

Wheels: Wanda writes, “My car heater did not work, so yesterday I took it to my regular garage (AAA garage). The owner called this morning to tell me that I need a new radiator to the tune of \$400 plus. First, the mechanic had called to tell me I needed a new thermostat for \$200.

I groaned at the cost, and prevailed upon the owner to flush the radiator first, rather than pay \$400 plus for a new radiator. He didn’t want to do that. He said my car was running hot anyway. (It’s been running with the temp gauge just a little over the mid mark every since I have owned the car. He said that meant it was running hot.) When I bought the car, used, in 1996, the dealer said the temp gauge was okay, that it wasn’t running hot. Today, my regular garage owner said one hose was running hot, and one was running slow now.

My car is a 1995 Olds Ciera, sedan with over 88,000 miles. Last summer my transmission dropped out so my regular garage installed a new one for a cost of almost \$3000.

I really like my garage, but I’m wondering about this repair. The garage owner is going to flush the radiator and call me back today. HELP, please.”

Halderman: It appears to me from your description of the problem and the diagnosis that the heater core is blocked or has an air pocket. An air pocket can block the flow of coolant through the heater core and this can occur if the coolant has been changed. Because one heater hose is hot tells me that the thermostat would not likely be the cause of a lack of heat concern. The radiator may need repair or replacement if it is leaking.

Wheels: Is there something that Wanda could have done to prevent cooling system problems?

Halderman: The best approach for long service life of any vehicle is preventative maintenance. Most vehicle manufacturers recommend that the antifreeze coolant be replaced regularly, some as often as every 30,000 miles or as long as every 100,000 miles. I would recommend that the entire vehicle be checked by a professional service technician at least every year. This inspection could be a part of regular service. While the cost may seem high, having the vehicle inspected and analyzed will often pay for itself by helping to eliminate unexpected repairs. Also, knowing when service or replacement of components is needed helps in budgeting for the expense.

