

Wheels: La Donna from Mendon writes, “I am writing in regard to my 1997 Cadillac Deville. I use only premium gasoline and am getting what they call a carbon buildup, which I have had removed by the dealer at 10,000 miles. This is not a cheap procedure. What would happen to the engine if I did not have it cleaned? Would it cut down on gas mileage, ruin the engine, or what? What would happen to the Northstar engine if I burned middle-grade gas? I’ve had the engine cleaned out just once and the company paid for it under warranty one time. I now have 65,700 miles on it. I would appreciate any advice that you can give me.”

Halderman: Carbon is a product of combustion and is not normally a problem. Carbon buildup usually becomes a concern with an engine that is driven short distances, which prevents the engine from operating at normal operating temperatures. Carbon can also accumulate if the engine oil has not been changed regularly. Symptoms of an engine needing a decarbonization include:

- Engine ping (spark knock or detonation)
- Rough or unstable idle
- Excessive NOx and/or HC exhaust emissions as determined by an E-check test

Decarbonization can cost from \$50-\$100 and often does help the engine operate more efficiently, but there is no relationship between the use of a particular grade of gasoline and the need for this service. I would continue to have the engine oil changed every 3000 miles or every three months and continue to use the recommended grade of gasoline as specified for your vehicle. Using mid-grade gasoline is not recommended for use in your engine. Using mid-grade gasoline would likely reduce the fuel economy and reduce performance slightly.

