

Wheels: An e-mail from Chris in Tucson says, “My wife owns a 1991 Toyota Tercel with a 3E-E engine. Recently, it has started emitting a white smoke from the exhaust. It idles rough and is difficult to start. I replaced the distributor cap, wires, plugs, igniter, and adjusted the valves and still the same problem exists. Any advice?”

Halderman: Unfortunately, your symptoms match those of a blown head gasket. Coolant is getting into one or more cylinders, which will affect the operation of those cylinders creating a rough running engine and white exhaust smoke. The root cause of a defective head gasket is often traced to a clogged radiator or other cooling system fault. I suggest you ask around for estimates and be sure all of them include replacing the oxygen sensor, which can be contaminated from the additives in the coolant. Also, be sure the indicator is checked for proper flow and repaired or replaced as needed. You may also want to consider replacing the vehicle now that the vehicle manufacturers are offering incentives, such as low cost financing and other discounts.

