

Honda Power Steering Fluid Flush



Some long-life consumables like power steering fluid should be periodically inspected. Perhaps because they are not considered ‘standard’ maintenance items, services of this sort can be overlooked. Maybe you’ve considered selling power steering flushes to your customers, but just didn’t know how or when to make the maintenance suggestion without sounding like you were perpetrating a ripoff.

Until very recently, Honda made no specific time or mileage recommendations for flushing and replacement of the power steering fluid on any model, much less tips on the best way to do the job. Possibly due to their truck-like origins, the Honda Passport and SLX *do* have a (Dexron II) power steering flush interval recommendation. As far as the rest of the Hondas out there are concerned, I don’t care whether it’s on the maintenance schedule or not; I can promise you the sauce in the power steering reservoir will be looking pretty pitiful after 90-120,000 miles.

This brings us to the *why* of our story. If Honda doesn’t specifically recommend power steering fluid replacement for most of its vehicles, why bother to change it? Because leaks are the most common reason Honda power steering racks require repair or replacement. I’ve resealed many of them, but I had the special tools, so doing the work was no big deal. It was, however, a big deal to the customers who had to shell out serious money for the job.



The fluid level on this Honda is just a bit low — even with the lower or “Min” level. Most of the time, we would make sure there weren’t any leaks, then top off the reservoir with fluid designated “For Honda Power Steering Systems Only,” right? Since Honda power steering fluid starts out clear like new engine oil and since the color of the fluid in this reservoir is dark, I opted to flush the system instead.

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To make flushing the system easier, remove the upper return hose from the reservoir. I capped the reservoir fitting and installed about an 8-10mm drain pipe made from a Honda transmission oil cooler line. I ran the pipe into a drain pan to show you how nasty this stuff can get. You may not be able to see it, but the pipe is wired to a bracket on the drain pan, to keep it from flailing around when I started the engine. A jug with a neck to keep the fluid from spraying all over the place is an alternative.



After hooking up the lines, start the engine. Turn the wheel all the way to the left, then all the way to the right as fast as you can, and shut the engine off. This allows the pump to push all the fluid out of the rack. Don't let the rack stop at full lock during this step. We're running all of the oil out of the system, and pumps don't like to run dry.



This is no exaggeration — the power steering fluid really was this dark. When you're done with the first evacuation of the system, fill the reservoir to the top with new fluid. Repeat the previous steps until clear fluid comes out the disconnected return line. Keep the reservoir filled so the pump always has as much new fluid as it needs.

We're all after value, right? Isn't that what makes customers happy and keeps them coming back? What if we could give them a few more miles out of their Honda steering racks before the racks leaked? Haven't you noticed customers who regularly change their motor oil have few if any oil pan gasket, cam seal or valve cover gasket leaks? When oil breaks down or becomes contaminated, it does nasty things to seals, like making them as hard as your first attempt at homemade Rice Krispy bars. That's why we advocate dumping the crankcase oil every 3000 miles or so.

I'm not a chemist, so I can't tell you what Honda power steering fluid fractionates into after 100,000 miles driving a ram back and forth, getting whipped around by gear or vane pumps and being squeezed through bypass valves. But if color tells us anything, it says 100K fluid deserves a change.

A power steering flush is a quick and easy maintenance job that takes me about a half an hour to complete (not counting wiping my fingerprints off the camera lens). Remember, this simple procedure can extend the life of the rack and the power steering pump. If you explain it to your customer in that way, it won't sound like a gimmick, and the added revenue for your shop will always be welcome. Just be careful not to let the power steering fluid spray all over the place in the process! ■

—By Marlowe Peterson



After four bottles of Honda power steering fluid, the fluid started to come out the return hose as clean as from the bottle. By filling the reservoir with new fluid, then running the engine just long enough to steer the wheel left and back right before shutting it off, we swept old fluid, bits of metal, acids and you-name-it from the system, leaving behind only seal-friendly, fresh power steering fluid.



When you're sure you've got clean fluid throughout the system, reconnect the return line to the reservoir. Fill the reservoir to the upper line, then start the engine and turn the wheel back and forth as many times as necessary to purge air from the system. And finally top off the reservoir as necessary. It took a total of five bottles of power steering fluid to service this vehicle.