

Wheels: Katlyn from California writes, “I have a 1997 Honda Civic that is turning 90,000 miles. The Honda dealers in Los Angeles, CA, all specify timing belt replacement at 90,000 miles. I was prepared for this until the Honda dealer in Davis, CA, (where I attend school) was adamant that this service was not required until 105,000 miles. He was referencing the information available to him on the Honda Interactive Network. The only caveats to this interval were either operation in temperature extremes (below 20°F or above 110°F) and frequent trips under 5 miles each, in which case 60,000 miles was the suggested replacement. My driving has been mainly freeway, oil change interval every 3750 miles, and all scheduled maintenance performed on time. I understand this car utilizes an “interference engine” which apparently maximizes the possibility of valve, piston, etc. damage in the case of belt failure. I was prepared to perform this service at 90,000 until this service advisor insisted it wasn’t necessary for another 15,000 miles. What would you suggest I do?”

Halderman: You are very wise to have the timing belt replaced as part of the necessary service required of all vehicles that have a timing belt. As you stated, your engine is an interference design, which means that if the timing belt were to break, then the valves stop moving up and down, but the piston continues to move. The pistons will then hit the valves usually causing catastrophic damage. In fact, a new or replacement engine is usually required and the \$2000 - \$3500 cost often exceeds the value or worth of the vehicle. I would recommend that you replace the belt according to the vehicle manufacturer’s recommendation. In this case it is at 105,000 miles. You may keep the car for another five years and the belt should be replaced every 105,000 miles. Therefore, I think it best if you wait until 105,000 miles and then you will be OK until it is needed to be replaced again at 210,000 miles. However, it will not hurt to have it replaced now and if you have the money to have it done now and you will feel better that you did, by all means have the belt replaced. Keep in mind that the water pump and accessory drive belts, as well as, the crankshaft and camshaft seals should also be replaced at the same time.

