

Buying Habits Vive La Difference?

Battle of sexes heats up in the repair shop.

BY KRYSZYNA LAGOWSKI

When it comes to the battle of the sexes, nowhere are the lines of combat drawn more clearly than the auto repair shop.

Auto techs will tell you that men and women shop differently for service and repairs. For example, men may feel pressured to be fluent in automotive issues and thus may feel obligated to explain their servicing needs in auto jargon. This may not have the desired effect for the tech, who could just find it all confusing, and summon every power of communication to gently pry and poke to get at the meat of the problem.

But women, apparently, are different. Could it be that since no one expects them to be knowledgeable about car systems, they may be more open to listening instead of talking? Some techs say that women focus more on value and safety – they want to make sure the car is fixed properly so they won't be stranded on the side of the road. However, men seem to be more fixated on price, and more prone to challenge the cost of a repair.

Caveat Emptor

But it's a double-edged sword. With the internet, no one really has an excuse to be completely unaware of automotive issues. Everyone knows oil needs changing, tires need rotating and, most importantly, that an ounce of prevention is worth its weight in auto parts. It's still "caveat emptor" no matter what your gender. No one goes into a repair shop without doing some homework. Every customer should have a framework in which to operate. If that check engine light has been on for three

months, it could be a sensor – or it could be any number of items.

What's the customer's expectation? Does it matter if it's a man or a woman? Since this is still a primarily male-dominated industry, men may feel more of a sense of camaraderie when they walk into a repair shop. For most women, however, it's unfamiliar territory. So women may feel they have to try twice as hard to get a good deal, and come armed with a list full of questions. Men, on the other hand, may be more accepting of what the tech has to say.

It could be that we all fall victim to stereotyping, at one time or another. If a man asks for a quote, it's likely that he will ask for an explanation. What kind of parts is a tech likely to quote a man? And what kind of parts is a tech likely to quote a woman? There's an expectation that one may wheel and deal more than the other.

Brave new world

But it's a brave new world, and women are finding their way onto the shop floor. With the shrinking pool of labour, enrolment of women in auto training and apprenticeship programs is on the rise. That battle between the sexes could become the battle for talent. With more women entering the sector, this once male-dominated industry may eventually level up.

Be that as it may, techs have a responsibility to look past gender insecurities and treat all customers equally. Because you never know where your next tech is coming from. 🌐

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