

Wheels: JD wrote with a question, “My 1995 Buick Century wagon (3.1 L and 80,000 miles) recently experienced a significant drop in fuel mileage. In the fall, I flushed the radiator and changed to a “high mileage” motor oil of the recommended viscosity and almost immediately the mileage dropped from 30 on the highway to the low 20s with actually more highway driving. I took it to a very competent mechanic who replaced the thermostat and checked the car over, thinking it was possibly an oxygen sensor and found nothing wrong. I then had the transmission serviced and checked and everything is working properly there. I then called the oil manufacturer and was told “possibly” the oil might affect the mileage so I went back to the standard 5W-30 oil I have always used, and noticed no significant difference. One possibility we have discussed is the winter formulation of fuel, but in checking past mileage history, I have never experienced this amount of drop in fuel mileage. It appears to be at least a 20% drop. Any suggestions or comments will be greatly appreciated.”

Halderman: I believe the oil caused your fuel economy drop because this type of oil is not rated for use in newer vehicles because it does not have the “star-burst” label on the front indicating that the viscosity is recommended by the vehicle manufacturers. After you changed the oil back, I believe that our extended cold spell has caused your drop in fuel economy. Even though I park my vehicle in a garage and use Mobil 1 synthetic oil, I, too, noticed a drop in economy of about 60 miles less per tank. Write back if your economy doesn’t improve in the spring and continue to use the engine oil specified for use by the vehicle manufacturer.

