

How a cheap oil change can cost you in the long run

ConsumerReports

By Jon Linkov 3 hours ago



When is a preventive oil change at an independent mechanic or quick-lube shop the wrong thing to do? If you own a Kia vehicle, it might end up costing you a lot of cash down the road.

Kia issued a technical service bulletin in February 2012 regarding oil filters and oil viscosity, and customers using either the wrong engine oil and/or an aftermarket oil filter. The manufacturer says a number of symptoms and concerns may come about if a non-Kia filter or the wrong oil.

Owners who bring their Kia vehicles to the dealer with complaints about engine noise should be aware that one step the technician must follow, per TSB ENG 114, is to check to see if an aftermarket oil filter is installed. If a nonapproved filter is in place, the technician will perform an oil and filter change and bill the customer, regardless of how recently the oil was changed by the owner.

In addition, Kia says any mechanical issues that may be “a result of incorrect oil viscosity or use of aftermarket oil filter should not be treated as a warranty repair and any related damage is not warrantable.”

Translation: If problems can be tied to you not using a Kia-approved oil filter or the Kia-spec'd oil weight, your warranty-repair claim will be denied and you'll have to pay for the repairs. That can get expensive fast.

If you are concerned about this, the takeaway here is three-fold:

1. When dropping your car off for service, make sure you don't authorize the dealer to perform repairs without speaking with you first. This way you won't get a surprise bill for an oil and filter change.
2. If your Kia is still under the powertrain warranty, considering taking it to the dealer for oil changes. Yes, it probably costs more than the quick-lube store, but you'll avoid any potential problems with oil- and filter-related warranty claims.
3. Consider buying Kia-approved oil filters and either using them when you do your own oil changes, or have your mechanic or quick-lube store use the Kia filter and not their own.

While Kia has gone so far as to put out a technical service bulletin on this topic, it wouldn't be surprising to discover other manufacturers with official or unofficial policies like Kia's. After all, not all oil filters are the same, and filter quality can vary greatly even within a brand.

We have found that other automakers have similar policies about facets of the vehicles and their service that may not be obvious to car owners.

If you're in doubt about policies affecting your vehicle—particularly if your powertrain warranty is still in effect—stop by the dealership and ask the service department. At least they won't charge you for that!

—*Jon Linkov*