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The Auto Repair Reality Show

Thought you'd be a hero only to find out you were a heel? Welcome to TV-land!

By Richard Goulet

Reality shows are all the rage on TV these days. You can't change the channel without seeing some poor sap being teased for a date, forced to eat live spiders, or getting a make-over by a group of flamboyant fashion designers.

They call that reality?

If they're looking for a show in which nothing is as it seems, where even mundane tasks can become bizarre, and where no human interactivity is complete without an unexpected twist of some sort, they should set up their cameras in an automotive repair shop!

As a repair technician, you face unexpected twists every day, and even the most commonplace jobs can involve unique challenges.

I remember a customer who came in complaining that his battery was slowly discharging over a period of a few days. He couldn't understand why it would do this. It was a brand new battery and he'd installed it himself. In typical DIY fashion, he blamed it on the part.

Now, I'm in the customer satisfaction business, so after politely listening to the customer's rant, I proceeded to diagnose the problem. I started by checking the battery, the starting system, and the charging system. And once I had confirmed that there weren't any problems there, I told the customer I'd have to conduct a more thorough diagnosis of the electrical system. This would be charged at the door rate. He agreed and left the building.

Diagnosing a slow discharge on the battery can be a complex and involved process. I knew I had to isolate the different circuits and then confirm which should have an electrical draw and which shouldn't. Four hours later, I final-

ly isolated the problem. It was the underhood light, which was staying on when the hood was closed. It turned out to be a simple defective switch. I was a happy camper, certain that having found and fixed the problem, I would end up with a satisfied customer.

This is the set up the reality shows love... because here comes the twist.

The customer showed up after work

demanding to know why he should pay all that diagnostic time to repair a tiny problem with a simple mercury switch. Shouldn't I have known earlier in the process that this might be the problem? He wouldn't acknowledge that there was no way of knowing that the switch was defective because the hood had to be closed to see that it was not turning off the light. And this was made even more difficult to detect because it was broad daylight.

In the end, the customer reluctantly paid the bill for the repair and left, totally unconvinced that the cost was justified.

In this particular episode of the Auto Repair Reality Show, I was the loser. I lost the customer. He never came back.

Customers at an automotive repair center are there for one of two reasons. Either they're having regular maintenance performed, or they're having repairs done to an unexpected problem. Unlike other major expenditures in a household,

most people don't tend to save for vehicle repairs. As a result, a technician not only has to solve a potentially elusive problem, but he must do it within the confines of what the customer thinks is reasonable – both in time and cost.

Meeting consumer expectations is the toughest part of the Auto Repair Reality Show. And you'd think we'd be good at it because it's the game we play every single day.

But look on the bright side. It's better than eating live spiders. 🚗

Richard Goulet has worked in many facets of the repair and service industry for more than 30 years.



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and I informed him that his electrical problem had been resolved. The total time for diagnosing the problem was four hours, plus there was an additional half hour to replace the switch. Add the cost of the switch, and the bill was significantly higher than the customer expected. When he saw the price, he blew a gasket,