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Should you add oil to a running engine? In this article, discover the potential consequences of adding oil to a running engine and gain insights into how to add oil to your car's engine the right way.

Should Car Be Running When Adding Oil?

Introduction

During engine maintenance, certain procedures and safety measures require careful consideration for the best performance and durability of the engine. And also for your safety when carrying out maintenance routines on your car.

One question commonly asked among car owners, especially those new to car maintenance, is whether the engine should be running when adding oil. Should the car be running when adding oil? No. It's a straightforward answer, but some owners still add oil to their cars while the engine is running.

In this article, we'll explore what happens when you add oil to the car while the engine is running and explain the correct way to add oil to your car's engine. We'll also touch on the signs to look out for when the engine is thirsting for an oil change or a top-up.

What happens if you add oil when the engine is running? Read on to find out.

Should The Car Be Running When Adding Oil?

No. Adding oil to the engine while the car is running is not recommended as it can affect the engine's health and poses a safety risk to you as you add oil. How does adding oil to the car while running affect the engine's health? It does not pose immediate damage risks, but poor oil circulation, foaming, inaccurate oil level readings, and other minor issues occur when you add oil to the car when running. These minor issues lead to major problems that might affect the engine's durability, especially when oil is repeatedly added to a running engine.

It doesn't matter whether you're in a hurry or have just started the car; the recommended way to add oil is after the engine has cooled down. Most car owners add oil to the engine while it's running after discovering it needs oil when it's too late. In this article, we'll also cover signs to look out for to know if you need an oil top-up or change.

So, how do you know it's time to change or add oil to your car?

Summary

When adding oil to your car, the engine should be turned off and cool enough to prevent issues that may result from doing so. These issues might be minor but may lead to even major ones that threaten your engine's lifespan.

How Do You Know It's Time To Change or Add Oil To Your Car?

Knowing when it's time to top up the oil in your car is essential for maintaining its performance and longevity. And in some cases, you'll notice it's time to add or change oil to your car's engine when driving. In such situations, adding oil with the car running or doing an oil change with a hot engine is not recommended.

Engine Overheating

When the engine overheats, there could be several issues why it's doing so, among which is oil starvation causing insufficient lubrication.

When this happens, it's highly recommended not to add oil to the engine when it's running since it could cause foaming. Also, before adding oil, you should check the dipstick to diagnose whether you need oil or an oil change. Black and dirty oil on the dipstick indicates that it's time for an oil change, and if the oil still has its rich brown and amber color, you can top up, but only after the engine has cooled down.

White deposits on the dipstick indicate it's time for an oil change and an engine flush. The white deposits form when engine oil gets contaminated with moisture or coolant, and it causes the engine to overheat due to insufficient lubrication.

It's only when flushing the engine that it's recommended to have the engine running. This is done to allow the flushing agent to circulate in the engine. However, when draining the contaminated oil mixed with the flushing agent, you should turn the engine off and turn it on only after adding the new oil.

Low Oil Level Warning Light or No Oil on Dipstick

Most modern cars have oil level warning lights that come on when the oil in the engine is below the optimum level. But in older cars, you must regularly check the dipstick to know the oil level.

When the oil level warning light comes on immediately or a short while after an oil change, you'll need to recheck the oil level and top up if it's below the recommended level. Why does the oil level drop after filling up? Oil takes some time to distribute throughout the engine components. Oil leaks could also cause a decrease in the amount of oil in the engine to ensure you also check for signs of leaks.

Oil dipsticks have two markings to indicate the maximum and minimum oil levels. After removing the dipstick, wipe it clean, reinsert it in the dipstick tube, and then remove it again. If the oil level is below the minimum (bottom) mark, you need to top up the oil in your car. Do the same if there's no oil marking on the dipstick.

In both situations where the oil level light comes on, or the oil level in the dipstick is low, you shouldn't add oil when the car is running. Only turn on the engine after adding the oil to let the oil circulate, then check the oil level.

Oil Leaks

After fixing an oil leak, an oil top-up or oil change is necessary, depending on the condition of the oil.

If you recently changed the oil, topping up with new engine oil should do. However, if the oil has been in the car for a while, it's best to drain the remaining oil and fill the engine with new oil. But what if you notice a decrease in oil level when driving, and the culprit is an oil leak? Should you add oil to the car while it's running? Still, no.

It's possible to top up oil and continue driving if the leak is minor until you can get to a car repair shop. But it would be safe to let the engine cool down first since adding oil to a running engine might cause hot oil to splash on you or, worse, cause fires.

Vibrations Strange Engine Noises

When the engine is low on oil, moving parts grind against each other, producing vibrations and strange noises.

Low engine oil could be caused by excessive oil leaks, which could be external or internal, where the oil leaks into the combustion chamber and is burnt along with air and fuel. In some cases, vibrations and noises occur when driving. When this happens, some drivers are tempted to add oil while the car is running, thinking it might improve circulation, but that's not the case.

If you notice vibrations and noises from your car's engine, first check the dipstick and the condition of the oil on the dipstick. This way, you'll know if the engine is burning oil or if the oil looks too contaminated. Then check for signs of external oil leaks, especially from the seals and gaskets, and check underneath the car for oil spots.

It's not recommended to continue driving when you notice vibrations and strange noises from the engine. But if it's impossible to get help, let the engine cool down first before adding in new oil, then drive moderately to allow the oil to circulate. That should get you to the nearest service center where the cause of low oil will be diagnosed.

Check the Oil Change Interval Recommendation

All cars have an oil change interval recommended by the manufacturer or stated in the owner's manual.

However, the oil change interval can vary depending on a couple of things, such as the type of oil used and driving habits. Synthetic oils have a more extended usage period than mineral oils. And oil in less frequently driven cars has longer oil change intervals than cars driven daily or heavily used. Whichever the case, you shouldn't add oil to the car while it's running.

Summary

Check the oil quality and level and pay attention to engine behavior to know whether the engine is due for an oil change or a top-up. Also, manufacturer recommendations and oil change interval information on the owner's manual should tell you whether you need an oil change or a top-up.

[What Happens When You Have The Car Running When Adding Oil?](#)

Adding oil to a running car might cause severe effects on the engine's performance and pose safety risks to you as you do so. What are the possible dangers of adding oil to a running car?

[Can I put Cold Engine Oil in a Hot Engine? Adding Cold oil to Hot Oil - Can I do it?](#)

Overfilling and Spillage

Adding oil when the car is running doesn't allow the oil to flow and settle in the engine, which causes overfilling and spillage.

[Overfilled Motor Oil - What Happens & Engine Damage Done \[Fix & Avoid\]](#)

Too much oil in the engine caused by overfilling puts excess pressure on the gaskets and seals, causing them to crack, leading to oil leaks and other seal and gasket related issues. Excess oil also causes frothing, where air bubbles form in the oil due to aeration. When bubbles form in the engine oil, it becomes less lubricative due to oxidation and doesn't lubricate the moving engine components as it should. This causes overheating and rapid engine wear.

Adding oil when the car is running also causes spillage. The spilled oil could drop on the surface or on the surface of the engine, where it's heated up when you start the engine. When this happens, the oil will produce a foul stench that accumulates in your car, making the cabin uncomfortable.

To prevent overfilling and spillage when adding oil to your car's engine, turn it off and let it cool before adding oil. Also, use the right equipment, such as a funnel or an oil fill pump, and measure the oil as the manufacturer recommends or indicated in the owner's manual.

Oil Breakdown

The formation of air bubbles in engine oil caused by adding oil when the car is running also causes the oil to break down due to oxidation.

There are additives in most engine oil that prevent oxidation, known as anti-oxidants, but they won't work if air bubbles continue forming. The air might also get into the engine oil through cracked seals and gaskets damaged by excess oil pressure caused by overfilling.

Oil breakdown caused by oxidation increases the oil's viscosity, which might cause a chain of problems in your engine. First, the oil will lose its lubricative and rust corrosion prevention properties causing rapid wear when moving engine components grind against each other and rust formation. Overheating might also occur due to insufficient lubrication caused by oxidized oil.

False Oil Level Readings

Adding oil to your car when running will give you false oil level readings.

When you add oil to a running engine, you'll get a higher oil level reading than usual. This is why it's recommended to add oil when the engine has been turned off and allowed to sit for a few minutes. Let the car sit for a while after adding the oil to get an accurate oil level reading. Then start the engine and let it idle for around 5 minutes before checking the oil level.

Poor Oil Circulation

Adding oil to a running engine might affect the circulation of the existing oil in the engine or the new oil if you are doing an oil change.

During the engine's operation, oil circulates continuously in and out of its components to keep them lubricated and cooled. This circulation may be interrupted by adding oil as the engine is running, which could lead to abrupt

changes in pressure and flow. Thus, causing uneven lubrication and insufficient cooling could lead to increased wear and tear on engine parts.

Safety risks

Due to the high temperature that a running engine generates, you'll be putting yourself and the car at risk if you add oil to a running engine. Why is it so?

When cold oil comes into contact with hot engine parts, it splatters, and hot oil droplets might fall on your skin, causing burns, especially if the car has been running for a while. Also, adding oil to a running car causes the oil to reach its flashing point quicker and generate flammable fumes. These fumes might burn the rest of the oil, causing permanent damage to the engine.

Summary

Before adding oil to your car, ensure the engine is cool enough to enhance circulation and prevent spillage, overfilling, and breakdown. You also avoid damaging the engine and harming yourself by adding oil to a cooled-down engine.

How to Correctly Add Oil to Your Car's Engine

Now that you know you shouldn't add oil to your car's engine when it's running, what's the correct way to do it?

[How To: Check & Add Oil To Your Car](#)

What You'll Need

- Floor jack and stands
- Wrench
- Oil drain container
- New engine oil in the manufacturer-recommended amount and the viscosity rating
- New Oil Filter
- Funnel or oil-filling pump

Procedure

Step 1: Park your car on level ground, turn the engine off, and let it cool down.

Step 2: Lift the car using the floor jack and set it on the jack stands.

Step 3: Get underneath the car with the drain container and wrench, and locate the oil drain bolt on the oil pan's side.

Step 4: Place the drain container underneath the drain bolt, then slowly unscrew the bolt. Tip; to prevent oil from splashing, unscrew it halfway using the wrench, then unscrew it by hand.

Step 5: Let the old oil drain until no droplets come from the oil pan.

Step 6: Reinstall the drain bolt.

Step 7: Remove the old oil filter and apply some oil on the rubber gasket of the new filter before installing it.

Step 8: Open the oil filler cap and add the new oil into the engine using the funnel or the hose attached to the oil filling pump if you're using one

Step 9: Close the oil filler cap, start your engine, and leave it idling for around 5 minutes.

Step 10: Turn off your engine and check the oil level on the dipstick. Wipe the dipstick after the first removal, reinsert it, and remove it. If the oil is not between the maximum and minimum markings, top up with a bit of oil until the oil reaches the optimum level.

You'll only need new oil when topping up oil in your car. But before adding the oil to your car, let it cool down first.

FAQs

What happens when I add oil instead of changing it?

While topping up the oil level is necessary to maintain proper lubrication, it's important to understand that simply adding oil without changing it at appropriate intervals can decrease the efficiency of the new oil.

Will adding oil increase oil pressure?

Adding oil to the engine only results in excessive oil pressure if you add oil when the car is running or when you overfill the oil.

Should you add oil to the engine when it's still hot?

No. Adding oil to a hot engine has the same results as adding oil to a running engine. The cold oil splutters, and hot droplets might fall on your skin. You might also not get an accurate oil level reading, and the oil might froth up, resulting in air bubbles, increasing the oil's oxidation rate.

Conclusion

If oil is added to a running car, it can disrupt the flow and lead to uneven lubrication, leakage due to increased oil pressure, and increased wear on engine components. Before adding oil to your car, ensure the engine is cool and only turn it on after adding oil to let it circulate.