

Does it really do what it says on the bottle?

As a retailer, you will have to guide your customers through the alphabet soup of oil standards... but what do these specs really mean?



ANDREW GODDARD
is the Chair of the VLS oil standards body and MD of Morris Lubricants

comment@haymarket.com

As business becomes increasingly global, especially where products are sourced for retail, the issues surrounding foreign exchange management become ever more pressing.

Packaging plays a vital role by informing the customer and trader of its contents and

seem to be believable. Closer inspection found that occasionally sub-standard formulations provided by newly-established companies were being passed off as the latest specifications to their customers.

VLS FORMS

Out of this concern, reputable lubricant blenders and manufacturers came together to launch Verification of Lubricant Specifications (VLS), an industry-led service that independently validates complaints regarding the technical specifications and performance claims of products. Since then, VLS has tackled 49 cases, working through claims in a transparent process to ensure products really do deliver what they claim to. The work is ongoing and relies on manufacturers, distributors, traders and end users to report products they have any concerns over, so that they can be investigated.

while now 5W-30 grades are the most popular. However, whatever the requirement, end users are well advised to refer to the OEM operating manual at all times for the right viscosity oil.

Secondly, consider the API rating. Here you might see two sets of letters an 'S' rating followed by a sequence letter or a 'C' rating also followed by a sequence letter and sometimes an associated number. These relate to petrol and diesel engines respectively. They are not as widely used these days because of less reliance on North American technology (API stands for American Petroleum Institute).

Thirdly, there is the ACEA rating – a European set of performance standards. The so-called ACEA sequences identify relevant performance standards for lubricants based on the type of engine – usually the 'A' series for petrol engines

So a typical series of sequences might be ACEA A3/B4, or alternatively ACEA C3. For heavy commercial diesel engines then the ACEA 'E' series will apply.

In any event the engine manufacturer will determine which should be used and this will be shown in the handbook, if your customer can find it. All you have to do is make sure that these instructions are followed.

Finally, some manufacturers have their own specifications and where you see these in the handbook you should select an oil with the same claims. Examples might be Mercedes-Benz MB 229.51, BMW Long Life 04 or GM Dexos two.

Whatever the right oil for your end users' requirements, the rule of thumb of always referring to the operating manual still holds true today as it always has.

If you have any concerns that

"If you have any concerns that oil does not do what it says on the bottle, you can report it"

whether the lubricant is suitable for the chosen application. Lubricants carry key pieces of vital information that can help an end user navigate their way to the right automotive engine, transmission, brake or gear oil for their vehicle.

Choosing the right oil really does matter. Manufacturers invest millions of pounds, euros or dollars in developing sophisticated, technologically advanced engineering and expect all ancillary parts used to be of suitable quality to ensure the life of the machine for many years to come. Using inadequate or incorrect oil can accelerate wear to gears and bearings that could significantly shorten an engine's life.

In 2013 the industry faced a problem with lubricant products being sold by some new entrants with claims that just did not

When it comes to looking at claims on lubricants packs, there are usually four key pieces of information that end users need to consider carefully:

Firstly the SAE rating. This is a universal system invented many years ago by the Society of Automotive Engineers (hence the name) for expressing the viscosity or thickness of automotive oils. For modern multigrade engine oils there are two numbers separated by a letter 'W' e.g 5W-30. The first number indicates a viscosity in cold or winter operating temperatures and the second number after the letter 'W' indicates a summer or high temperature viscosity.

Most passenger cars require oils that are less viscous than those of say twenty years ago. Then 10W-40 and 15W-40 were the usual fare for passenger cars

and the 'B' series for many passenger diesels including light vans. Both these 'A' and 'B' sequences are designed for vehicles not fitted with exhaust after treatment devices.

CATALYST

For vehicles that are fitted with either a catalytic converter or diesel particulate filter, the 'C' sequences apply where 'C' represents catalyst compatible.

packaging claims on lubricants products are in any way misleading, sound too good to be true, or the oil does not do what it says on the bottle then you can report them to VLS. The body handles all cases anonymously through a clearly defined process that includes technical review by a panel of experts from across the industry and dialogue with the manufacturer and all relevant parties to work together to resolve any issues. 

WHAT ALL THOSE LETTERS MEAN

SAE – The Society of Automotive Engineers. The number following these letters will indicate a lubricants viscosity or resistance to flow.
API – The American Petroleum Institute. The body that sets an oil's performance standard.

ACEA – Developed by the European Association of Original Equipment Manufacturers, its own performance standards specifically tailored to the needs of the European market. Upgraded every few years they cover all passenger car as well as heavy duty truck engines.