



Ralph Seekins

One of my shirttail relatives was complaining about what he felt was a real injustice. He told me he traveled quite some distance to a dealership in Idaho to purchase a new Dodge pickup. He'd seen that dealership's ads in a magazine and, after talking to a salesperson on the phone, he was sure he would save thousands over what he could buy one for at home. He said he got a real good deal. But, after looking at his paperwork, he didn't save thousands. It wasn't an apples-to-apples comparison to the truck quoted by his hometown dealership. And, had it been, his local Dodge dealership would have been just as competitive. But he'd already told all his friends he was going over to Idaho to get this outstanding deal and he just couldn't come back without a new truck.

Six or so months later, the truck had a funny noise in the engine so my relative took it to his local dealer's service department. The salesman he'd worked with in Idaho told him the warranty was good at any Dodge dealer – which, on its face, is true. However, after gathering the

It Pays To Buy Locally?

relevant information, i.e. name, address, vehicle identification number, and when and where the truck was purchased, the local dealership service advisor told my relative he could drop the truck off and they would try to fit him in but there was no guarantee when that would be. You see, the dealership had a first responsibility to those folks who had purchased from them before assisting someone who had purchased from a dealer somewhere else. Simply put, local buyers would come first and, if there was time to fit my relative in, they would gladly get to his truck.

This scenario is all too often repeated across the country. The local dealership wasn't trying to be punitive. They were simply living up to a responsibility they had to their own owners. My relative didn't see the situation through the eyes of a local buyer. That buyer - who had purchased from their local dealership - had every right to expect that their vehicle should be first in line.

My relative did get his truck fixed. However, he was without it for almost two weeks. It could have been longer and he may face the same challenge with any further necessary repair work depending on the dealership's workload.

Dealerships generally have a contractual responsibility to and really want to provide covered warranty repairs for the manufacturers they represent – regardless of where the vehicle was purchased. However, priority can come into play. A good example

might be when temperatures hit 50 below in Interior Alaska and mechanical breakdowns invariably increase. The waiting lines get long and dealerships prioritize their available shop space. They rightly schedule those who purchased from that dealership or those who purchased their vehicle prior to moving to the Interior to the front of the line. Residents who bought somewhere else move down the line.

Several years ago, a good friend of mine who lives in Anchorage told me he wanted to buy a new F-150 from me. I told him I'd love to sell him one but that I'd rather, for his sake, that he buy from his Anchorage Ford Dealership. He'd be THEIR preferred owner with all its benefits. So, I made a quick introductory call for him and he got his brand new truck from his hometown dealer. He told me later he appreciated the advice.

My best advice . . . when looking for a vehicle, work with your local dealership. They pay the same for any vehicle on their lot as all dealerships everywhere and, apples-to-apples, they will probably be as competitive as any dealership anywhere. If they don't have exactly what you want, they can probably locate what you do want and trade with that dealership. Believe me, it's good business to buy locally.

Ralph Seekins has more than 42 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 35 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln.