

Wheels: Bill of Dayton writes, “My question has to do with my grandson’s 1991 Chrysler LeBaron, which I formerly owned. The 3-liter V-6 engine with 60,000 miles smokes quite a bit, although the car passed E-check and, other than smoking and using oil, runs fine. The smoke bothers my grandson, especially when the top is down. It also bothers other motorists who make unkind remarks to him. I’m told that this is not an unusual occurrence for this engine. I have looked into several options for him: 1. Replace the engine with either a used or remanufactured engine (either option is expensive considering the car’s age). 2. Rebuild the engine, again a costly alternative. 3. Replace the valve guides, which may or may not correct the problem (a less costly alternative). and 4. Change the oil to SAE 20W-50.

The last option was suggested by a mechanic friend of mine. However, when my grandson took the car in for an oil change, they talked him out of the heavier oil claiming it would ruin the engine. What is your opinion of the heavier oil? Is there another option I’ve not considered short of getting rid of the car? Incidentally, I have tried oil additives with little success.”

Halderman: You are correct about that engine has a pattern failure for valve guide problems. The “right” way to cure the problem is to have the cylinder heads rebuilt. Could you use the heavier oil? Sure. It won’t hurt except the fuel economy will be slightly lower, and it will be hard to start in cold weather. If it were my car, I would use SAE 20W-50 and see if that took care of the problem. I think it will help, but not totally eliminate the smoking problem.

