

# CARSIDE MANNER

## REAL-LIFE LESSONS IN CUSTOMER RELATIONS



hicles. (The pizza was two days old if anyone is interested.)

The letters came from all over the country, from cars owned by the rich and poor alike. The picture they paint of abuse and neglect is not a pretty one.

We'd like to share some of the more touching letters that wandered through my dream, in the hope that some of you can convince the owners of these vehicles to stop their horrid treatment of our four-wheeled friends.

Grab a box of tissues and read on.

### From Sludged-Up in Omaha:

Dear Sir,

A well cared for car has no idea how lucky it is. The hamster head who owns me has allowed the oil in my crankcase to reach the asphalt state. You could drain my crankcase and fill potholes with this stuff. Trying to draw oil into my pick-up is like trying to suck the bottom out of a pop bottle. I have 28,000 miles on my odometer and the original oil filter is still on me.

There's a tire gauge in my glove box that's never seen daylight, and it's been so long since I had a drink of water that my pipes are parched. What does he think I am, a cactus plant?

I'm desperate, can you help me?

Dear Sludged,  
Hamster head?

### From Too Pooped to Push in Peoria:

Dear Import Service,

My first owner was a caring individual who always did his best to keep me in tip-top shape. Unfortunately, his gas-and-go children have reached driving age, and I have been relegated to a second-class citizenship, hauling screaming cheerleaders and sweat-soaked athletes back and forth to sporting events.

My entire life is spent at the self-serve pumps (\$1.27 at a time, most of it in pennies), and as a result, my hood has finally rusted shut. I am dangerously low on vital fluids, and may have no choice but to give up the ghost completely.

His daughters are especially bad. They throw my shift lever into the Park position while I'm still moving, use the rear view mirror only to put on lip gloss,

I had the strangest dream the other night. Maybe it was the cold pizza at midnight—who knows. At any rate, I dreamed that we had received a batch of letters written by abused and neglected vehicles.

and think that an oil change involves the purchase of a different brand of suntan lotion!

As if this weren't enough, my glove box is now used to store old sweat socks—used sweat socks at that, and a three month old cheeseburger is attempting asexual reproduction below my passenger seat. Oh woe is me!

Dear Pooped,

Mentioning the hamburger helped a lot. The EPA has been contacted and help is on the way. Apparently you're eligible for Superfund money. Hang in there.

### And Finally from Shot At and Missed in Ohio:

Dear Folks,

I am beyond hope now, but perhaps my story can save others. My owner bought me new. He vowed undying love and attention. As it turned out, the only dying done was by me. Soap was something I only heard about on my radio. I was driven with reckless, and occasionally drunken abandon, until I looked like a piece of abstract sculpture.

My owner thought that tuning me involved selection of another radio station. He drove me until you could throw a small cat through my spark plug gaps, and then kicked and cursed me when I failed to start. Let me assure you that the beatings did little to improve my attitude.

Finally, adding injury to insult, he parked me next to the barn, stole my battery for the farm tractor, and began storing chickens in me. Do you have any idea what it's like in here on a hot day?

Dear Shot At,

Do you ever get those brown eggs? I really think they're better than the white ones.

Well there you have it. A list of unsolicited pleas for help from some of America's most abused cars. We'd like to beg and plead with each of you to do what you can to help these poor cars and others suffering from neglect.

Perhaps it's time to get your customers accustomed to a regular maintenance schedule. Recent statistics indicate that customers are keeping their cars longer than ever before. Whether the car is a month or a decade old, getting your customers on a regular maintenance schedule can mean added profits for you, and a lot less grief for these abused vehicles.

Personalized maintenance records and an occasional post card reminder in the mail can help remind your customers about the need for proper, and regular service. They can also do a lot to keep your service bays busy.

This whole farce may sound like a dream to you, but for the average car, it really can be a nightmare.

—By Ralph Birnbaum