

The Tremec TKO Series of Transmissions

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The business of doing business for our industry has become much more complicated in the past few years. The general advance of complex designs and electronic functions has made severe changes in the cost and volume of the work the average shop can produce. Add to this the competition for market share that the car dealers through reman programs and the centralized rebuilding centers have placed on the transmission shop, and it is easy to see how the industry is contracting.

In the past the average shop had retail customers and a variety of fleet, garage and wholesale customers to bring in revenue. It was common for the transmission shop to specialize in transmission- and

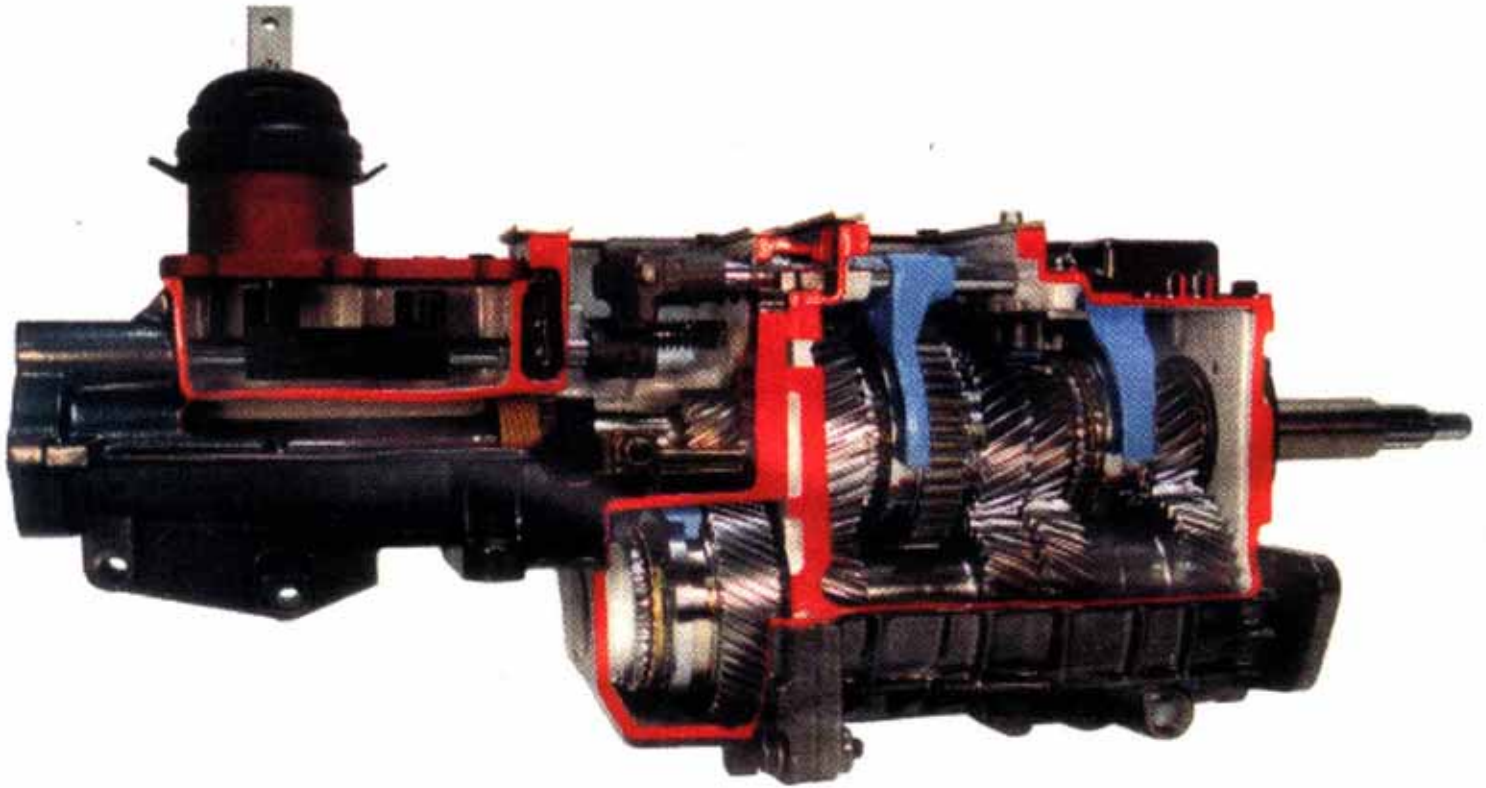
powertrain-related repairs and to send all other work to the wholesale customers who were sending in transmission work, either sublet or by referral.

In the present scenario the wholesale market has all but disappeared as many garages, fleets and body shops are doing R&R work on units they buy through the dealer or central rebuilders. To make matters worse, the retail market is now losing a substantial amount of work to new-car purchases or leases. The low interest rates and aggressive rebate programs provided by the car manufacturers make it easy for the average customer to buy or lease a new car and not spend the money to pay for a high-ticket repair like a rebuilt transmission. This scene

has the transmission shops changing directions and beginning to concentrate on general repairs to create enough work to remain profitable.

One of the areas that our industry often overlooks is so-called "performance work." This term covers a broad spectrum of related services for which there is an expanding market. There is the real track-only professional market, which while lucrative is narrow and very time consuming. There is, however, a huge market for so-called "enthusiast" products. By this we mean the true car guys who have the need to enhance their stock machines to be something better than their neighbors have.

This is a market in which, with a



little bit of research, you can serve your customers without any real additional expense or training. The best part of this market is that the customer base *wants* to spend money on their cars as opposed to the guy with the broken gearbox who *has* to spend money or replace the vehicle.

The only thing you need to do to expand into this market is to let your customers know what is out there and that you can perform this type of work. It can be as simple as installing a line of quality performance clutches, torque converters and shift-improvement packages and upgrading their

transmissions to handle more horsepower and torque. This scenario includes the sports-car market, older collector cars, trucks and SUVs, and four-wheel-drive vehicles, all of which can have added-performance options installed.

On the transmission side we
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have several lines of transmissions that have been introduced into the market to enhance the performance of older cars equipped with stock units like the T5 five-speed. At its pinnacle the T5 was the largest production run of transmissions ever produced. It was used in GM "F" bodies, Ford Mustangs, Jeeps, Nissan 300ZX and a variety of offshore brands. The weak point of the unit was its relatively low torque rating, which was soon marginal as manufacturers bumped up horsepower and torque ratings.

Tremec, which manufactured the T5, then introduced a line of five-speed overdrive transmissions that were direct bolt-in replacements for the T5 in GM and Ford applications and had much higher torque ratings. These units were called the TR-3550 and the TKO. Designed to replace the T5 with no engineering effort, they became the staple of a great many "weekend warriors," or people who drag-raced in street-driven cars.

A further refinement of this design is the newly introduced TKO-500 and TKO-600 units, which cover a tremendous number of applications in the performance-oriented sports cars, hot rods, kit cars and older collectible '50s and '60s toys. This is a vast market that can be very profitable for the average shop with little investment.

The TKO-500 and TKO-600 transmissions have been designed to make these types of swaps very simple. The 500 and 600 in the name designate the torque rating, which is substantial. The size of

the unit is comparable with that of the T5 or Muncie four-speed they replace with little or no modifications. These units have 10- or 26-spline input shafts to use the stock or aftermarket clutches for the original cars and feature 31-spline output shafts to handle the extra horsepower and torque that caused the demise of the T5. The only thing necessary is to change the output yoke from 27-spline to 31-spline.

These units are five-speeds, with 5th overdriven so that even owners of older four-speed cars can have efficient highway cruising.

Ratios:

TKO-500 - 3.27 1st, 1.97 2nd, 1.34 3rd, 1.00 4th, 0.68 5th and 3.00 reverse

TKO-600 - 2.87 1st, 1.89 2nd, 1.28 3rd, 1.00 4th, 0.82 5th and 2.56 reverse

Features:

- 83mm centerline distance
- upgraded one-piece countershaft
- 4615 alloy steel for hardness and durability
- Forged-steel shift forks
- Tapered roller bearings on all shafts
- Short-throw performance shifter
- eight different shifter locations to keep the console stock
- dual electric and mechanical speedometer pickups
- 100-lb. weight gives a high strength-to-weight ratio
- three cross-member mounting configurations
- neutral-safety switch
- reverse-light switch
- optional offset shifter available for early GM cars

What you have in these units is a gearbox that can be used on the street daily, on the drag strip or on a road course. The extension housing is equipped with dual-pattern mounting bolts for Ford- or Chevy-application cross members and a torque-strut mount for Firebirds and Camaros, and the design allows installation of either a mechanical or electronic speedometer from the original vehicle with no hassles. This is a series of units that can be installed by any shop with no modifications or engineering in a wide variety of vehicles. No drilling, modifying, cutting up consoles or floorboards or the like; it is all there, ready to go.

If you want to add to your profits doing what you already know how to do, the enthusiast market is out there waiting for you to let them know you can service their cars. Put the fun back into this business and deal with people who WANT to spend money. **TD**

THE BOTTOM LINE:

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