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10% of U.S. Drivers Have Their “Check Engine” Light On

New Harris Survey Finds Alarming High Number of Drivers Ignore Potential Danger Signal

FOUNTAIN VALLEY, Calif. (June 9, 2008) – A survey sponsored by CarMD.com Corp. and conducted by Harris Interactive® disclosed that 10% of U.S. drivers who drive a car, light truck, SUV or minivan model year 1981 to present are currently driving with their “Check Engine” light on. In addition, the survey noted that half of those same drivers have had their “Check Engine” light on for more than three months – driving, in effect, oblivious to potential problems indicated by such warning lights.

“This study corroborates other industry reports that we have seen over the years, including those conducted by AutoZone and AAA,” said Kristin Brocoff, marketing manager for CarMD.com Corp. “With concerns about the environment and rising gas prices at all-time highs, it is a real cause for concern that so many drivers today ignore their vehicle’s ‘Check Engine’ light.”

Cost, denial and lack of time are some of the main reasons cited by survey respondents as to why they continue driving with their “Check Engine” lights illuminated. Over one-third said that they hadn’t had their engine checked because their car appeared to be running fine and over one-tenth said they didn’t believe there was a serious problem.

“It’s quite alarming that fully half (50%) of the respondents who were driving with their “Check Engine” light on said their “Check Engine” light had been on for more than three months,” Brocoff noted. “That indicates that a substantial number of people aren’t as aware as they should be that their car may need immediate attention, or that they should take the time to ensure the safety and well-being of their vehicle.”

The survey further noted that 20% of the respondents had been driving with their “Check Engine” light on for less than one week; 5% for 1-2 weeks; 8% for more than 2 weeks but less than 1 month; 10% for 1-2 months; and 7% for more than 2 months.

Of those currently driving with the “Check Engine” light (also known as malfunction indicator light or MIL) on, more than half exhibited some type of denial about the potential severity of the problem. Thirty-five percent said the reason they haven’t had it checked is because “the car seems to be running fine.” Another 16% said they didn’t think [the problem] was serious. Thirty-four percent of the adults surveyed said cost is the reason why they haven’t had it checked – not surprising, given the current economic climate.

(MORE)

CHECK ENGINE LIGHT SURVEY – 2-2-2

“It is disturbing to see these numbers,” said Keith Andreasen, ASE double master technician and director of technical services for CarMD.com Corp. “The U.S. government put the on-board diagnostic system in place to require vehicle manufacturers to alert drivers when their vehicle was emitting too many emissions or had a problem. This light can signify something potentially costly and possibly dangerous to the passengers or others on the road. It’s important that drivers treat it seriously.”

Other survey findings:

- 89% of U.S. adults indicate driving a primary vehicle model year 1981 or newer. Seventy-seven percent drive a car, light truck, SUV or minivan that is model year 1996 or newer. 10% of these model year 1996 and newer vehicles, which have OBD2 technology, also have a check engine light on currently.
- Younger adults (aged 18-34) are more likely to indicate that they are driving with the light on (15% do, as compared to 11% of those aged 35-44, 9% of those aged 45-54 and 7% aged 55 years or older).
- Time is also a factor, with 11% of respondents saying they “haven’t had time” and 7% “waiting for an appointment with a mechanic” as reasons for not having their vehicle checked, despite the “Check Engine” light being on. A 31-year-old female who was surveyed said, “I know the light is on from an emissions leak. It’s not impacting the way the car drives, and it will be time consuming to trace the leak and repair. There is never a good time to spend hours at a repair shop.”
- Finding a mechanic or dealership you can trust is also a reason that drivers ignore their engine problems. Of those driving with illuminated MILs, 8% said they are “not sure where to go to have it checked” and another 7% said, “I don’t have a mechanic I can trust.”
- Even with gas prices hovering at \$4.00 per gallon, many vehicle owners driving with the “check engine” light on don’t seem to realize or believe that gas mileage is likely affected by the problem. “It’s just the gas cap,” and “The car has been checked, a sensor is bad, but it causes the car to get better gas mileage,” were two responses.
- Recurrent problems are also common. Several respondents have had the light on for over a year and had it looked at by several different mechanics. “[I’ve] taken it to [the] dealership 10+ times for this issue and they keep saying nothing is wrong per the diagnostic,” answered a 45-year-old male.

CarMD.com Corp. distributes the award-winning CarMD® diagnostic product, which gives drivers a quick and easy way to analyze their vehicle’s “Check Engine” health from home and detect hidden engine problems before they trigger the MIL. When a problem is found, the handheld CarMD tester and PC software can tell you why the “Check Engine” light is on and let you generate a personalized diagnostic report with probable cause and estimate parts and labor costs in your geographic region to help keep auto repair bills low.

Survey and Sample Methodology

Harris Interactive® conducted the online omnibus survey on behalf of CarMD.com Corp., from May 20-22, 2008, among 2,041 U.S. adults aged 18+. Results were weighted as needed for region, age within gender, education, household income and race/ethnicity. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

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About CarMD.com Corp.

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