

Golden Moments and Golden Oil



Jeana Babcock
Jeana@BabcockAutoCare.com

Have you ever had a day or time in your life when everything seemed to go bad—a “when it rains, it pours” kind of time? A “perfect storm” of sorts? We’ve all had times like these, haven’t we? And maybe now, in 2020 we’ve had quite enough storming!

But what about the opposite? Have you ever had a day or time in your life when everything seemed to go right? A time when everything just lined up perfectly and you wanted to pinch yourself to see if it was real? A time you just wanted to yell from the mountaintops, “how great is our God!” I had a time like this recently and today, even today, I just want to squeal about how perfect it ended up being. Let me explain...

Beside the elderly—lonely and cooped up through the pandemic/quarantine, perhaps the group next in line as the most affected by all of this has been teenage girls. With the closing of schools, end of face-to-face interactions, canceling of so much, disconnecting from the bonds they need with their friends, our teenage girls have surely been through a time of trouble. As adults, we’ve had difficulties ourselves, but can you imagine enduring all of this as a teen?

Our daughter, Briella falls into this category and it has been difficult being a witness to all she has gone through these last months. She turned 16 in May—normally a time of extra joy and excitement with all that comes with it. But 2020 really has thrown a wrench in much. In respect for her privacy, I will leave it at this.

However, I am going to share the goodness. These past weeks/months, Briella has contemplated pursuing a career as a pilot. Knowing nothing of this field ourselves, her dad, Jeremy and I were unsure how to best support and guide her. In an effort to seek guidance, Jeremy asked one of our great, long-time customers, Jim, a retired Delta pilot if he might know a next good step. Jim, being amazing Jim did more than give guidance, he gave us a person—Jay.

Jay, owner of a successful business, father of eight, and pilot for ten years, immediately responded in kind to Jeremy’s inquiry—and in a way we never expected. Are you ready for this? Having never met us, he offered to take all of us up in one of the planes he shares with his flight club! I could not believe our good fortune! We went from not knowing how to guide our daughter in this career path to planning a personal flight via text in just a couple of hours.

Sunday, July 12th dawned with perfect weather—no wind, not a cloud in the sky, and mid-60s! Pinch me, please! Jay met us at the airport and from the very first moment not only did we feel welcome and important to him, but he swept us up with kindness and excitement in his passion for flying. Have you ever met someone that you thought, this person is so amazing he/she must have a million friends? That’s the first thing I thought about Jay as his engaging personality calmed any angst we may have had then we dove

into learning.

First thing first, preflight checklists. Jay grabbed his list and began teaching Briella the ins and outs of the plane and all that needed to be checked, every time. I learned things I never thought about before. For instance, the gas is in the wings! I had never thought “I wonder where the gas goes?”. But now I think how very clever of an idea that was!

The second thing that stood out the most was the golden beauty of the engine oil. It was so clean and pristine that I commented. Jay said that the oil is changed every 50 hours. Every 50 hours! Well, that sure explained the reason it was so good-looking.

I hate to interrupt a good story, but I sure would like to hang out with you right here for a bit. We need to talk about that oil! Perhaps, there are not many who would be as excited about pretty oil like me, but even now, I am thrilled with it and I want to explain why.

As the years have progressed in the automotive industry, the mindset of the manufacturers has changed. In an effort to bring a “low cost of maintenance” to new car buyers, oil change intervals have been extended more and more. There is little talk about how vehicles are driven and the climates in which they are driven and how this affects the oil. There doesn’t seem to be much talk about what mechanics think about the extended life and what they have seen as a result. And there is no talk about the fact that an oil change is a maintenance item—the whole point of maintenance is keeping the oil doing its job well to prevent problems.

So let me ask you this, if the oil is very dirty by the time a vehicle gets to the new 10,000 mile recommended mark some manufacturers are suggesting, how is that oil going to protect the engine in order to get it to a ripe old age? In light of the number of hours between airplane oil changes, it made me wonder, “how many hours does it take to get to 10,000 car miles?”. If we were to drive on average of, let’s say, 45MPH, how long would it take? If my math is right, it would be just over 222 hours. That’s four and a half times longer than the oil change of a plane and it doesn’t even take other factors into account. Let’s explore.

In its fresh, new state, oil is a glorious golden color. It contains conditioners and lubricants that travel through the engine of your vehicle, protecting all of the components—running through all of the nooks and crannies and cleaning up any dirty spots along the way. As the oil ages

and travels, as it is affected by so many factors including driving habits and weather, as it picks up all the debris from normal engine wear, it changes in color and even consistency from golden liquid to brown/black, sometimes gelatinous goo (sludge).

If the oil in your engine gets to the sludge state it certainly cannot do the job it was designed to do of protecting your engine. Even a little sludge doesn’t flow as well and if it becomes too thick, it can even block passages in the engine, preventing oil from lubricating vital engine components. These components then wear more quickly and may even fail prematurely.

Sludge is caused by several factors.

#1) Time: The engine oil is contaminated by exhaust gas that eventually leads to sludge. This is the reason there are mileage and time intervals for oil changing.

#2) Condensation: Sludge can also come from oil that gets contaminated by water from normal condensation. After a few minutes of highway driving, the oil heats up enough for the water to evaporate. The problem comes when those of us who often make short trips don’t allow the engine to warm up enough for the water to evaporate. This is especially true in winter.

#3) Heat: Sludge also forms when the engine gets too hot—causing the oil to break down. Stop and go summer driving, towing and hauling are a few conditions that foster the formation of sludge.

As an example of a problem with extended oil life intervals, let’s say your oil is very dirty and maybe just a little sludgy by the time you get it changed. The old oil is drained out and your system is filled with new oil. What do you suppose happens to that new oil almost immediately? As that golden oil travels to all of the nooks and crannies that had dirty oil running through them, the new oil does its job by cleaning and lubricating—picking up the left-behind grime as it goes. The little bits of left-behind grime here and there contaminate the new oil. If you then continue to extend the time between oil changes, not adding any additional cleaning products, you have a vicious cycle of dirty oil.

Some manufacturers have overcome the specific time/mileage with computer programs that record the number of cold starts, how many times the cylinders fire, engine temperature, and other factors. The computer then estimates when you should change your oil and alerts you

to it. Do you have a vehicle with this feature? Do you know if you have it? Some computers take only mileage into account. Is this how yours works? Or is there no oil life indicator at all?

With so many considerations, how are we really supposed to know when to change the oil or who to even listen to?

Might we jump back over the airplane? The oil is changed every 50 hours. Why? Because oil is extremely important! Certainly, you don’t want to take any chances in a plane—if something goes wrong you can’t simply pull over to a cloud with a breakdown. A breakdown of a plane engine would be catastrophic. But the point I want to make is this—there is a very good reason the oil is changed so often. It is done so that it can do an excellent job of protecting the engine, keeping it healthy to a ripe old age, and preventing any internal failures one cannot see.

In a vehicle, you can pull over if there is a problem. And if you have deep pockets, perhaps you don’t care about keeping your vehicle in tip-top shape to get as many miles out of it as possible. But for most of us, we want to keep our vehicles to a ripe old age—thousands of hours old. To do this, we must consider the importance of oil and be extra vigilant about making sure we get it changed as indicated by the type used, mileage, and time, as well as where we live and how we drive.

Speaking of being vigilant, I was so reassured to know all that is checked before a plane takes flight—every single time. And, pilots are my kind of people. They know that we cannot always depend on our memories to ensure we check every single thing. They have lists—I love lists! Their lists ensure every single thing is thoroughly considered and nothing is missed.

After the lists were checked, our new friend, Jay taught our daughter how to pilot the plane. She learned some pilot terms, learned about the instruments and controls, learned how to navigate different areas, learned how to take off and land, and even learned a few fun small plane maneuvers. We flew to Byron to find our house nestled into a neighborhood of trees, we touched down/took off from the Dodge Center airport, we headed to the Mississippi River, landed and took off in Redwing and flew over the beautiful city of Rochester.

It was the perfect day, the perfect weather, the perfect pilot, the perfect plane, with the perfect golden oil. As imperfect parents, who work way too much, take too little time to have fun with our kids, it was a perfect moment, in the midst of a pandemic to have lined up this perfect event to show our daughter that we not only support her dreams, but we will do all we can to make them come true. There is nothing that thrills me more than seeing my children thrive—it makes me want to shout from the mountaintops (or from a plane), “How great is our God!”. I am most grateful for this perfect moment in time—and I hope, in the midst of all we’ve endured in 2020, that you’ll have some perfect moments like this and give praise to the One who made them possible.



507.226.8330

5335 Hwy. 52 North

(Off Hwy 52 Nat 55th St.) Rochester

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