

Wheels: Brian of Oakwood has two concerns about his 2000 VW Beetle. His first concern is the amber “check engine” light came on while driving on the freeway. He wants to know if he can safely drive the vehicle or should he have it towed to a dealer for service.

Halderman: The check engine light simply indicates that the computer has detected problems. It is safe to drive the vehicle. The most common cause that will trigger the check engine light (called a malfunction indicator light or MIL) is a loose gas cap. Since the 1996 model year, all cars and light trucks are equipped with an on-board diagnostic computer system called OBD-II (on-board diagnostics – second generation). The purpose and function of the OBD-II system is to test all emission-related systems and turn on the check engine light if a fault is detected that could cause an increase in pollution. If the gas cap is not fully tightened, the OBD-II system can detect a leak by either drawing a slight vacuum on the fuel tank or by applying a slight pressure to the fuel tank. This test is performed regularly whenever the fuel level is between 15% and 85% full. If this is the problem, simply tighten the gas cap at least 3 “clicks” and drive the vehicle normally.

Wheels: What should Brian do if the check engine light does not go out after he has tightened the gas cap?

Halderman: If the gas cap has been tightened, the computer will run another test of the system to check to see if there is a leak that could cause unburned gasoline fumes to escape into the atmosphere. This test is run when the vehicle is warm so a short drive will often not reset the light. If the check engine light is still on, visit the dealer. The dealer has the proper scan tool to access the diagnostic trouble code (DTC) that has been stored and should be able to make the necessary repairs under the new vehicle warranty.

Wheels: Brian’s second concern is that his Beetle has been using a quart of oil every 3000 miles. The dealer has agreed to perform free regularly scheduled oil changes, which are at every 10,000 miles as specified by the manufacturer. Do you have any ideas?

Halderman: Most experts recommend changing the engine oil every 3000 to 5000 miles instead of every 10,000 miles as specified by his dealer. This means that the Beetle is using one quart about every oil change. While the amount of oil usage may seem high, most vehicle manufacturers state that normal oil consumption is a quart or more every 600 miles.

Wheels: Is there anything Brian can do?

Halderman: It is possible that a different brand of oil has been used at each oil change. I have found that different brands of oils may contain different additive packages. Try selecting one brand engine oil and stay with this same brand through several oil changes and monitor the oil consumption. I would also recommend changing the engine oil every 5000 miles or every 6 months whichever comes first. Also be sure to use the recommended viscosity. Most vehicle manufacturers recommend either SAE 5W-30 or SAE 10W-30.



⚠ CAUTION
REMOVE SLOWLY
Fuel spray may cause injury.

TIGHTEN UNTIL 1 CLICK

or  CHECK may come on.