

# CARSIDE MANNER

REAL-LIFE LESSONS IN CUSTOMER RELATIONS



Three years ago this month, the first installment of **Carside Manner** cruised away on the maiden voyage of *Import Service* magazine. Three years have slipped away quietly, and to my great joy,

*Import Service* is still here.

In fact, as our circulation grows, there are more of you receiving *Import Service* than ever before. So it seems appropriate in a column dedicated to customer relations, that we should stop and talk to both our old and new customers, one of the most important, and sometimes forgotten customer groups in the U.S. right now—the automotive repair technician.

You.

We hear the distant rumblings of the fierce battles being fought for consumer dollars in the automotive field. For many in the industry who struggle with the uncertainties of a changing marketplace, the questions are often painful. Why do so many people buy foreign vehicles? Why are the Big Three auto makers taking it on the chin? Millions of dollars are spent in consumer magazines and on television to sway consumers to buy this product or that product.

But how often does someone try to sell the automotive technician something on his terms? How often do we stop and realize that in the automotive repair field, the technician is the final consumer? How often do we stop and say, "Thank you for the business Mr. Technician?"

Think about it. There are many unanswered questions for you as a consumer as well. Would you buy parts that didn't fit or didn't work if you got a free bay banner or baseball cap? Do you buy on price alone? How often does one of your customers ask for a specific brand of head gasket, belt, spark plug, or hose?

As the technician responsible for making a lasting repair, it is your judgment, your choices, and your experience which spell the difference between success and failure. Once again, you are the final consumer in these matters of choice.

Are technicians who work on import vehicles picky about which parts they use? We think so. Do they expect support when they have a problem, and technical assistance to avoid those problems in the first place? We think so. And what about technicians who specialized in domestic-only vehicles for years who

are beginning to see Chevys from Japan, and Pontiacs from Korea? Do they have special problems and questions as more "domestic" cars are imported cars? That's what we're hearing more and more.

Don't get us wrong. There are any number of after-market parts suppliers who have made a strong commitment to improving the size and quality of their import coverage. And in some cases, there has been a corresponding commitment to improve technical support and training. But the improvements are not universal by any means. Not yet.

So what are you to do as a concerned consumer? Maybe you wish you could write to someone at one of those big companies and voice your concerns, air your problems, and make suggestions about improving your status as a customer. But you aren't sure how to do it.

If that's the case, we'd like to help. If you want your letter to reach Mr. Big at Conglomerate Auto Parts, or the consumer affairs department at Mega Motors, mail it to us, care of *Import Service*, 306 N. Cleveland Massillon Road, Akron, Ohio 44333. We'll forward your letter to the big guys, and send you a copy of our cover letter for your records.

And the same medicine also applies for *Import Service*. We try to keep track of your mail, since you are our customer. Once in a while, requests for an article about 1952 International trucks will fall out of bounds, but most of the suggestions, criticisms, and comments received here are not only read, but discussed with an ongoing concern to meet your needs.

Your continued input is essential.

Thank you for the business, Mr. Technician.

## Changes

It is with great pleasure that we announce the promotion of Karl Seyfert to the editor's chair here at *Import Service*. The addition of another magazine, *Autobody*, has taken more and more of my time. Fortunately, Karl has always been here to help get the job done. He has earned this job in no uncertain terms, with pure hard work. Good things do happen to good people.

I will continue to write **Carside Manner**, and have already asked to contribute tech articles as time allows. I hope Karl lets me do some writing from time to time.

He said he'd think about it.

—By Ralph Birnbaum