

# Women and Automotive Maintenance



Ralph Seekins

The automotive industry has long recognized that women are more and more the decision makers in both vehicle purchases and maintenance. For example, some fairly recent surveys show that women buy more than 50% of all new and used cars sold at dealerships and that somewhere between 65% - 80% of the folks who take their vehicles for service or repairs are women. Our own experience clearly demonstrates that these numbers are pretty accurate. While we don't have an exact number, when it comes to vehicle service or repairs, women represent the clear majority of customers that our service personnel interact with on a daily basis.

Stereotypically, however, most people think automotive service or repair is a man's world. After all, guys are supposed to know these things. And that, they will say, should translate into a more efficient and effective service experience when men handle the deal. However,

in more cases than not, that isn't what happens.

Information provided by professional service advisors reveals they would prefer to work with a woman service customer than with a man. Why? Well, it isn't because, as some would say, women are more naïve or vulnerable. Typically, they find women are more inquisitive, more detailed and will tell what symptom the vehicle is experiencing as well as when the symptom occurs. If it squeaks, rattles or clunks at 36 miles per hour or there's a smell like rotten eggs when first starting up, a woman will most often provide that information right up front. A man, on the other hand, will more often give the service advisor his own diagnosis – which, with today's sophisticated and complex vehicles, is very dangerous ground. As a result, when working with a man, the service advisor will generally have to backtrack to get an accurate description of the symptoms that led to the visit. And, even then, advisors sometimes find it uncomfortable to explain that the guy's diagnosis wasn't what the problem was in the first place.

So, what does it boil down to? When your car or truck needs to visit a service facility for scheduled maintenance or repairs, handle the situation like my wife does. Make a list of the

things you want done and, if there's a problem you want addressed, write down a description of the symptom or symptoms as well as when and how it or they are presented. Remember that your service advisor has been trained to gather that information to present to the technician(s) for final diagnosis before the service or repair begins. With good input from you, the needed service or repair will be more effective and be completed more efficiently.

Don't do what I tend to do. My male ego convinces me that I'll remember everything I want done and that I should be able to come up with a diagnosis all by myself. I know better but I just keep falling into my old habits. But, I was real proud of myself recently. My chain saw wasn't working right and I took it to the dealer. I told the counter guy I didn't know anything about chain saws and I didn't have a clue what was wrong. I just knew the thing wouldn't run right and please fix it for me. As Connie would say, it was one of the few times I took my own advice and I ought to do it more often.

*Ralph Seekins has more than 41 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 34 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln.*