

Today's Auto Repair

with Chip Stewart

-Incompetence or fraud?- Part 1

The Federal Trade Commission says that problems do exist in the auto repair industry. After conducting a two-year study into the causes and cures of auto repair complaints, the FTC concluded that "incompetent mechanics" are to blame, while the "lack of consumer knowledge contributes."

Outright fraud and dishonesty play only a minor role, the FTC says, finding that "Only a small proportion of consumer auto repair problems appears to be attributable to deceptive or unfair business practices." The FTC worked with the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) as well as other federal officials and industry representatives, including NAAG's Auto Repair Task Force.

After reading the report, you may want to take the next two years to determine just what the FTC had to say. For example, while indicting technicians, the report says that one reason for incompetence is misdiagnosis of repairs, but then goes on to say that probably the reason repairs are misdiagnosed is that today's vehicles are so sophisticated and complex that it's difficult to *make* a diagnosis. And, the FTC says, many technicians don't have full access to service information from the vehicle manufacturers, so that "even the best trained technician will be unable to effectively diagnose and repair vehicles" without that technical data. The FTC adds, "Faulty or inadequate repairs performed in good faith appear to be the cause of the majority of consumers' auto repair problems." It also notes, "There is little disagreement over the importance of consumer education in the fight to reduce auto repair problems. Many consumers fail to maintain their cars properly or delay routine repairs until the problem becomes aggravated, resulting in more complex and expensive repairs later. In addition, consumers are often ignorant about their basic legal rights under state law, such as the right to receive a written estimate, making them more susceptible to unanticipated repair costs. The Commission supports increased efforts by government and private industry to increase consumer knowledge about these issues." These articles were produced specifically for that purpose. Please see "part 2" of this article.

