

SEMA/ASE INSTALLER CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Showing Customers That Technicians Are Proficient and Professional

By Steve Campbell

Trust may be the greatest sales tool available to any business. When customers feel that they are treated fairly by well-qualified technicians, they not only return to that service but also spread the word to family and friends. When a job is done well and the components function as advertised, the client is satisfied and the business thrives. Creating and increasing that type of consumer confidence is the idea behind the Installer Certification program established by the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) in conjunction with the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE). The ASE is an independent, nonprofit organization that is well known for testing and certifying automotive repair technicians.

The SEMA/ASE Installer Certification program is intended to display the competence of a shop's installers through a third-party endorsement, showing that its technicians are proficient at what they do. Through a series of tests, installers confirm their knowledge and skill, inspiring confidence in customers and providing the business with the opportunity to promote its quality work, pointing out that its technicians are certified to perform complex tasks expertly and professionally. Obviously, certification is a voluntary process, but it also allows installers to display their abilities to current and future employers as well as to their customers. The program is open to employees and owners of SEMA-member businesses as well as nonmembers.

There are two categories of certification within the SEMA/ASE program: accessories and wheels and tires. The accessory certification program consists of four test areas, including Electric Sunroofs (Z1); Body Exterior Components (Z2); Leather Interiors (Z3); and Roof Treatments (Z4). In order to earn certification in the accessory program, a technician must pass one or more of the module tests as well as an ASE test on electrical system diagnosis

and repair. The custom wheel and tire certification (Z5) requires a separate exam but does not include the ASE test.

SEMA offers two Test Preparation Guide & Registration Booklets, one for the accessory category and another for the wheel and tire category. The booklets can be used to help accessory installers study and prepare for the certification tests. Each booklet includes an overview of the program, information about the topic areas that will be covered by the individual tests as well as sample questions. The booklets are available as PDF downloads from the SEMA Web site at www.sema.org/certification.



Each of the exams is written by industry experts, including SEMA-member manufacturers and installers that have accumulated years of expertise in their fields.

All of the questions are written in multiple-choice formats and deal with the installation, diagnosis and/or repair of specific types of accessories or wheels and tires with which installers work on a day-to-day basis. The exams are administered by ACT, originally known as the American College Testing Program. ACT is a nonprofit corporation that provides test development and administration as well as educational and vocational research.

In order to evaluate a candidate's proficiency, the accessory category testing topics cover three areas in which installers must demonstrate their knowledge:

>**BASIC TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE**—Tests the technician's knowledge of what is required to properly install a specific accessory or a group of accessories and what proper procedures and/or precautions are to be followed in making repairs or adjustments.

>**REPAIR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL**—Tests the technician's ability and understanding in applying generally accepted repair procedures and precautions in assembly, disassembly and repair operations and in making inspections and adjustments. Also tests ability to follow recommended installation and/or repair procedures and use of tools of the trade.

>**DIAGNOSTIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL**—Tests the technician's ability to recognize repair problems and to use generally available tools, measurement and/or testing equipment to diagnose a problem. Also tests the technician's ability to determine the cause of a particular set of symptoms.

The wheel and tire category testing similarly covers three areas in which installers should be competent:

>**BASIC TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE**—Tests the technician's knowledge of what is required to properly install specialty wheels and tires and what proper procedures and/or precautions are to be followed in making repairs or adjustments.

>**REPAIR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL**—Tests the technician's ability and understanding in applying generally accepted repair procedures and precautions in mounting, demounting and repair operations and in making inspections and adjustments. Also tests ability to follow recommended installation and/or repair procedures and use of tools of the trade.

>**DIAGNOSTIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL**—

Tests the technician's ability to recognize repair problems and to use generally available tools, measurement and/or testing equipment to diagnose a problem. Also tests the technician's ability to determine the cause of a particular set of symptoms.

Each of the preparation and registration guide booklets found on the SEMA Web site offers a substantial list of training and reference resources for the tests. For instance, among the recommended resources in the accessory installer booklet that covers the electric sunroofs, body exterior components, leather interiors, and roof treatments testing are the "CHMSL Installation Wiring Guide," a CD that was produced by the Light Truck Accessory Alliance, a SEMA council, and contains information on center-high-mounted stop light wiring and connection; "Mitchell Air Bag Service & Repair Manual," which provides technical and procedural information on various air bag systems; and "Towing a Trailer," which is a brochure produced by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration and includes information on weight ratios and tow ratings, hitch, brake and wiring systems, load and weight distribution, state and local towing requirements.

A sampling of the A6 exam references include the "Official Catalog of ASE Automobile Tests," which provides test content areas, a task list and sample questions; "Mitchell 1 ASE Test Preparation Series," which is a guide that covers a description of the test and test-taking strategies, a glossary of terms and a sample exam with explanations of correct/incorrect answers; and the Service Technicians Society A6 study guide that covers electrical systems diagnosis and repair.

The wheel and tire training resources include "Bridgestone/Firestone North America—Tire Resource Manual," which covers tire categories and construction, sidewall information, tire and rim dimensions, load and inflation tables, innovative technologies and performance fitment formulas; "Performance Handbook," which is an annual supplement to Modern Tire Dealer, SEMA News and Truck & SUV Performance that features articles on mounting, demounting and installation, custom wheel dimensions, plus-sizing, performance tire selection, plus a comprehensive resource directory; and the "Tire Industry Association (TIA)—Basic Automotive Tire Service Training and Certificate Workbook," which covers basic principles of tires and

wheels, tire and wheel assembly removal and installation, balancing procedures and guidelines, diagnosis and repair.

To be eligible to take the exams, candidates must have at least two years of hands-on work experience. As noted previously, candidates for the accessory category must also pass the ASE A6 test in electrical system diagnosis and repair in order to receive certification, but the A6 test is not required for the wheel and tire certification.

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Candidates may sign up for one or more exams at either of two yearly testing sessions that are held in May and November at more than 700 test centers nationwide as well as in Canada and elsewhere outside the U.S. The test sessions last for four hours, and the registration fee is the same no matter how many exams are taken in the session. For SEMA-member employees, the registration fee is \$35, and it is \$100 for nonmembers. All test and registration fees are payable to SEMA in U.S. funds only. Accessory technicians who pass the SEMA and ASE exams or wheel and tire installers who pass the SEMA exam and who meet the work experience requirement will receive the appropriate credentials from SEMA and ASE, which are valid for five years. SEMA credentials include a certificate suitable for framing, an insignia and a wallet card.

Technicians who are eligible to earn SEMA/ASE certification should take advantage of the program. It is an investment in their own marketability for future employment as well as a good way to show customers that their work is being performed by people who know what they're doing. For more information, contact SEMA at 909/396-0289 or visit the SEMA Web pages described earlier. **HRP**