RULE OF THERM

We find out more about how Gates is attempting to make a mechanic's life easier in the repair of thermostats.

It's not difficult to understand why cooling system problems remain so high on the list of unscheduled maintenance issues that an average mechanic has to deal with. Product innovation and design technology has improved coolant system reliability to the extent that increased longevity and higher performance levels must be reproduced inside engine compartments that are far more hostile than they were less than ten years ago.

Engine compartments are smaller and technical innovation has added components such as fuel injection throttle bodies, turbochargers and oil coolers to those traditional parts — radiators, thermostats, water pumps and heaters — that used to make up the cooling system. In the workshop, the mechanic's job is becoming more and more complex.

So is the job of the aftermarket supplier and the motor factor.

As well as providing the comfort of a single source of thermostats, hose, radiator caps and connectors from the same supplier, leading coolant system component suppliers must also be able to deliver strong technical support. For example, today's cooling systems feature radiators that are smaller, use less coolant, have fewer replaceable parts and less space in which to operate (which as well as making the environment under the bonnet far more hostile, also makes access more difficult). As a result, Gates introduced its 'Installation and Troubleshooting Guide' as a fast and proactive approach to help mechanics resolve cooling system problems by improving the understanding of diagnostic techniques. Deterioration of hoses caused by heat, oil, abrasion or electro-chemical action can be identified earlier. High on image content, the guide is also a tool that garage technicians can use to reassure motorists that remedial action that may have been recommended is actually necessary.

Changing trends in cooling system design mean that as well as being more reliable, components must also be more efficient. Thermostats, for example, must be more sensitive to heat variation. Temperature tolerances are tighter, but the thermostats themselves are often located inside a complex housing which may also be a sealed unit. Garage mechanics need to be able to identify the correct replacement parts quickly and easily, while being assured of a guaranteed fit.

Fitment issues

Consequently, suppliers must also respond to related fitment issues. A comprehensive picture-rich catalogue can help. The Gates catalogue, for instance, contains several easily identifiable types of thermostats in order to provide the same design specified by car manufacturers. The list of parts includes housing thermostats, offset thermostats and bypass thermostats. Recent additions include applications on BMW, Volkswagen, Opel/Vauxhall, Mercedes-Benz and many Japanese applications.

Cooling system parts suppliers can also help mechanics by supplying the appropriate accessories with each part.

"Thermostat repairs can be completed more easily if the correct gasket is supplied at the same time," says Andrew Vaux from Gates' Technical Training and Support Team. Gates supplies a range of thermostat gaskets for a variety of fitments and furthermore the company has recently augmented its system service support by supplying certain PowerGrip Kit Plus timing belt kits (timing belts and tensioners, oil seal(s), O-ring(s) and/or other application specific parts) complete with a water pump.

"Suppliers cannot merely supply the parts, these days," he adds. "Cars are seen so infrequently that inspection and preventive maintenance is becoming more essential than ever. Suppliers have to provide the parts, service and technical support so that mechanics can carry out a trouble free inspection and overhaul wherever necessary."

MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Gates' range of cooling system components
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