

Ask Ronny

by Ronny Shaver @ Ronny's Garage

Answering Your Questions About Classic Car Care Service And Restoration

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Where Is My Coolant Disappearing To?

by Ronny Shaver

I recently had a 2000 Arnage Red Label come into the shop with a coolant loss problem that was interesting. The customer concern was that the low coolant warning light kept coming on even though the system was continually checked and actually over-filled. What the customer forgot to disclose is that the system was losing coolant and they had to keep adding it.

I inspected the sensor and saw that it had a crusty trail of dried coolant running down from it and when disconnected the warning lamp was no longer illuminated. Easy right!? Well, replacing the sensor is not really easy. The left headlamp assembly must first be removed and of course, the tiny little screws that held the sensor in were seized and corroded severely. But the sensor was finally replaced, the system filled to the correct level, pressure tested and road tested. No leaks so everything was great.

The customer picked up the car and drove home. I got a call the next day and was informed that the low coolant light was once again displayed. Hmmm.

Once the car was returned I re-checked the coolant level and it was below the minimum mark. So I thought that maybe the system had an air bubble and was never correctly filled after the last repair. But I was not comfortable about returning the car yet so I topped it off and drove the car home to make sure. On the way home the warning light came on again so I suspected the coolant was leaking somewhere. Just a note, the coolant temperature was always in the normal range and I never saw any white steam emitting from the exhaust system so I was "reasonably" sure the head gaskets were fine.

First thing in the morning I topped off the system and made completed a couple of errands on the way to the shop. Short ten minute drive, park, returned twenty minutes later and so on. What I noticed after the first stop was the when the car was first started, the engine had a slight miss then smoothed out right away. The same symptoms occurred after the next stop. When I finally got back to the shop the warning lamp was once more illuminated. Remember, no leaks on the ground or steam from the exhaust and not running above normal temperature.



The system was once again pressure tested and seemed to hold just fine and not leak so I made an "educated guess" and suspected leaking head gaskets anyways. After removal of the heads the evidence was un-deniable. The A4 (right rear) cylinder had a spot on the head gasket combustion sealing ring that was leaking. Just a note, the head nuts were all tight (40 of them) and the car had never been overheated. It turns out that this problem is not un-common to this series of cars so be aware!

Thank you for the questions and keep them coming. Please send your questions to Ronny at ronnyshaver@ronnysgarage.com.

Happy Motoring!
Ronny