

Today's Auto Repair

with Chip Stewart

-Why so much?-

Motorists often ask "Why is transmission repair so expensive?" As a transmission specialist, I feel that is a very valid question, which every prudent consumer should ask.

The answer requires a little background. Around twenty years ago, a typical transmission shop worked on an average of 10 models of transmissions which comprised 80% of all the work they performed. Those days are gone. Today there are over 350 models with which the professional must contend. When 10 models were the mainstream, parts were readily available and relatively inexpensive by comparison. One could afford to stock 90% of the parts they might use in a given month. In those days, the necessary expertise level of technicians required to produce a quality end product was simplistic by the standards of today. Increased expertise levels command increased salary levels.

Our business has always been the most complex specialty of auto repair. However, with the recent extreme complexity and product proliferation, the transmission industry has moved (forced) into space age technology. To further complicate matters, the overall introduction of electronics to automobile technology has added to labor hours required and the skill level necessary to properly diagnosis and repair the average car.

Most cars today are front wheel drive, trans-axle type units with a full array of electronics and computer controls. "Transaxle" means that the entire differential assembly (commonly known as the "rear end" or "third member") is incorporated into the transmission. When transmission rebuilding is required the rebuilding of the final drive is also necessary. Therefore, two major components demand work, parts and attention. Also, the electronic controls usually have to be replaced due to the fact that the many of the components have magnetic properties. Anytime the transaxle becomes damaged, the magnetic components pick up metal residue and, most of the time, this residue cannot be removed. The number of hours necessary to diagnose and rebuild these types of transmissions has more than doubled, and in some case, tripled from the "simple" years.

Though complexity, expertise level and the cost of repairing/rebuilding transmissions has raised considerably, the *relative* cost has greatly diminished. Yes, it's expensive, but put into perspective, transmission repair is one of the best values in today's accelerated economy.

Next time we'll discuss how to avoid the expensive transmission rebuild. That is, if it's not too late.

