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Synthetic Blend vs. Full Synthetic Oil: Pros and Cons

Synthetic blends and semi-synthetics both use a combination of conventional and synthetic base oils.



by **ANDY ARENDT**
December 17, 2021



Scott D. Galbreath asks via our [Facebook page](#) about the pros and cons of synthetic blend motor oils. Thanks for the question, Scott.

Making sense of motor oil can be confusing and frustrating. Choosing among full synthetics, synthetic blends, semi-conventional, conventional, high-mileage full synthetics and synthetic blends is just the beginning.

For many, synthetic blends and semi-synthetics are the most confusing. In part, this is because they fall between conventional and full synthetics on the motor oil spectrum. Examining the pros and cons of synthetic blends can help eliminate confusion.

Are Synthetic Blends and Semi-Synthetics the Same?

When evaluating synthetic blends, it's helpful to define the terms "synthetic blend" and "semi-synthetic".

Generally speaking, **synthetic blends and semi-synthetic refer to the same thing: an oil that uses a combination of conventional and synthetic base oils in its formulation.**

It's important to note that, while base oils are a fundamental element of a motor oil's formulation, they're only part of the picture. Additives make up the other part of the equation, and the quality and concentration of additives have a significant affect on the oil's protection and performance.

For more, check out our [definitive guide on synthetic vs. conventional oil](#).

Lastly, there are no industry specifications or regulations that define a minimum amount of synthetic base oil that must be present for an oil to be classified as a synthetic blend or semi-synthetic.

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Uncertainty in a Bottle

This uncertainty presents a few problems.

For starters, **the level of protection the oil delivers compared to a conventional oil can vary depending on the proportion and quality of the synthetic base oils in the formulation.**

Because synthetic base oils have greater molecular uniformity and stability compared to conventional base oils, they reduce oil burn-off in the presence of extreme heat and oxidation, which results in...

- Reduced oil consumption
- Improved wear protection
- A cleaner engine

However, obtaining these benefits from a semi-synthetic or blend is in direct proportion to the amount of synthetic base oils in the formulation, which is unclear at best and dubious at worst.

For a deeper dive on how much “synthetic” is in your oil, [check out this post](#).



advances in automotive technology and increasingly strict original equipment manufacturer (OEM) specifications continue to raise the bar for motor oil protection.

It's becoming more difficult for blends to meet and exceed these specifications. For example, take the [GM dexos1® Gen 2 specification](#).

While it may be possible to meet the requirements of GM dexos1 Gen 2 with a blend, the majority of brands that meet the specification appear to be full synthetics. Offering protection beyond the dexos1 Gen 2 spec likely requires an oil made from synthetic base oils and a robust, well-balanced additive package.



Which Should You Choose?

Historically, synthetic blends have offered the advantage of lower price compared to full synthetics. As the full synthetic category has matured, however, this price advantage has diminished.

Using the passenger car motor oil category as a barometer for the popularity of synthetic blends shows that blends account for the smallest share of the category and blends have experienced little-to-no growth recently.

Many motorists – and enthusiasts in particular – want the best engine protection they can afford. And many of them conclude that, when it comes to synthetics, the old adage, “If some is good, more is better” holds true. That’s why full synthetics continue to grow in popularity.



Updated. Originally published Sept. 22, 2017.

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