

REPAIR OR REPLACE? PERSISTENT LEAK LOOKS PRICEY TO FIX



BY RAY MAGLIOZZI

Dear Car Talk:

I have a 2006 Honda Accord EX-L with a 3.0 L V-6 engine. I bought it used 10 years ago as a Honda Certified Used Car with 46,000 miles on it. For the first seven years, I only drove it once or twice a week, mostly in town, with occasional 120-mile highway trips to the big city. I keep the vehicle very well maintained, and it was a great, problem-free car. About three years ago, my driving habits changed, and I started driving the car four to five days a week on a 120-mile highway commute to work. At 80,000 miles, a local quick oil change

shop told me I had a very bad oil leak coming from the transmission. They showed me the leak, and it was pretty bad. They weren't exaggerating just to sell me some repair work. They put a tracer dye in the transmission oil to help locate the leak and told me the leak is likely coming from the oil cooler lines. I took it to the Honda dealer where I bought it, and they said the same thing, so I had them fix it. Three months later, at the same quicklube shop, they told me my transmission had a bad oil leak. I didn't believe them, and told them I had that fixed by the Honda dealer. Sure enough, it was still leaking!

They checked for the leak again and now said the gasket between the two halves of the transmission case was leaking, and the transmission would have to come out to change the gasket. I took it back to the Honda dealer and showed them the receipt for fixing the leaky oil cooler lines and that the leak was still there. They agreed the transmission case gasket was now leaking, and recommended

replacing it with a rebuilt transmission at a cost of \$5,700. After giving the service manager a harsh talking to, I took it to a reputable repair shop in my area and they found the same leak and quoted about \$2,000 to fix. I don't want to spend that much money to repair the leak, so I have been driving it for the past two years adding transmission fluid every time I fill it with gas. But this is really getting old. Is there an additive I can put in the oil to stop or slow the leak? Or should I just trade it in? — Mike

There's no additive that will stop the gasket from leaking, except gasoline, Mike. And you'd need to pour that all over the car and light a match. So if you want to keep the car, you have two choices. You can either keep adding transmission fluid at every fill-up, or you can fix it. And if you decide to keep driving it with the leak, consider relocating to an area with lots of dirt roads, where the residents will appreciate your personal "dust reduction" program.

I know you don't want to spend \$2,000, but you should compare that with what another car will cost you. Ask a mechanic you trust to check out the whole car for you, as if you were considering buying it now. Have him tell you what else is worn out and looks likely to fail soon. If the car is in pretty good shape, other than the transmission gasket, then consider fixing it. Let's say you get another two or three years out of the car for \$2,000. That's less than \$100 a month, which is almost certainly less than even a used car payment. Or, if you're lucky, your mechanic will give you a long list of stuff that's broken, and make your decision easy. Either way, get the facts first, Mike.

Got a question about cars? Write to Ray in care of King Features, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803, or email by visiting the Car Talk website at www.cartalk.com.

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