

Wheels: Bill of Beaver Creek writes, "I am a faithful reader of your column in Wheels. Thanks for writing it. What are the benefits/risks of getting an automatic transmission professionally flushed versus just draining the fluid and changing the transmission filter? (I understand that draining only allows replacement of a portion of the fluid.) If flushing is desirable, is there a preferred technique or type of service provider I should know about? Should I expect that cleaning the pan and replacing the filter is part of the flushing service, or must I specify that these services be accomplished also? How often should flushing be done?"

I have a 1996 Chevrolet Caprice with a 350-engine factory equipped for towing up to 5000 lbs. I pull a trailer with a gross weight of about 3000 lbs. just a few times a year. I have been draining the transmission and replacing the filter every 30,000 miles. Should I add flushing to this routine?"

Halderman: Thanks for writing. That is a good question but I do not have a definite answer for you. Professional transmission technicians do not like flushing machines because they can cause the filter to collapse causing the filter material to flow through the valve body and cause valves to stick. There is one unit that simply uses the transmission pump itself to pump the old fluid to an exchange machine where the old fluid is exchanged for new. I would recommend this approach. You are doing the right thing by replacing the fluid regularly. The major reason why automatic transmission fluid needs to be replaced is heat. If the temperature stays below 175 degrees, the fluid will last a long time. However, if the fluid temperature approaches 275 degrees or hotter, the life of the fluid is short and measured in hours. Because your vehicle is setup for towing, I assume it has a transmission fluid cooler. If not, I suggest that you have a transmission cooler installed and change the automatic transmission fluid regularly.

