trucks) Do the checking when the fluid is cold and then do it again after letting the engine run with the gear in ‘Neutral’ or ‘Park’ and the parking brake on. The level is fine if the dipstick gives a reading between the ‘add’ and ‘full’ labels. But, it should not be below the ‘add’ and above the ‘full’ labels. Extra fuel has to be added if the reading is on ‘add’ or below that label because low fluid level makes the shifting response slower. Similarly, a higher amount of fluid will create gear slippage and annoying sounds. Never check the fluid level after driving the car at a high speed for one or two hours. It is likely to give a false reading and the level will appear higher than it is. >> Looking for a second-hand car from Japan? Click here