

**Wheels:** Kevin writes, “One year ago my older son bought a 1998 Pontiac TransAm Firebird with 45,000 miles on it. Upon inspecting the fluid levels underhood, we found that the engine coolant surge tank had sludge-like consistency deposits. Since the coolant (Dexcool) has a supposedly five year or 150,000 mile life, what is happening? I mentioned this to my trusted mechanic and he said that it is normal for this long life coolant to become sludge. He said that Dexcool has caused plugged heater cores and overheated engines. I have contacted two local General Motors dealerships and they admit that Dexcool does have a tendency to sludge up. They say this only happens if air enters the cooling system through leaks or through an empty surge tank. My son backflushed out the old coolant and installed new Dexcool. He has said that he will change his engine coolant every two years from now on. What’s going on here?”

**Halderman:** Thanks for writing. The problem as you stated is caused by air entering the system and causing rust. The root cause, according to my sources, is the radiator filler neck warping slightly to allow the pressure cap to leak. The filler neck should be carefully inspected and cleaned and a new pressure cap installed to prevent future problems. The coolant itself does not appear to be the cause. There is a General Motors bulletin that discusses this issue and the repair procedure includes flushing the system.

