

Wheels: An e-mail from Don says, "I'm worried about my 1994 Pontiac Bonneville oil pressure at idle. The gage reads a little over 40 at idle for the first 15 or 20 minutes of stop and go driving, and then it begins to drop to around 22. If I shift to neutral, it rises about 5 psi. The pressure then returns to 40 as I resume speed. The engine temperature also rises when I'm in traffic tie ups on I-75. The car has 94,000 miles. It sounds to me like I have an oil pump problem, but I hope you can give me a more encouraging solution."

Halderman: I think the oil pressure is normal. Industry specifications for oil pressure are usually 10 psi per 1000 RPM. At idle speed, the engine rotates about 700 RPM and should have about 10 psi or more. It is normal for cold oil to create higher oil pressure than warm oil that has become thinner due to heat. The coolant temperature increase could be normal, but this is the area that may need further investigation and testing. The coolant temperature should be between the opening temperature of the thermostat (usually 195 degrees) and the temperature that the thermostat is fully open, which is 20 degrees hotter (215 degrees). If the coolant temperature exceeds this temperature (215 degrees), it means that the cooling system is not capable of getting rid of the heat generated by the engine. Possible problem areas include the radiator, radiator pressure cap, cooling fan, or water pump. Sometimes the impeller blades of the water pump can become so worn that the pump is unable to supply enough coolant flow to properly cool the engine.

