

Auto Sunday

Extended-life radiator coolant should be flushed on schedule

Q. We own a 2004 Chevy Malibu with only 22,000 miles. It's time to change the Dexcool radiator fluid per the owners manual. Some shops say they no longer use Dexcool due to the alleged problems and litigation against GM. Is it OK to use a universal fluid in a GM car, or must it be Dexcool?

A. Dexcool has created its share of controversy over the years and there has been litigation around claims that it has caused some gasket failures. Some of the problems are a result of consumers having the impression that they never have to flush the coolant anymore. The other thing that has caused some problems is the mixing of regular coolant with extended-life coolant because they are different chemical compositions. Even though it is extended-life coolant, it still needs to be flushed per the maintenance schedule.

Congratulations to you for following your maintenance schedule. There are some global coolants that will interchange with the Dexcool but you have to be sure that it does. If you are not sure, you are better off sticking with the Dexcool or the coolant that your particular car calls for. The important thing is that you follow the maintenance schedule for your car.

Q. I have a 2007 Saturn Vue AWD I acquired in May 2007. It now has 43,000 miles on it. The seats are a custom leather and both front seats have heaters. The driver-seat heater has gone out three times now. The last time I replaced it was in January. It just failed again last month. Do you know of a problem with these?

A. The seat heaters will go bad from time to time but it seems that you are having more than your share of problems. I looked to see if there were any Technical Service Bulletins and I did not find any. Were these installed after the car was built or are they factory-installed heaters? If this was an aftermarket installation, as your question indicates, I would question the quality of the component or possibly the installation. The other question I would have is what part of the system is failing: the seat element, the switch, or is it some other part of the system?

If these are aftermarket seat heaters you might want to have someone who installs these systems take a look at it to get their opinion. If this is a factory installed system you can check the fuses to see if one has blown. There is a fuse under the hood and also one in the inside fuse box. If it is not one of the fuses, you will have to once again have a technician diagnose which component has failed.

Q. I have a hard time trusting the car dealerships on fine tuning my van. Is that the best place to go for the winter check up or would a local auto technician be the best choice? I've done regular maintenance (oil changes, filter, brakes, tires) on my 2003 Honda van. Is there anything else to really be concerned about? The van has about 73,000 miles on it.

A. As I've mentioned in the past, it is important you have a shop you trust with your car. A place where, when you go in, you feel confident that the shop has your best interest at heart.

Your car is running good so you don't have to decide on a shop on the spot like you would if you had to get towed in because something broke. The best way to find a shop is to get a referral from a friend or a co-worker. You could check with the Better Business Bureau or your local chamber of commerce. Once you have a few names, pay them a visit and ask some questions. When you're there, make sure you feel comfortable.

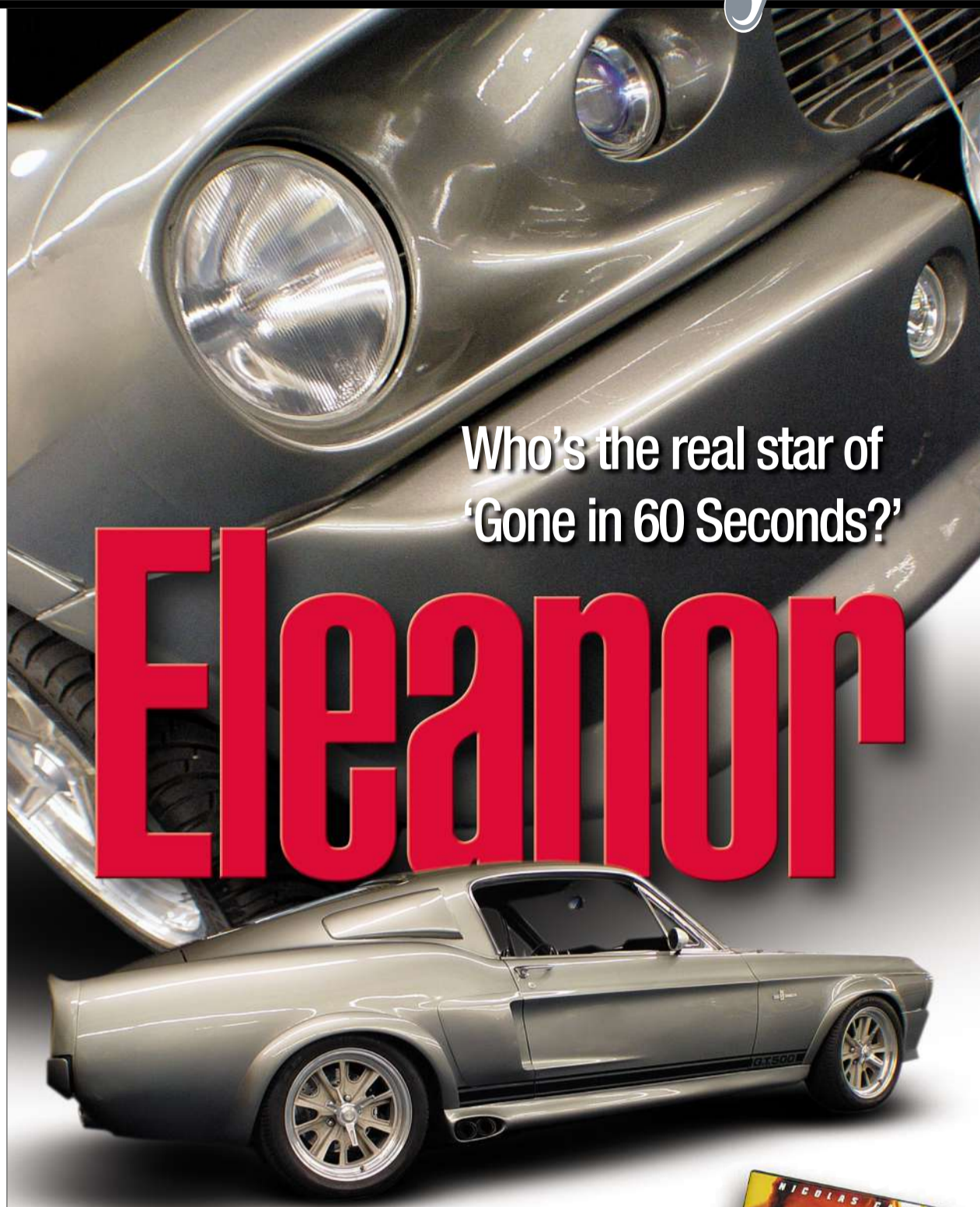
For winter maintenance, be sure all scheduled services are done and current. The 60,000 mile one would have been the biggest service. Make sure you have the belts and hoses inspected and if the coolant has not been serviced, it would be good to have that flushed out. Most shops have a winter service or checklist they perform. Here are the items I mentioned a couple weeks ago.

- Oil change
- Battery test
- Test the coolant strength
- Test heater and defroster output
- Inspect tires for enough tread
- Check all lighting
- Inspect belts and hoses
- Test wiper and washer system
- Inspect brakes and anti-lock system
- Inspect steering and suspension components
- Perform repairs to any deficient area and provide maintenance service where needed.

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Doug McAllister
Under the hood



Who's the real star of 'Gone in 60 Seconds?'

Eleanor

BY MALCOLM GUNN

Wheelbase Communications

There she is ... there's Eleanor."

For movie-loving car nuts, the names Angelina Jolie, Nicolas Cage and Robert Duvall pale in comparison to the real star of the movie "Gone in 60 Seconds."

Eleanor.

She had no dialogue, but made the most noise. She was Cage's bittersweet love interest and probably had more on-screen presence than the rest of the cast put together. She, of course, was a 1967 Shelby GT500 Mustang, code-named Eleanor, the 50th and final vehicle that Cage, who played retired-car-thief-brought-back-into-action Randall "Memphis" Raines, had to steal and deliver to a ruthless crime boss with horribly bad one-liners.

Enough about the plot. For car nuts, "Gone in 60 Seconds" — a remake of the cheesy 1974 movie that also featured a Mustang — is not 112-minutes long, but precisely 14-minutes long, the exact length of the movie's climactic car chase, timed from the moment Eleanor enters the picture, to the moment she's delivered, beaten to a pulp (and 12 minutes late, by the way), to the bad guys. Great, Eleanor is crushed by a 100-ton crane. For car lovers, it's their worst nightmare come true.

Granted, the other 49 cars looked great, too, but there's just something about the gray Mustang leaping backed-up bridge traffic in a single bound.

Since the movie, Eleanor has spawned numerous clones — interesting considering that even the original Eleanor is a clone of a popular '60s Mustang — and companies that have no problem charging (and getting) tens of thousands of dollars to build them. How and why did this happen?

After more than a century of film

Fine Lines

1967 Shelby GT500 Mustang

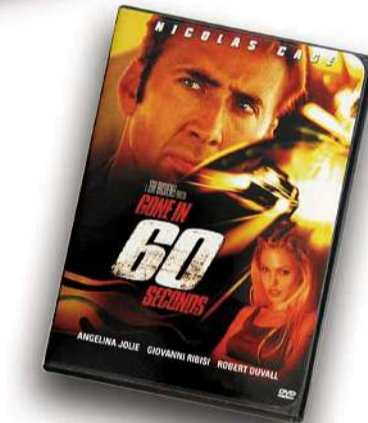
making, the cinema remains the most influential, ahem, "art" form around. Not only does it dictate the clothes we wear, the food we eat and the furniture that decorates our homes, but it holds considerable sway over the cars we want to park in our driveways.

Eleanor is based on the original 1967 GT500 built by Carroll Shelby, an ex-racing driver and the father of the Cobra sports car. Back then, using a Ford Mustang fastback body as a starting point, Shelby replaced the stock 390-cubic-inch V-8 with a 355-horsepower 428-cube "Cobra Jet" V-8. The GT500 parts also included an enlarged grille, dual driving lights, unique air-scoop hood, side air intakes behind the doors, rear-deck spoiler and sequential turn-signal taillights from a 1967 Mercury Cougar.

Most of the 2,050 GT500s built that year at Shelby's Southern California factory included air conditioning and special wheel covers, with buyers selecting either a four-speed manual transmission or three-speed automatic. The optional GT stripes that extended above the rocker panels were dealer-installed.

At around \$4,200, about \$2,000 over and above a base Mustang coupe, the GT500 was a pricey item in 1967. But, as they say in Hollywood, you ain't seen nuthin' yet.

To create Eleanor, "Gone in 60 Seconds" producer Jerry Bruckheimer ordered a more modern interpretation of the GT500 be built from scratch. That meant updating the front- and rear styling, adding side-mounted exhaust outlets and fender flairs, lowering the ride and stuffing a set 17-inch alloy wheels



shod with modern-day rubber into the fenderwells.

To appeal to younger audiences, Eleanor was fitted with a power-enhancing nitrous-oxide system (a gas that provides extra oxygen for the engine) with the appropriate switch labeled "GoBabyGo."

A flashy "Pepper Gray" metallic paint job with contrasting wide-band black racing stripes completed the exterior updates.

Most of the 12 Mustangs built for the movie used nothing particularly special for running gear and wound up being destroyed during production.

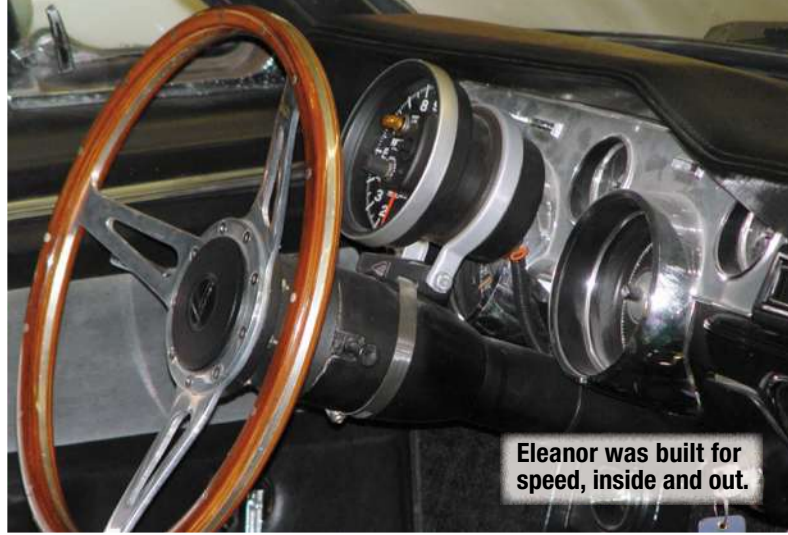
The one performance version that remained intact received a 400-horsepower, 351-cubic-inch V-8 supplied by Ford. A 13th Eleanor, not used in the movie, was constructed from an original GT500 for Bruckheimer's personal use.

The buzz surrounding "Gone in 60 Seconds" and its Eleanor car star reverberates to this day. The parts needed to convert a 1967 or nearly identical '68 Mustang into a movie double are readily available from aftermarket suppliers and the value of clapped-out fastback donor cars continues to escalate, due in no small part to the movie.

To take the phenomenon one-step further, Carroll Shelby, the creator of the original car upon which Eleanor is based, teamed up with a group of Dallas-based entrepreneurs in 2002 to produce the Shelby G.T. 500E, a very close clone of the movie machine. Buyers could order their completed cars in a variety of strengths, from a relatively tame 325-horsepower V-8 all the way up to a supercharged 427-cube mill with 750 horses on tap. The price of admission ran between \$80,000 and \$150,000.

That's a lot of coin, but remember, you're getting both a cinematic-influenced fashion piece and an honest-to-goodness historic Shelby-inspired performance machine, all rolled into one. Thank you, Eleanor.

• E-mail Malcolm Gunn at www.wheelbase.com/mailbag.html.



Eleanor was built for speed, inside and out.

Acura introduces two-wheel drive RDX

BY ANN M. JOB

For The Associated Press

In the search for fuel efficiency, Americans today are scrutinizing even smaller sport utility vehicles that have four-cylinder engines.

So it's no wonder that Acura adds a two-wheel drive version of its RDX compact SUV for 2010. The move shaves some 190 pounds from the previously all-wheel drive-only RDX and helps account for two more miles per gallon in both city and highway driving for a combined 21 mpg government mileage rating in slow- and high-speed travel.

Even better, the front-wheel drive 2010 RDX — which also includes subtle styling updates and new standard features that are on all RDX models — has a lower starting retail price than the base 2009 RDX.

Specifically, the starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, for a 2010 RDX with two-wheel drive is \$33,330. Acura said the new pricing on the Consumer Reports-recommended RDX stems from customers in warm weather areas saying they didn't want to have to pay for all-wheel drive if they didn't need it.

But the new model also means the base RDX has a noticeable price differential compared with major competitors. For example, starting retail price for a 2009 BMW X3 with manual transmission and all-wheel drive is \$40,525, while the 2009 Infiniti EX35 with two-wheel drive and automatic transmission starts at \$34,665. Additionally, the 2010 Audi Q5 starts at \$38,175 and has automatic transmission and all-wheel drive.

The competitors above have six-cylinder engines so you'd expect them to have more power. They do, in terms of horsepower, but Acura's RDX has impressive get up and go so you might think you have a six cylinder under the hood.

The reason? The RDX has Acura's first production turbo-charged engine, and though it's just a 2.3-liter four cylinder, its output is 240 horses and a six-cylinder-like 260 foot-pounds of torque at 4,500 rpm.

This compares with the Q5 V-6's 270 horses and 243 foot-pound at 3,000 rpm and the 260 horsepower and 225 foot-pounds of torque at 2,750 rpm generated by the six cylinder in the 2009 BMW X3.

This 15.2-foot-long SUV bounded up hills easily and felt lighter than its 3,752 pounds. The two-wheel drive vehicle is also 250 pounds lighter than its six-cylinder competitors.

However, the recommended fuel for the RDX is premium, which adds some cost at the gas pump.



COURTESY OF ACURA

Acura adds a two-wheel drive version of its RDX compact SUV for 2010.

At a glance

Price as tested: \$36,430

Engine: 2.3-liter, double overhead cam, turbocharged, inline four cylinder with i-VTEC

City/highway fuel economy: 17/22 miles per gallon

Length: 180.7 inches

Wheelbase: 104.3 inches

Curb weight: 3,752 pounds

Built: Japan