

CANADIAN TECHNICIAN

MARCH 2005

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Buying New Equipment?

7 questions
to ask first

- Understanding AC troubleshooting
- Advanced OBD-II diagnostics
- Selling spring tune-ups



Repair Basics

The Simple Life

Despite runaway technology and an ever-evolving society, some things haven't changed in the vehicle repair business.

By Richard Goulet

Simplicity is a relative

term when it comes to automotive repair. On the most basic level, our job is quite simple. When a car doesn't work, it's our job to get it going.

Of course getting a car going can be enormously complicated these days – given recent advances in vehicle technology. Unfortunately, customers don't always understand that. All they understand is the inconvenience of being stranded without wheels.

It wasn't that long ago that simplicity was a hallmark of our industry, if not our entire society. Most repair shops looked like the one in the popular Canadian sitcom *Corner Gas* about a filling station/repair shop/restaurant in the fictitious town of Dog River, Sask. The local shop was a meeting place, where people talked politics, sports and cars while they drank their morning coffee. I know this from experience because I grew up in a small northern mining town that was very similar to Dog River. My parents' Champlain gas station in Kearns, Ont. was a popular place to while away an afternoon.

Life was simple, and cars were simpler. Back then, fixing a car was truly a mechanical job. Today solving vehicle problems is a whole different game.

Just think of all the changes our industry has seen in the last 40 years, and consider the impact this has had on customers, technicians, and on the way vehicles are serviced.

Consumer choice. Banner programs, specialty shops, and national chains have entered the market in big numbers. And new-car dealerships are working harder than ever to retain service business. Consumers now have a wealth of options

when it comes to vehicle repair. The result is that they've come to expect faster, better, more competent service. If they aren't treated properly, they won't just fume about it, they'll take their business elsewhere.

Global vehicles. Vehicles were once predominantly manufactured here in North America with (let's face it) rudi-



Actor Brent Butt celebrates simpler times in the popular Canadian television show "Corner Gas."

mentary technology, wide-open engine compartments, and easy access to all key components. Today, vehicles are manufactured globally, and North American brands command less than 50 per cent of the market. And if you lift the hood, some of the 'key components' of yesterday aren't even there anymore!

Diagnostic advances. An oscilloscope, and timing light won't be much help in the modern repair shop anymore. Today you have to invest in sophisticated diagnostic scan tools that require annual updates. And if you want to stay current on repair technology, you have to invest a lot of time training and studying – much of it using electronic media.

Scope of knowledge. A 'mechanic' – as they were known back then – once required little background knowledge. Today a 'technician' is required to have thorough knowledge in chemistry, physics, electronics, and electrical theory – and they must be able to apply these in combination when diagnosing vehicle system problems.

Customer contact. Once upon a time, customers dealt with the shop owner or mechanic, providing the details of their vehicle problem directly to the person responsible for the repair. A modern automotive service repair facility is a lot bigger, and many times a 'service advisor' is the main customer contact. Technicians generally receive their information about a vehicle problem second-hand, through a repair order, and they must depend on proper documentation to get the repair going.

All in all, it's not such a simple world anymore.

What hasn't changed, with all this evolution, though, is that we still offer a valuable service – arguably more valuable than ever before.

As in the simpler days, the professionals who service cars still tend to get into this business because they love cars, and they love the challenge of solving problems. We just have to avoid the pitfall of making our businesses cold and impersonal.

Corner Gas – the sitcom – demonstrates the value in keeping things simple. Despite our complex cars and society, we can still offer a simple, valuable service. 🚗

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