



How Much is a Free Inspection?

A very wise person once wrote that nothing is ever truly free

Most reasonable people realize that anything of value has a cost, and the customer always pays that cost. Still the word *free* is very often used in business to lure the unsuspecting. The lure of *free* is a very strong one, and people continue to be taken in, over and again.



Several times a week a customer comes into the Service Department with a long list of things he has been told his vehicle needs. Someone has done a free inspection. Looking at the list, a professional can spot the long list of high-profit items recommended. Many times, most the work recommended is not needed, and often seriously needed work has been overlooked. This may be confusing to the average customer, and there are forces that almost guarantee such an outcome. The following are facts, not known by many and may explain this point:

- With a free inspection, the Service Department only gets paid if they find something *wrong*. Getting an honest, objective opinion may be difficult. Properly inspecting a vehicle takes time. Time is money, and everyone must be paid. It is far more likely to expect a credible inspection to have a charge attached.

- In many Service Departments service advisors and technicians are paid on a commission basis. This means employees get a percentage of what they can sell. In a perfect world, this should not influence their recommendations. Many Service Departments use loss leaders to lure customers in. The money is made by selling high-profit, sometimes questionable services.
- Loss leader pricing. This is where services customers often shop for, are priced at low or no profit. The theory is, customers will think if these prices are low, everything else may be comparable priced. Not so! This is the come on, and high-priced items are sold to make up the loss. An honest Service Department prices everything fairly; their prices represent value.
- Menu pricing. This is a refinement of the above two. It is logical for people to wish to know, in advance, what something will cost. When buying commodities, this is simple. A loaf of bread bought at store A might be equal to the same brand loaf of bread bought at store B. This is due to standardization. Such standardization does not exist in the auto repair trade. A tune up in Service Department A for \$400.00 may include original-equipment manufactured parts, plugs, wires, fuel filter, air filter, cleaning the throttle body and servicing the injectors. In Service Department B, a tune up may be a set of no-name plugs and an air filter. This is a rip-off at \$250.00. The same goes with every service.

Service Departments willing to use deceit to gain clients are also far more likely to use deceit to improve their profit

An honest business charges a fair price and renders a fair service. Don't be taken in; have you ever really got anything that was truly free?

In the end two things are pertinent. Is the Service Department honest, and are they technically competent? If they are honest, the price is always be fair. If they are technically competent, they are able to repair the vehicle. If either is NOT so, the result will be bad, regardless of promises made in advance.