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How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fluid?

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Browser



How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fluid?

Fri May 17, 2013 9:15 am

I got an oil change for my 2002 CRV and was told that the oil in the rear differential was dirty and needed to be changed -- costs \$120 for this service. I got curious and looked at my previous service records on this vehicle. I found that the Honda service department service receipts showed they have been changing the differential and transmission fluid at every 30,000 mile scheduled service since the vehicle was new. It now has 145,000 miles and fluids were last changed at 115,000 miles. Based on that history, both the differential and transmission should now be serviced. Haven't paid much attention in the past, but I decided to investigate. **Interestingly, the driver's manual only recommends that the differential and transmission fluids be changed at 90,000 miles under normal driving conditions.** With regard to the rear differential, this vehicle is not a full time 4WD. It is an AWD, in which power is transferred to the rear wheels (via the rear differential) only when the front wheels lose traction. This means that the rear differential should have pretty light use. Have I been getting ripped off? How often should differential and transmission fluid be changed? I'm considering not getting this service done even though it has been done every 30,000 miles. I drive about half local and about half on long interstate trips. Should I have this service now anyway because it is a high-mileage vehicle?

Last edited by [Browser](#) on Fri May 17, 2013 1:53 pm, edited 1 time in total.

We don't know where we are, or where we're going -- but we're making good time.

Rupert



Re: How Often Change Differential and Transmission Fluid?

Fri May 17, 2013 12:50 pm

The dealer is almost always ripping you off. **That being said, my 2004 Acura owner's manual says change the transmission fluid every 30,000 miles or 2 years, regardless of how old or high mileage the car is.** (My car's a transaxle, so no separate differential fluid to worry about). That's the severe maintenance schedule, which, given the broad definition of "severe" in the manual (city driving, many trips less than 5 miles, climate where temperatures regularly exceed 85 degrees or so), would seem to include almost any kind of driving I can think of. Maybe your dealer is following the severe schedule?

As much as I hate dealers in general, I admit that I do always take my Acura to the dealer for transmission service. I haven't found an independent Honda mechanic who will follow the manual's recommendation for

"flushing" a Honda transmission, which involves draining, driving, and refilling the fluid three times, as opposed to using one of those machines to flush it.

Browser



Re: How Often Change Differential and Transmission Fluid?

Fri May 17, 2013 1:02 pm

The severe schedule has differential fluid still changed at 90,000 miles. Transmission fluid is to be changed at 60,000 and at 30,000 thereafter. The manual says that you should use the severe schedule if you are driving mostly under one of the severe driving conditions (not occasionally or sometimes). This includes towing, mountain driving, hot weather, etc. What's interesting is that the dealer didn't mention the transmission fluid but recommended changing the differential fluid. **Both were changed 30,000 miles ago (about 2 years as I recall).** I have to admit that I didn't know the dealer's maintenance schedule is entirely different from the maintenance schedule from the guys who build the car.

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Frugal AI



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 2:40 pm

Browser, this is one of those cases where you **don't** go by the manual. There are TSBs on the 3rd generation vehicles and some of the same issues were evident on prior generations as well. I've got a 3rd generation and I'm changing mine out every 15k to 20k miles. I'd say if you've been changing yours every 30k miles with no noises on tight turns, you're doing good. Not everyone experiences the issue The good news is that as long as it is serviced promptly when it makes obvious noise, a fresh fill of Honda Dual Pump Fluid II will take care of the problem. By doing it routinely, it is a simpler procedure and just takes a simple drain and refill. If it makes noise it might require multiple fluid changes, and a clutch plate burnishing procedure (which is easier than it sounds, but takes more time), or a new clutch pack.

Browser



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 4:51 pm

Frugal AI wrote:

Browser, this is one of those cases where you **don't** go by the manual. There are TSBs on the 3rd generation vehicles and some of the same issues were evident on prior generations as well. I've got a 3rd generation and I'm changing mine out every 15k to 20k miles. I'd say if you've been changing yours every 30k miles with no noises on tight turns, you're doing good. Not everyone experiences the issue The good news is that as long as it is serviced promptly when it makes obvious noise, a fresh fill of Honda Dual Pump Fluid II will take care of the problem. By doing it routinely, it is a simpler procedure and just takes a simple drain and refill. If it makes noise it might require multiple fluid changes, and a clutch plate burnishing procedure (which is easier than it sounds, but takes more time), or a new clutch pack.

I wonder if you can elaborate. Not sure I know what "TSB" is referring to, though I assume the auto tranny. Is there some more info on this issue available? Coincidentally, I have just started noticing a slight chattering or rattling sound in the underside front end somewhere when I am stopped with the engine idling. Does it in every setting except Reverse, and only when the engine is idling. When I touch the accelerator, I don't hear it. Been wondering what that is and now you've got me thinking about the tranny.

We don't know where we are, or where we're going -- but we're making good time.

snowman



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 5:32 pm

I do it every 30K miles. Really easy (easier than changing the oil), you don't even need the lift. Very inexpensive preventive maintenance.

If you don't keep the car forever, it's not necessary, just follow the manual. Although I have found that transmission behaves better when drained and filled every 30K miles. You can tell the difference.

As for differential (I got 3 on my SUV), it's generally not required until 90K miles, but some manufacturers recommend 30K service. I would never pay for what dealers charge for 30K service (it's a complete ripoff IMO), but if you can do it yourself, the cost for top notch fluids will be below \$30 (for all 3). At that cost, there really is no reason not to do it.

Browser



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 5:44 pm

False alarm: I just ran down to the local garage and had a look at the noise problem. It turned out to be a loose metal housing on the catalytic converter that is rattling. No tranny issue. What do you think is a fair price for an independent garage to change the transmission fluid? I think there's a filter that should be changed or cleaned in there as well so that might involve some labor. I've always had work done at Honda, but I'm thinking the local garage ought to be able to do transmission service and it should cost less.

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SteveNet



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 6:03 pm

Browser wrote:

False alarm: I just ran down to the local garage and had a look at the noise problem. It turned out to be a loose metal housing on the catalytic converter that is rattling. No tranny issue. What do you think is a fair

price for an independent garage to change the transmission fluid? I think there's a filter that should be changed or cleaned in there as well so that might involve some labor. I've always had work done at Honda, but I'm thinking the local garage ought to be able to do transmission service and it should cost less.

I'm quite sure that an independent garage that you trust and is good, will charge much less than a dealership. Changing the fluid is not rocket science I don't see any benefit to having a dealer do it.

From what I understand the fluid is supposed to be clear when new and gets darker reddish when it needs to be changed.

If it is darker then it's time for a change no matter how little it is or isn't used.

Make sure they (independent garage) use the correct type of fluid, I believe it's some sort of double pump fluid, not sure myself about that.

Thats my understanding, I'm sure someone will correct me if I made a error, as I'm not familiar with that vehicle.

Many years ago a dealership wanted to charge me \$90 to replace 2 motor mounts, my local garage charged me \$30.

Being frugal is hard to learn, but once learned is hard to stop.



Tycoon



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 6:31 pm

More than I'd like to. Early 2000 Acuras had a notorious problem with transmission failures. I had to have mine replaced at 25000 miles. Because of this I change the fluid ever two years (~20000 miles).

C'est la vie

Browser



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 6:43 pm

I just viewed a youtube video on changing the transmission fluid in the 02 CRV and it looks easier to do than changing the oil (which I've done and the drain plug is hard to get to w/o a lift). A real no-brainer. Guy said the fluid costs about \$15/qt from the dealer and you need 3 1/2 qts (you would buy 4) or \$60. Since I'd need a drain pan and a funnel my DIY price might be about \$70. So anything under \$100 or so would seem to be a pretty good price to have someone do it for you. Don't know about the filter though - whether there is one and does it have to be replaced?

We don't know where we are, or where we're going -- but we're making good time.

snowman



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 8:35 pm

Honda ATF DW-1 costs about \$8-10/quart. Prices vary. You can get it for as little as \$6 if you buy the whole case. You need the socket, new washer, drain pan, turkey blaster and funnel.

1. Drain
2. Plug (use new washer)
3. Measure how much you drained
4. Put the same amount in - turkey blaster into dipstick hole, funnel into turkey blaster

Start it up, measure, drive around, measure again (dipstick).

Look at the color of drained fluid. If it's dark, brownish color, repeat. If still the same color, repeat. You want to see clear pinkish-red color, similar to what you are putting in.

Dealer will only do it once, and will charge you around \$90. It involves making appt, driving there, waiting, hoping they don't screw up, listening what else is wrong with your vehicle, wasting more money, driving back. You can do it yourself in less than 30 minutes, and you know the job is done right. It's also a lot cheaper. Most 4 cylinder Hondas require 3 quarts; V6s generally 3.1 quart, although most dealers generally use round number 3 for any Honda engine. Either way, if you buy the case, 1 drain and fill will cost you about \$20.

Once you do this, you will realize how cheap and easy it is to change differential fluid.

snowman



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Fri May 17, 2013 8:59 pm

Browser wrote:

I got an oil change for my 2002 CRV and was told that the oil in the rear differential was dirty and needed to be changed -- costs \$120 for this service.

Just re-read your post again. This is a very common tactic, and what I referred to when you take your vehicle for oil change and they try to up-sell you. They have no idea how dirty your differential oil is, because there is no way they can determine that. They just want to sell you something, whatever it is.

Any differential is going to have 2 holes, and upper filler hole, and a lower drain hole. They are not going to open the lower one, because the fluid would drain out. They COULD open the upper one, and maybe stick a small finger in there, but it will tell you NOTHING about the fluid. Fat fingers will not even make it there. So what they did was look at your service records, and determined that it might be a good time to sell you differential fluid change. They told you it was dirty, and assumed you will just say "sure, go ahead".

Now, this fluid change is the easiest one. You remove the upper plug, then remove the lower one and drain the fluid. Depending on the size of the differential, it could be anywhere between 1q and 3q, your manual will specify both the quantity and type recommended. The total cost of fluid will be anywhere between \$5-\$20. That's your cost, dealer's cost is less. \$100 is their profit for 15 minute work. It can take you 30 minutes if you give it time to drain properly. At dealership, it's all about speed. They could do it in as little as 10 minutes,

but not all fluid will drain. There is no measuring involved in this one - plug the lower hole (use new washer), fill the upper hole until full (it will start draining out), wait for that to stop, than close it (use new washer). Done.



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 6:46 am

snowman wrote:

I do it every 30K miles. Really easy (easier than changing the oil), you don't even need the lift. Very inexpensive preventive maintenance.

If you don't keep the car forever, it's not necessary, just follow the manual. Although I have found that transmission behaves better when drained and filled every 30K miles. You can tell the difference.

As for differential (I got 3 on my SUV), it's generally not required until 90K miles, but some manufacturers recommend 30K service. I would never pay for what dealers charge for 30K service (it's a complete ripoff IMO), but if you can do it yourself, the cost for top notch fluids will be below \$30 (for all 3). At that cost, there really is no reason not to do it.

I am doing every 30k on our 2012 Civic 1.8L, already done one. The maintenance minder would have you do it near 110-120k and would do the three drain and fill method. We have a Civic at work and I recently did the three drain and fills since the Honda dealership wasn't aware of the Honda procedure.

Nothing is free, someone pays...You can't spend your way to financial freedom.



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 6:58 am

Browser,

Browser wrote:

I wonder if you can elaborate. Not sure I know what "TSB" is referring to, though I assume the auto tranny.

Actually I was referring to the rear differential--there have been a few Technical Service Bulletins. As for the ATF, every 30k or every couple years is the recommendation. Many dealers will just do a single drain/refill unless the vehicle sees severe usage, like towing. It takes 3 drains/refills for a "total" flush (80%+). Alternatively, every 30k miles or so just drain the 3+ quarts (one drain) and refill. As Mike points out, those with MM only see the auto trans maintenance around 120K, and then it would require a total flush. However, it should be checked often for color and smell.

On an older vehicle that is out of warranty I'd definitely go to an independent mechanic for routine maintenance. Any GOOD Honda mechanic should know to **only use Honda fluids**, with the exceptions of engine oil, brake fluid, or manual trans oil. If you have to supply them yourself, either buy from the dealer or check

out Bernardi or Handa Honda dealerships online.

On that noisy catalytic converter cover just get a screw type adjustable hose clamp and crank it down.
(edited because fluid volume of ATF was confused with rr dif volume)

Last edited by [Frugal Al](#) on Sat May 18, 2013 10:32 am, edited 1 time in total.



mike143



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 8:39 am

Frugal Al wrote:

with the exceptions of engine oil, brake fluid, or manual trans oil.

All Honda here with exception oil and oil filters. With brake fluid and manual trans fluid so little is needed (bottle or two) that it is not worth considering a substitute.

Nothing is free, someone pays...You can't spend your way to financial freedom.

snowman



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 9:31 am

Al,

I agree with you, just wanted to expand on couple points you made for Browser's benefit:

"Many dealers will just do a single drain/refill unless the vehicle sees severe usage, like towing. It takes 3 drains/refills for a "total" flush (80%+). Alternatively, every 30k miles or so just drain a quart and refill. As Mike points out, those with MM only see the auto trans maintenance around 120K, and then it would require a total flush. However, it should be checked often for color and smell."

I am not aware of any dealer that is going to perform this according to manual (and/or the way you and I do it). Every single dealer I know of will perform only 1 drain and fill. If you asked them to do it 3 or 4 times (as per manual), they will tell you they can do it, multiplying their charge accordingly. You will have no way of knowing whether they actually did it multiple times.

"Any GOOD Honda mechanic should know to **only use Honda fluids**"

Very true. Problem is finding one, and even then, you are not sure. All businesses these days are looking at ways to cut costs. You can save over 50% by buying retail ATF "compatible" with Honda transmission. You can save even more by going with generic products. There are thousands of dealers (not independents, but actual dealers) across the country (talking about all car makers now) that don't even purchase their own recommended fluids; they get generic in bulk from places like NAPA. It's "good enough", and saves them ton of money. Washers are almost never replaced ("good enough" category as well). If you want "genuine" fluid, they

will charge you more (though you don't know if they actually used "genuine" product; if their parts dept does not have it in stock, they will use bulk).

These are some of the reasons why I perform all routine maintenance on our vehicles. It is easy, very inexpensive, takes less time doing it yourself, but most importantly, you KNOW it is done right.



Frugal AI



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 10:40 am

I agree snowman. I don't blame anyone who doesn't DIY, though. You can improve your chances of getting the right fluids by discretely marking the bottles and requesting empties be placed in the trunk--still no guarantee. I'd gladly pay more to ensure getting Honda fluids.

mike143 wrote:

With brake fluid and manual trans fluid so little is needed (bottle or two) that it is not worth considering a substitute.

Mike, I agree, but there's nothing different with their brake fluids or manual trans fluid. With brake fluid it's just DOT 3, and just gear oil for the trans. Any good product meeting those specs will work.

Browser



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 11:00 am

Thanks for the advice. It looks so simple to change the tranny fluid myself, I'm inclined to do it myself - not so much to save money but to make sure it gets done correctly. The video at <http://autodiyonline.com/honda-diys/hon...hange-diy/> shows the guy also removing the transmission cover (3 bolts, relatively simple) and lubing the transmission cable with silicone spray. Anyone think that is a good idea? Also, they use protective gloves.

One other thing, should you run the engine and change the fluid while hot or do it with the engine cold?

We don't know where we are, or where we're going -- but we're making good time.

snowman



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 2:44 pm

Browser,

You don't need to remove the cover. Nothing for you to do there, don't worry about it. All you want to do is to replace ATF, unless your manual specifically says to replace the filter as well. You want the engine to be hot, not cold.

You may want to check the level of ATF now, just so you learn how to do it, and to see what the level is before the change. Measuring ATF on Honda engine is different from other makes - engine needs to be warm (say after 20 min driving), park on leveled surface, turn the engine OFF, then immediately measure. Presumably the level is within range, and if it is, you want to end up at the same place after drain and fill. That's why you measure how much came out, so the same amount goes in. Unless you have some sort of problem, 3 quarts will come out, and 3 will go in.

1. Locate the drain plug
2. Make sure you have the right socket
3. put gloves and safety glasses on
4. put drain pan underneath
5. open the plug and let the ATF drain out
6. when fluid stops dripping (15-20 min, don't wait longer unless you want to), put new washer on the plug and tighten it
7. measure how much came out
8. fill it with new ATF; you have 2 options: AT filler hole, or through dipstick hole; AT filler hole maybe hard to get to, so it's generally easier to use very small dipstick hole, in which case you need turkey blaster because that will fit in there, and your funnel fits into turkey blaster tube; put in the same amount as came out

Note: experienced mechanics and Honda technicians will not measure the amount of drained fluid. As long as it looks about right, they will put in 3q of ATF and be done with it. Since you are new to it and do not want to over or under fill and potentially damage your AT, it's a good idea to measure just to be sure. It should be 3q exactly on most 4 cylinder Hondas. Look in your manual what the exact capacity is, it will be there. Measuring will also force you to take a look at the color and smell of ATF. If it looks really brown, like a used engine oil, and not pinkish-red, you know it should be done again.

Start it up, let it idle for a few minutes while you change gears, turn it off, look at dipstick. If it's in the specified range, turn it up, and take it for a ride. Shift between gears many times, drive, reverse, 1-2, 3-4 etc. Just play with it. Come back home, turn engine off, measure. If within the range, you are done. Congratulations.

If you want to do it multiple times, here are couple of additional tips:

1. After the first time, you know exactly what you are doing, and it will take you 15-20 minutes max (most of it waiting for fluid to drain), so you can plan for less time.
2. You can do it in the same afternoon, or on different days, it will not make a difference.
3. You will know when the last one is done - when the ATF coming out is pinkish-red color. It could be the very first time, or the 3rd or 4th time.
4. Keep reusing the old washer if you do it all on the same day, with just short test drives in between. Put in the new washer when completing final change.

While you wait for fluid to drain, look around in your engine compartment. Get familiar with it. Check other fluid levels. Are there any leaks? Does anything rattle? Anything loose? Are all clamps on tight? Air filter dirty? Belt showing signs of wear? Any plugs hanging disconnected? To me, this is where DIY really helps - you will be able to just take a quick look and identify current or potential problems, before any big problems develop. You would be surprised how many times the car that just came from a mechanic (or a dealer) is actually in a worse shape than it was going in.

Don't be afraid. Once you do it, the second time is a breeze and you will feel confident. After that, it will

become routine, and you will wonder why you ever bothered getting it done elsewhere - it's like you don't call someone every time you need to unload and reload dishwasher, do you? You will want to move on to differential, which is even easier. You will buy fluids ahead of time only on sale, saving even more money. It will have snowball effect.

Good luck, and please let us know how it went.

gerrym51



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 2:58 pm

what is that? obviously not often.

Browser



Re: How Often Do You Change Differential and Transmission Fl

Sat May 18, 2013 6:48 pm

snowman - thanks for the detailed instructions. I decided to do it. Went to Honda and bought the fluid. Driver's Manual says ATF-Z1 but apparently that has been replaced by ATF-DW1. Also got new crush washer for the drain bolt. Then I went to O'Reilly's and bought drain pan and a long necked funnel for about \$16. Had to try 3 funnels before one would get down there far enough. Got home to do the job. Biggest problem was getting the drain bolt loose. Hammer didn't work, but fortunately I had a metal pipe that I could use as an extension on the socket wrench and finally broke it loose. Second problem was getting the old crush washer off the drain bolt - that took a metal cutter. Drained out old fluid and replaced drain bolt. Poured in 1 qt. new fluid and refilled the container with old fluid, repeated this process two times until all the old fluid had all been repoured into 3 qt. containers. No problem draining the fluid but it is was pesky to pour the old fluid into the quart fluid containers to take back for recycle. Fired up the engine and cycled through the gears a couple times. Checked fluid level on dipstick, shut engine down and repeated the process. It was just up to bottom fill line, so I added a bit more fluid from a 4th qt. container until it checked as up to the top fill line. After parking the car for awhile, I decided to run up to Honda as I was thinking about draining and refilling one or two more times to flush it out. The Honda parts guy and a mechanic said I really didn't need to do that, since the tranny fluid has always been changed at 30,000 miles. He looked at the old fluid, which was somewhat dirty but not too bad and thought it looked OK. His advice was that you should do the flush if the old tranny fluid is really bad or you've put the wrong fluid in. I decided to go with his advice since I didn't want to deal with two more drains and three more fills. After driving back home, I rechecked the fluid level right after stopping the engine and it was right to the top fill line. Looks like a success so far. Total cost for the fluid and equipment worked out to be maybe \$50. Took about an hour and a half to do it. I'd rather do this job than the engine oil. No filter change to deal with, which is a pain in the CRV because it's hard to get at w/o a lift and impossible to get off if Honda did it previously because they have some guy they hire to jump up and down on the filter wrench to make sure the filter can never be removed by a normal human. I'm happy I did this myself since now I know exactly what fluid was used and how the job was done. It's easy enough to do that I'll just do it myself from now on. Looks like 30,000 miles or 2 years is probably the right way to go with this vehicle.

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