

STRENGTHENING A PARTNERSHIP:

HELPING YOUR DEALER CUSTOMERS GREET THE YEARS AHEAD

The NAPA Jobber must be involved with helping the service repair dealer with his business — he's your final salesperson. You and NAPA can offer and stock every part in the world, but if the service dealer, the installer, doesn't bolt it on a car or truck, on a diesel or a gas engine, on a rack and pinion steering or on a MacPherson strut suspension, you don't make a sale.

But before you can help the service repairman, you must first make a hard, practical assessment of 1). where the professional mechanic is today and how he got there; and 2). where he should be in a few years. Then you can begin to work on a strategy to help get him there. Here is one opinion . . .

THE "NEW" TECHNOLOGY: THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL?

Many people claim that the root of the service repair industry's problems is the incredibly complex new technologies introduced in cars over the past few years. After all, how could anyone keep up with such new technologies and designs as aluminum cylinder heads, turbocharging, MacPherson strut suspensions, front wheel drive, four wheel independent suspensions, electronics, fuel injection. . . the list of new developments is absolutely overwhelming — at first glance.

But take a second look. Yes, today's service dealer has to deal with aluminum cylinder heads, a technology so new that it first appeared on imports in the U.S. in the early 1960's — *twenty years ago*.

Turbocharging? Again, so new to the service dealer that it appeared on Corvairs in 1964.

Other new designs, such as MacPherson struts, actually appeared around 1958 on English Fords.

Front wheel drives? They're so new that they were on Oldsmobile Toronados in the late 60's —

again, more than a decade ago.

Four wheel independent suspension is so new that it appeared on Corvettes in the early 60's. It also appeared on Volkswagens in 1948 and on Corvairs in 1960.

What about electronics? Electronic ignition appeared in 1974. Electronic diagnostics, or scopes? They were in every Volkswagen

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dealership in the U.S. by 1974 and just about every good-sized service station in the country had some form of electronic diagnostic equipment by the mid-70's.

So the "new" technology many people are blaming as the cause of the service dealer's current problems really isn't new at all; it's simply what used to be called "import" technology, and it's existed at the import specialist level for the last ten years.

IF NOT TECHNOLOGY, THEN WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

If what we've been calling the new technology has been around for a while, why are mechanics having so much trouble with their ability to work on today's cars? To better understand, let's take another look at history . . .

Think back to someone you knew that owned a Datsun, for example, in 1975. When that

Datsun's water pump failed at 50,000 miles, did the owner bring his car to one of your service dealer customers to install the water pump? No — he took it to the new car dealership. Did he take it to the new car dealership because your dealer customer couldn't get the part? Probably not. He most likely took that Datsun back to the new car dealership because our mechanics refused to work on that car. Our mechanics wouldn't touch it. It had nothing to do with whether we had the part in our system; the mechanic didn't want to work on it.

Why wouldn't he work on it? Because he was not familiar with it. In most cases, he could have fixed it if he would have tried. None of the "technology" or service requirements were beyond his reach. But the problem was he just didn't want to mess with it; he didn't need the trouble and he didn't particularly want to learn about it. And as such cars represented such a small segment of the repair market, he didn't *have* to learn about them . . . until today. Because suddenly, the repair market changed. The majority of cars that pull into the station for repairs have the same parts and service requirements as that little Datsun that no one wanted to bother with. The repair base refused to grow with the repair market. And this failure to adapt, not the complexity of the vehicles, is what has caused many of the woes facing today's mechanics.

The service repair dealer must accept that the equipment, tools and service techniques that the import specialists have used for the last ten years will simply become the standard for every repair service center in the U.S. The "new" technology is by no means above and beyond the capabilities of the average American mechanic. He
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