



A friend was pulling out of a quick lube the other day after having the oil and filter changed. As he left, the smiling young attendant handed him his receipt and asked, "Would you like any ketchup for your fries?"

This Freudian slip disclosed both the young man's most recent previous employment, and also suggested that his experience with oil changes had been limited to a deep fryer. It unnerved the owner of the car.

He usually takes his car to a reputable shop which specializes in repair and maintenance of his particular brand of car. They charge a bit more for a lubrication service, and aren't a block away from his residence. But the experience unnerved him so much that he went to the specialist's shop immediately, and had the job done over.

Case Two

In a similar vein, a shop owner in New England called me this week, and passed along another story. One of his customers had taken her Volvo to a quick change artist for a LOF. Informed that her differential needed a drain and refill as well as fresh engine oil, she declined the additional service. Anybody can drain the crankcase and screw on a new filter, right? But she wanted her normal repair outlet to do any additional suggested maintenance.

A few miles down the road, a loud growling noise started at the rear of the car. The car was towed to her regular repair shop, where it was discovered that the fill plug in the rear end was missing.

Confronted with the situation, an employee at the quick lube asked, "Why didn't you stop when the light came on?"

"What light?" she asked.

Good question.

Case Three

Bernice finally took her father's advice, and started having the oil changed in her car. Her dad had used the services of a nearby shop for years and recommended them. But the local quick change was a few

bucks cheaper, and college kids count their pennies.

After the oil change, she left to run errands. About five miles down the road, the engine oil light came on and stayed on. Wisely, she pulled safely off the road and shut off the engine.

Her father insisted that the car be towed to his favorite shop for a look see. Up on the lift, they found the backside of the engine covered with oil, right below the oil filter. After removing the filter, they discovered that the sealing ring from the old filter had stuck to the sealing flange. It had not been removed before the new filter was screwed in place.

As we all know, there are times when two seals are not better than one.

Competing for Low Tech Jobs

The last two editions of this column have dealt with the difficulties you may have when competing with car dealers on high tech repairs. But what about the other end of the spectrum. Is an oil change such a simple matter that anyone can do it as well as you do?

Apparently not.

So what do you do? Our caller from New England suggested the following:

1) Sell the maintenance package—the complete maintenance package. Take the time to explain why your oil change service is better, and also worth more.

2) Give the customer an itemized checklist of the items covered in your more complete service.

3) Explain the benefits of having a skilled technician look for telltale signs of other problems which might cause expensive problems if they aren't corrected.

4) Charge more for the service. If you've successfully educated customers about the benefits of having trained technicians do even simple maintenance, then they'll appreciate the extra money it takes to have the job done well the first time.

5) Always test drive the car. Things do happen. If there's a problem after the oil has been changed, then it's a lot better for you to find and correct the problem before the car leaves the shop.

6) Never offer the customer ketchup for his fries.

I can think of at least three people who understand these concepts a lot better than they used to.

—By Ralph Birnbaum