



Up To Standards

**By Mike Weinberg
Contributing Editor**

In this space every month I put together an article to try to explain the mysteries of standard transmissions. This month, with spring bringing the first signs of new life, maybe it is time to examine the life we lead.

Why do we do it? The frustration level in our industry is very high. That which we work on to earn our daily bread is arguably the most complex component in the automobile, and every year it gets more sophisticated.

The auto-repair industry as a whole is not well regarded by the press or the public. According to *Reader's Digest* there is no place in America where the public can get quality repairs done on the family car. No parent that I know of is eager for their child to become an "auto technician." Most people push their offspring into college, so much so that the only surplus we have in America (besides the population of lawyers) is college graduates. Never mind that with the standard liberal-arts degree the college graduates are excellently prepared to flip burgers at

Why Do We Do It?

the local Wendy's. I am all in favor of higher education and a career path, but not something you do because it is socially correct.

The customer around whom we build our business generally is not happy to see us, and why should they be? If they are in need of major repairs, they have been deprived of the use of their prized wheels and will have to pay a very expensive bill to get them back. Fueled by sensational stories in the media and horror stories told by the brother-in-law (you know, the one who comes into your shop and tells you the modulator on his Torqueflite trans is no good), they are suspicious and apprehensive, and they expect the worst. If the customer is not treated correctly or if their expectations exceed reality, we can count on hearing from the overpopulation of attorneys, courts and Better Business bureaus.

The hours are long, the pressures are high and the learning curve never ends. Comebacks are very expensive, and they come like grapes - in bunches, and usually when there is lots of paying work to get out on time. Competition is intense, with the car dealer becoming an ever-bigger player in the market and factory reman units setting the prices for overhauls.

The engineers who design and build the vehicles we work on have a perpetual vendetta against us. I

know that I have never done anything to any one of these guys to make them angry, but they keep on designing vehicles as if they would never have to come apart again. I know that all of us would really like to meet the guys who can do all the jobs in the time allowed in the flat-rate manual no matter how rusted, abused or broken the car is. Why do we do it?

If you paid attention to what you just read, it was easy to notice how negative and gloomy a picture I described. Unfortunately, a percentage of the people employed in our industry believe that this is what our business is made of. Sure, we all get tired and frustrated and down at times and ask ourselves why we're doing this. Sometimes after a hard day when every swear word has failed to make a difference, and getting in the car and just flat leaving it all behind forever looks really good, the positive side carries us through so that the next morning we will go back to work and solve yesterday's problem.

Why do we do it? Because we can! We are a select group of people who are gifted with the talent and the skill to do what few people can do. That positive side of us defines us for what we really are: mechanics, technicians, craftsmen. We are by nature filled with an insatiable curiosity. We need to know how things work. We

continues next page

Put an End to Transfer Case Failures For Good!

**Extreme HD • AWD-To-Part-Time Conversions
Slip-Yoke Eliminator Kits • AWD Low-Range Lockups
AWD Viscous Eliminators**



are never happier than when we have discovered the cause and the fix for some tough problem. We thrive on challenge, and we routinely risk our time and investment in parts against the challenge of making that which is abused, failed and broken perform as well as or better than new. We don't get paid if we don't fix it, and we take responsibility for our work for six months, a year, two years or more.

Society holds doctors and other professionals in high esteem. When was the last time your doctor guaranteed any of his or her work? You get charged for "repair work" or diagnosis on your body, and if the repair is not effective or lasting, you get charged again. The human body hasn't changed in thousands of years, but the units we work on change every week. To a great extent, the human body will work to heal itself, but it is our life's work to create quality from failure and destruction and to stand behind our craftsmanship so that our customers enjoy peace of

mind and safe transportation.

I mean no disrespect to the medical profession (well, maybe just enough to knock off the arrogant). People in the health-care field devote their lives to helping other people, and that is a noble cause. The comparison I want to make is that our career also is a noble cause. We deal with an extremely complex component of a very complicated machine. We need to understand hydraulic theory, powerflow, electronic theory, computers, and the interaction of the complete powertrain and suspension of the vehicle. We must be capable of making precision measurements using fractional math, and reading and retaining huge amounts of very technical information. We must make a very large investment in hand tools and specialized equipment. We spend money on technical manuals, seminars, tech hotline subscriptions, computers, CD-ROM and the like.

Everyone in our industry has an inherent fascination with and love of automobiles, and a desire to fix preci-

sion machinery. If you don't love what you do for a living, you can never be good at your craft. Much has been written and said about how to improve the public image of our industry and the people employed therein. We have professional associations that promote ethical conduct and technical expertise; certification by various groups; testing; education; apprenticeship, and even formal licensing.

All of these are quality programs to enhance our image, but the most important thing we can do as individuals to boost the standing of our industry is to recognize that we are indeed professionals. We perform quality repair under difficult conditions on an intricate part of the most advanced form of transportation available to the general public. The first step to enhancing our trade in the eyes of the consumer is to take pride in our profession and ourselves. We have within our ranks people who are incompetent, thieves and fools, but no more than a small percentage – and certainly no more than any other profession.

The marketplace is a cruel master. Those who do poor work for whatever reason soon are found out and destroyed by word of mouth and qualified professional competition. The only way to succeed and build a good business is to do quality work at a price that is fair and profitable, and to back it up with a fair and equitable warranty. If we believe in what we are doing and act like the craftsmen we are, the public perception of our industry will improve. Doing a job well is its own reward. The more difficult the job, the greater the reward, and the greater your self-esteem and confidence will be.

"With hands like these men wrought the marvels of the antique world and craft the wonders of the new, and I have hands like these." **TD**

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Tell us your opinion of this article:

Circle the corresponding number on the free information card.

- 87 Useful information.
- 88 Not useful information.
- 89 We need more information.



GM Transfer Cases

All GM Transfer Cases are Remanufactured with the Latest O.E. Components with Updated Clutch Packs to Eliminate Chatter Problems

AVALANCHE - NV246C, NV261C/ NV263C TAHOE/YUKON-NV149C, NV241C, NV243C, NV246C, BW4481C, BW4482C, BW4484C

SUBURBAN / XL - NP208C, NV241C, NV243C, NV246C, NV261C, NV263C

ALL PICKUPS - NP208C, NV241C, NV243C, NV261C, NV263C, BW4401C, BW4470C, S10,S15-NP207C, NP231C, NV233C, NV136C, NV236C, BW4472C

BLAZER, JIMMY - NP208C, NV241C, NV243C

TRAILBLAZER, ENVOY - NV126C, NV226C

COLORADO - BW4484C

HUMMER - NV281GM, NV242GM

ASTRO, SAFARI - BW4472C, NV136C

EXPRESS, SAVANNAH - BW4473C

**Includes New Morse Chain*