



I received a letter from Chris Van der Slice of European Coach Werkes in Frankford, Delaware. Chris had been employed for some time at a new car dealership. Since then he has moved to an independent shop, and has found repair procedures to be more complicated now that he doesn't have access to current technical information and

the dealerships' wealth of special tools.

Here are some of his observations.

"Being used to the wealth of information and special tools in a dealer service department, I find myself often frustrated by the lack of good information available to independent technicians. Recently, while trying to check and adjust the fuel mixture of a Saab, I ran into a slight problem. The procedure called for the use of a Saab special tool being connected to a plug on the right fender. Fine and dandy—except for the fact that we do not have the Saab test equipment...."

"If I were to publish a... service manual or procedure, I think I would learn how something works and is monitored, and publish an alternative method of reading specifications with digital multimeters, dwell meters, amp meters, and/or oscilloscopes, depending on the type of signal the system uses."

Chris has also noted the increasing number of televised advertisements suggesting that the dealer is the only one who can fix a car properly. Chris notes that he "likes to take pride in the quality of work I am able to perform." As a result, he classifies consumer ads where a technician throws up his hands and says, "We can't do that, you'll have to go to the dealer" as "rather disheartening."

The note of frustration in Chris's letter is not an isolated case of sour grapes. Many professional repair shops have voiced similar complaints.

To the Manufacturers

You who manufacture cars and trucks have struggled with the flip side of the coin for years. You want to sell cars, and you want customers to be so satisfied with your products that they will repurchase your product in several years. Keeping them under the wing of the dealership parts and service departments has seemed like a logical way to do this.

Manufacturers have had an obligation to the retail service arm of their dealer network, especially to those

dealers who have wisely decided that maintenance and repair can indeed be profitable. As a result, dealerships have been "asked" to purchase thousands of dollars of special equipment as part of their franchise agreement. Many repair manuals and wiring schematics have been written only for those who have that equipment handy.

But much of this information has done little to familiarize a technician with HOW a system works. That includes dealership technicians. Instead, techs have very often been cast into the snarly branches of a diagnostic logic tree, armed only with a special piece of equipment and instructions similar to this:

"If the red light on special tester BZY 8770 glows as the engine cranks, then turn the rotary dial on the tester to dial setting F and proceed to step TWO."

Great—just great. What if the red light in the tester doesn't glow, or glows brightly and then goes dim? Then what? The poor dealership technician may not be any better off than an independent at this point, because he hasn't been given the information he needs in order to understand what in the blue blazes that red light means.

Our Recommendations

We humbly present this wish list to auto manufacturers on behalf of all technicians. We hope it accurately represents the wishes of our readers

- **Please don't assume that technicians are idiots.**

Someone might say that a little information can be a dangerous thing. We agree. A little information is not enough. Wiring schematics are a good example. They should include resistance values for solenoids, resistors, and motors. They should include current draw specifications for important components.

- **Please don't assume that only dealers can properly service vehicles.** Quality repair shops both from large metropolitan areas to cities and towns far from the nearest dealership provide a needed service to vehicle owners. Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your products may rest in the hands of a non-dealership technician.

- **Include information about how your systems work, and whenever possible, use common repair and test equipment in your repair sequences.**

- **Make that information available to independent repair shops, even at a fair price.** Several top flight shops have complained to us that repair information from the manufacturer is unavailable to them at any cost, even though they are willing to pay for that information.

- **Get some input from people who use your repair information before you write and print it.** And please, please don't forget that independent repair shops are your customers too—parts customers—big ones at that.

— By Ralph Birnbaum