

Today's Auto Repair

with Chip Stewart

-Mechanic Shortage-

The Automotive Repair Industry needs new blood. There's a tremendous shortage of technicians. Gone are the days of the backyard "grease monkey" that could "save you money" by bypassing one or more of your automobile's systems so it could run "good enough". Gone are the days when parents discussed their dim bulb of a son's future and found solace in the notion that he could "always be a mechanic". Most Americans don't realize what it takes to repair today's vehicles. If they did, their perception of the person who fixes them would be a lot different. The following is an article from one of our industry's trade magazines called "Motor" (April '96). It's called "The Last Word" and it's written by Richard B. Laimbeer. I couldn't have said it better myself:

"An automotive technician's job is to find and fix things that vehicle manufacturers haven't perfected, the laws of nature destroy and the forces of motion wear out. Technicians must have a working knowledge of all the technologies found on motor vehicles in order to diagnose and repair them. That range of knowledge, skills and insights is greater than that possessed by most American workers. Yet, most Americans (even many within the automotive after market) still perceive that automotive technicians do more work with their hands than with their heads.

So, for all the people who still have this perception, here is a dose of reality. The first step in solving the automotive technician shortage is understanding which skills and knowledge must be mastered in order to attain "qualified technician" status. Below are some of the skills and knowledge a qualified technician uses every day to diagnose and repair vehicles. Today's qualified automotive technician must be:

- Part mechanical engineer with an understanding of how internal combustion engines and mechanical systems work and how laws of physics and motion cause parts to wear out or malfunction;*
- Part chemical engineer, who can identify contaminated fluids and diagnose the source of that contamination;*
- An expert in hydraulics and pneumatics so he can service brake systems, transmissions and vacuum controls correctly;*
- Knowledgeable in basic geometry, which is required for wheel alignment and suspension repair;*
- An electrical systems expert, who tracks down drivability and electrical system problems and makes the proper repairs;*
- Computer-savvy, with a sound knowledge of electronics to operate today's sophisticated diagnostic equipment;*
- An accomplished mathematician who can interpret readings on gauges and dials, and who can machine or adjust parts to specific tolerances so the vehicle meets original equipment specifications;*
- Proficient in both the metric and English systems of measurement and be able to convert these measurements in his head (a skill most Americans have not mastered).*
- Automotive technicians also use their sense of sight, smell, hearing and touch to find the source of problems. As they go about diagnosing problems, technicians must have*

the ability to analyze the inputs, isolate the faults and make the correct repairs, be it in 90 degree heat or frigid weather conditions.

-And when it comes to an automotive technician's personality profile, we expect the patience of Job, the compassion of Mother Theresa and the honesty of George Washington.

Shop owners and car owners covet a good technician when they find one. A qualified automotive technician is a rare individual with exceptional skills. Is it any wonder there's a shortage?"

Notice that this was written in 1996 - the necessity for technical competence is much higher today and the shortage of qualified technicians is much greater. In the words of Ron Ananian, host of the radio talk show, *The Car Doctor*, "Good mechanics aren't expensive - they're priceless."