

Wheels: John sent an e-mail that says, "Hello. I enjoy your column. You mentioned two items that are of interest to me so I thought I'd better write and see if I can learn more. As a person who is always looking for a good used car, I would find it very beneficial to know about pattern failures. Consumer magazines do a good job covering a wide range of general problems, however, some details are typically left out in that scope of coverage. Problematic engines may be lumped together with good engines for the purposes of a car's rating. For example, the Mazda Protégé I bought for my wife rated very well. The 1.5-liter engine, however, was the wrong choice. This engine (according to the dealer, at least) has a pattern of intake system carbon buildup. Of course he'd like to be paid every 30,000 miles to clean this. So my general question is, where can I find documentation or descriptions of these pattern problems/failures prior to buying a vehicle? Are there any more specific sources than consumer magazines?"

As far as the 1997 Protégé, how can I best keep this clean myself? I've never thought much of additives but is there any product which might minimize this buildup problem? Can I remove the intake ducting and perform any useful cleaning myself or is the problem in the manifold?"

Halderman: I consider that throttle body cleaning is a part of routine service and not what I think of when I mention "pattern failure." It is normal for gases to condense around low pressure areas of the throttle plate and cleaning this area requires that the air intake hose be removed from the throttle body and using a shop cloth and throttle body spray cleaner, simply clean the area especially on the engine side of the throttle plate. Have someone depress the throttle to wide open (engine off, of course) to gain access to this area. I think it should be cleaned at least once a year to avoid rough idle or stalling. Almost all vehicles need this periodic cleaning. Honda, Acura, and some Toyotas do not seem to need this cleaning as often as other makes and models, but I do not consider this to be a fault with the vehicle. Almost every vehicle has some unique common area of concern. Ask your service technician before purchasing a vehicle about possible long-term faults. Of course, no one can anticipate problems you may experience.

