The Secrets Of Selling Standard Transmission Work

We usually speak in this column about the fine points of repairing manual gear boxes. It occurred to me that if a shop can't sell the work to the customer, there's isn't much need to know how to fix them.

The first order of business is to let your customers know that you work on manual transmissions and transfer cases. Include in your advertising the entire range of services that you provide to the motoring public. If you are not working on all types of transmissions, it may be time to explore how to bring in the additional income every shop can use.

There is a cardinal rule in selling standard transmission repair: NEVER, REPEAT, NEVER quote a price on a stick until the unit has been torn down and completely inspected. With an automatic box, the supply of good "experienced" parts is plentiful and relatively cheap. There is no dependable supply of used gears, and with

> many variations in ratio and models, quoting a price off the cuff is suicidal. Incidentally, the tear down and inspection of the transmission should include removal and inspection of the clutch. Fifty percent of all manual gearbox problems start with a bad or worn clutch, and the additional dollars generated from clutch work will help your bottom line.

With the clutch and unit torn down and thoroughly dissembled, it is time to write an



By Mike Weinberg Contributing Editor

estimate. It is my suggestion to replace all main bearings, seals, synchro rings and gaskets on every overhaul. Re-using bearings will create comebacks for noise and bearing failure. Be careful to note gear damage. In the case of broken gears, always replace the opposing gear even if it looks new. Whatever stress caused the gear to break also was placed on the opposite gear. You only have one chance to sell the customer now, and if you take a chance, you will eat the comeback with a knife and fork down the road. Don't place yourself in harm's way. Sell the customer everything he needs. Don't neglect to check the coupling teeth on the speed gears and synchronizers. Worn pointing on the front edges will create clash on shifting, and if the back taper is worn off the sides, gear jump-out will occur.

As you write up your estimate, make sure you add the correct mark-up percentages to the parts to keep you profitable. Do not go by manufacturers' suggested retail prices. There is no such thing as a list price. It is a suggested price from the factory that you are under no obligation to follow. Most import dealers give you a "generous" 15% off list when you purchase parts. Don't let a billiondollar manufacturer control your

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business unless you want to go broke. Take the price you pay for a part and mark it up with the margin that you need to be profitable.

The first thing most shops do after completing the estimate is call the customer and relay the bad news. Wrong move. Look at the picture through your customer's eyes. The second he hangs



up the phone after you give him the news, he will begin to shop your price. He will call several other shops and his brother-in-law who knows everything about everything. The smart thing for you to do is to develop a set of alternatives for your customer before you call him. Find out the price of a new unit from the dealer, and call several junkyards to get an idea of the cost and availability of used one. Now, when you talk with your customer, you will help him understand the choices available and gain trust by having done some research on his behalf. If you can't control your customer, some other shop will.

The customer has agreed on the price, and you are repairing the unit. Make sure of the quality of the parts that go into your work, for your reputation and checkbook are only as good as the parts you use. Those bargain "copycat" parts won't be a bargain if they fail under warranty. The cheapest thing you can put in the unit is an OEM-quality part.

The job is done. The car drives great and the customer is on his way to pay you. Make sure you have a good (legal) WRITTEN written warranty to protect your customer and yourself. Take a ride with the customer, see how he drives and answer any questions he may have. Schedule a twoweek checkup to ensure that the unit is working properly and leak free. Offer your customer a discount transmission service once a year. This will help prolong the life of your repair and help make your customer a "regular." People like to go where they feel comfortable, and maintenance programs bind your customer to your shop and provide real value to the consumer.

The competition is fierce out there, and it is impossible to build a successful business without repeat sales. Remember the old 3 and 30 rule: Do right by your customer and he will tell 3 people. Do him (her) wrong, and they will tell 30 people.

Happy Thanksgiving. ■

