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FEBRUARY 2014

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REPORT: INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO TRANSFORM
COLLISION MARKET FIGHTS BACK AGAINST CHALLENGES, UPTICK ANTICIPATED IN 2014

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ABRN TO HONOR, RECOGNIZE MILITARY IN THEMED MAY 2014 ISSUE

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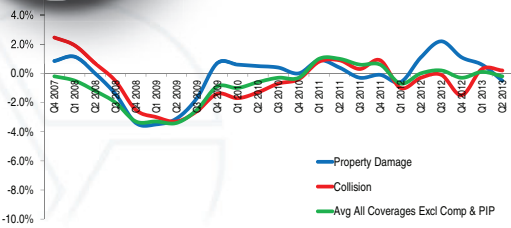
NEWS ANALYSIS, INSURANCE MATTERS & LEGISLATION ISSUES

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TRENDING

Auto Comp Losses Essentially Flat

Private Passenger Auto Claim Frequency
Percent Change from Same Quarter Prior Year
(Quarter is the rolling 12 months ended that quarter)

8



Source: PCI Independent Statistical Service First Track Q2 2013

ANALYSIS

CCC REPORT: INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO TRANSFORM

BY SUSANNA GOTSCH | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The collision industry is bouncing back in 2014 from challenges faced over the past few years.

SOCIAL MEDIA PROGRAMS

BODY SHOP NATION CREATES OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR SHOP OWNERS

8 Body Shop Nation is releasing a community-based program that will allow collision shops to directly communicate with customers through social media.

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FEATURE

CALLING ALL VETERANS: WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORY!

BY LARRY SILVEY | ABRN BLOGGER

In recognition of our veterans who are now working in service repair and the collision industry, the Advanstar Automotive Group will feature a Military issue in May 2014.

[COMMUNITY PULSE]

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BEST OF THE BLOGS AUDIO WEBCASTS TOP HOW-2 VIDEOS READER PHOTOS INDUSTRY CALENDAR MESSAGE BOARDS INDUSTRY GROUPS VIDEO WEBCASTS



WHAT IS ABRN COMMUNITY? The ABRN community is an online NETWORK for your business. It's a place to go to post articles, blogs, videos, photos and audio clips to share ideas with other collision repairers. Community content is used in ABRN's twice weekly e-newsletters. Check it out at <http://workshop.search-autoparts.com>

FEATURED COLUMNS

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MINDING YOUR BUSINESS

MAXIMIZE YOUR SHOP PROFIT

BY KEVIN MEHOK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Try these tips to improve business success and boost your collision repair shop's bottom line.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ABRN
Test your social media know how. Are you using it properly to boost business success?

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THE SHOP PROFILE

PIKE'S CARSTAR COLLISION CENTER, MADISON, OH
 JAMES E. GUYETTE / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

26 Longevity comes from family ties and a focus on community service.



THE PROFIT MOTIVE

TACKLING THE PARTS CHALLENGE

TOM MCGEE/ CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

24 One way or another, parts procurement needs to be addressed.

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HOW2 KNOW-HOW TIPS & TECHNIQUES FROM THOSE IN THE KNOW

COVER FEATURE

FITTING NEW PARTS

TECHNICAL TRAINING

BY AL THOMAS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Correctly adjusting gaps and flushness go a long way toward customer satisfaction and success.

TECHNICAL FOCUS

EXHAUSTING WORK

BY TIM SRAMCIK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

38 Use extra diligence the first time to confirm exhaust problems are collision related.



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FROM ABRN CONTRIBUTING EDITOR AL THOMAS.
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PRODUCTS



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PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

The 3M Cubitron II Clean Sanding Hookit Disc features 3M Precision-Shaped Grain Technology that provides faster cutting for paint removal and delivers a finer, more uniform finish.

PRODUCT FOCUS



46 Lincoln Electric offers a line of rugged, magnetic angle fixturing devices and hand lifters in its Radius tool Welding Gear product group.

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FEBRUARY'S FEATURED VIDEO
**Q&A WITH AXALTA'S
NIGEL BUDDEN**

VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

CHIP FOOSE on 3M's Cubitron II Sanding System

Chip Foose of Foose Designs talks about one of the newest 3M innovations, the Cubitron II Sanding System. He hosts a "sand off" to show the product's efficiency and strength.

[URL ABRN.COM/CUBITRON]



BLOG SPOTLIGHT

AUTHOR AND motivational speaker Mark Wayshak discusses the need to maximize every opportunity to find new customers, mainly through social media.

[URL ABRN.COM/WAYSHAK]

THE MOST daunting part of social media for any small business is understanding your audience. Do you? Getting to know your fan base is the most important key to figuring out the best way to reach them with content. Here are some tips.

[URL ABRN.COM/SOCIALUNDERSTANDING]

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Axalta released its annual color popularity report for 2013, revealing four color megatrends.

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CCAR GROWS USER BASE, NEW ONLINE COURSES

CCAR ended 2013 with increased subscriptions and has added two additional courses in the first quarter of 2014.

»» ABRN.COM/CCARGROWTH

BODY SHOP NATION CREATES INDEPENDENT SHOP OWNER NETWORK

Body Shop Nation's new collision shop program will allow owners to connect to customers.

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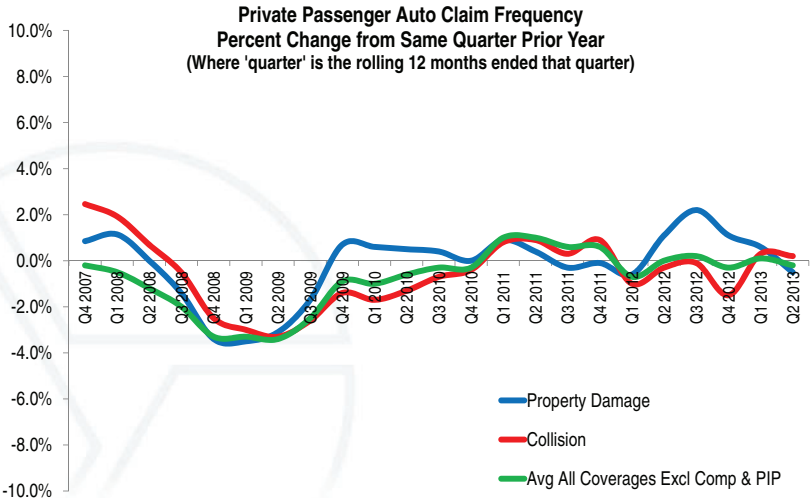
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Frequency for all but Comp Losses Essentially Flat



INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

CCC report: Collision industry continues to transform

BY SUSANNA GOTSCH | CCC INFORMATION SERVICES

The collision repair industry has experienced a great deal of change over the last several years. The recession helped drive already flat-to-declining vehicle accident frequency down further, and more customers were opting not to have minor damage repaired. And with the average age of vehicles on the road in the U.S. at an all-time high, more vehicles were damaged total loss versus repairable. As we move into 2014 however, it would appear that the collision repair industry is beginning to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

New light-vehicle sales in 2013 hit 15.6 million, up nearly eight percent from 2012, and the fourth straight year of one million or more unit sales gain. New vehicle sales typically drive up auto premiums, and improving employment rates often suggest a return to driving during peak times, when accident rates are highest. Early December snow and ice storms across the U.S. led to higher repair volumes to wrap up the year, with many carriers' claims counts up nearly 15 percent from the same period in 2012. According to Aon Benfield, a

>> CONTINUES ON PAGE 9

BREAKING NEWS

TRAINING INVESTMENT

I-CAR INVESTS TO IMPROVE TRAINING

I-CAR, the Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair, is investing \$2.6 million dollars partnering with IBM Kenexa, to implement a new learning content management system (LCMS) that will greatly improve the development, delivery and quality of collision repair training offered to the industry. This new training system simplifies management of curriculum content and will significantly reduce the time needed to develop or update courses, allowing I-CAR to bring more relevant training to the industry at a much faster rate. Benefits will be evident across all I-CAR delivery platforms, improving not only the learning experience for students, but also improving the delivery tools available for instructors nationwide. Visit ABRN.com/ICARinvests.

Photo: CCC Information Services

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>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

CCC REPORT: COLLISION INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO TRANSFORM

mixture of heavy snow, accumulating ice, sleet, freezing rain and rain led to dangerous driving conditions from California to Maine, resulting in thousands of structural and auto claims.

Longer term, it is unlikely the industry will see dramatic increase in repairs – claim frequency for collision and liability losses remains stable, with moderate oscillation quarter to quarter.

The longer term trends that have led to lower accident rates overall are still in play: drivers moving into safer driving years; high unemployment rates among Millennials; overall fewer miles driven per household, per vehicle, and per driver; and more vehicles with electronic stability control and crash avoidance technologies.

Because the collision repair industry has seen a decline in the number of U.S. shops, sales per shop may still benefit. According to the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association, the number of U.S. shops specializing in collision repair in the U.S. has declined nearly every year between 2002 and 2011, with the largest drop in 2010, and the final tally as of 2012 at just over 34,000 independent collision repair shops. Data from ASA's How's Your Business – Collision suggests that repairers have seen a gradual increase in the number of estimates generated per month since the heart of the recession as of the 2012 edition.

The ASA How's Your Business – Collision surveys also track the percent of repairers that participate in insurance company direct repair programs (DRP). Since 2001 the percentage reported by the survey has remained fairly steady at about 90 percent. The 2012 ASA survey reported that only 7.7 percent of repairers responded "None" to the question "In how many DRPs do you currently participate?"

Analysis of repairable appraisal count for insurance companies within the top 25 personal lines auto insurers points to increased use of DRPs across the industry, with DRP share of volume trending at just over 40 percent by 2013 year-end.

Automakers today must meet the growing demands of consumers as well as U.S. regulatory demand for safety features such as electronic stability control (required on all vehicles in the U.S. by the 2012 model year), doubled roof strength standards for light vehicles by the 2017

model year; and, higher standards for fuel economy and emissions by the 2016 model year. Each of these changes will impact the electronics and materials used in the composition of vehicles in the coming years. Many of these changes to vehicles have the potential to reduce frequency, yet add complexity in material

and electronics that may raise the cost to repair a vehicle in the future.

As the complexity of vehicles increases, repairers must have the capital necessary to support the significant investment in the training and special tools required to repair these vehicles. To read the entire study report, visit ABRN.com/CCCreport.



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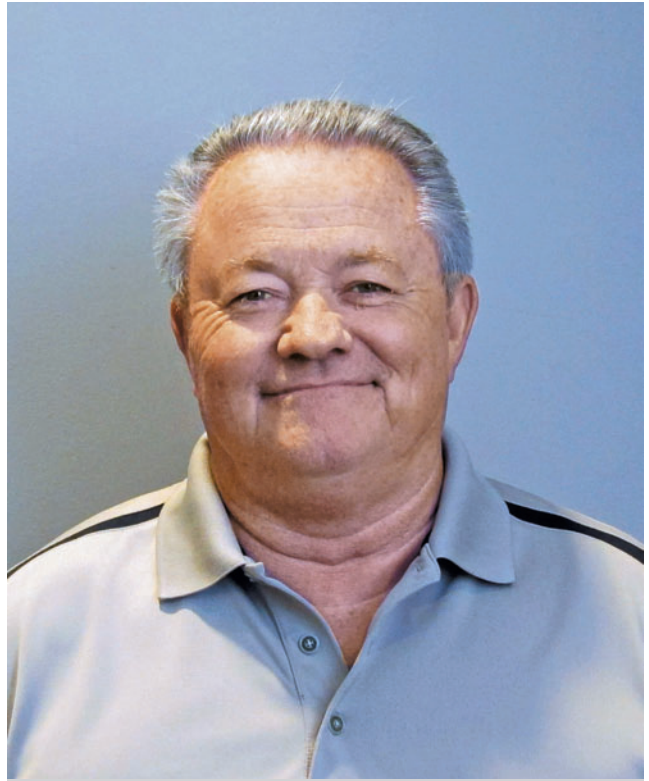


Q+A WITH ED STAQUET

SENIOR TECHNICAL SUPPORT MANAGER,
FUSOR REPAIR PRODUCTS, LORD CORP.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SIZE CARTRIDGE WHEN USING ADHESIVES/SEALERS IN A REPAIR IS VITAL IN THE BLUEPRINTING PROCESS

BY KRISTA MCNAMARA | MANAGING EDITOR



The task of approximating an estimate for car repair costs is no longer necessary, thanks to the advent of estimating software systems. This process, known as blueprinting, automatically generates a repair parts order and the repair bill. But as Ed Staquet, senior technical support manager for Fusor Aftermarket Repair Products at LORD Corp., explains, it is still important for body shops to understand the importance of choosing the right size cartridge when applying adhesives/sealers to the repair.

ABRN: How has blueprinting changed the repair estimating process?

ES: In the past, body shop owners and technicians pretty much had to rely on “guesstimates” to determine the cost of adhesive/sealer use. With blueprinting, a damaged vehicle is dismantled to determine exactly what parts and products are needed for repair. The damage report information is entered into estimating software systems, which generate the parts order and repair bill. These systems feature an override function that allows the user to add repair products to the database. When a repair

product is designated for use on an estimate statement, the charge for that product is automatically entered.

ABRN: Why is it important to choose the right size repair product cartridge?

ES: Selecting the appropriate size cartridge of repair product can help eliminate waste, while generating more profit. For example, if you are repairing or replacing a large side panel on a car, the job would probably require at least one large cartridge of repair product — and possibly one smaller cartridge. For a smaller job, such as repairing a bumper, just one or two small cartridges might be required. A technician should decide the proper combination of cartridges that will be the most economical and efficient for the job, rather than just choosing the largest size cartridge of repair product.

ABRN: What types of repair products are dispensed from the cartridges, and what cartridge sizes are available?

ES: There are a variety of repair products such as plastic repair, panel bonding, seam sealing and sound deadening

foams and coatings that are dispensed from cartridges. These products come in cartridges that are sized to match applications’ needs, known as “job-size” packaging. Typically, repair products are available in 10-oz., 7.5-oz. (for metal bonding) and 2-oz. (50ml) package sizes. This makes it easier to get closer to the amount of product needed for a repair without wasting product.

ABRN: How does choosing the right-sized repair product cartridge add to the profit margin for body shops?

ES: Nearly every estimating system now features an override function that allows the body shop estimator and technician to add product pricing to the final estimate. Instead of absorbing the expense of using a larger cartridge, body shop owners can earn greater profits by using smaller cartridge sizes when needed. Cartridges can be billed as line items on the repair at a profit. Ask your jobber for the published “repair-order pricing” for cartridges that you will be showing as a line item on the repair order. Repair-order pricing normally allows the body shop to mark up their costs by 25 percent, which is acceptable by most insurance companies. ☞

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COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY Stats & Trends

Motor vehicle crashes and fatalities increased in 2012 after 6 consecutive years of declining fatalities, according to the NHTSA.



Calling all veterans: We want to hear your story!

ABRN to honor, recognize military in themed May 2014 issue

BY LARRY SILVEY | ABRN BLOGGER

My father was a dirt-poor country boy from the mountains of North Carolina who joined the Army in search of a better life. He thought he had found paradise until the morning of Dec. 7, 1941 when he was on guard duty at Pearl Harbor.

My oldest son later followed in his footsteps, enlisting months before the Sept. 11 attacks. After shuffling from Wiesban, Germany to Kuwait, the Iraq border and later Bagdad, he came home after his tour was up. He appeared unscathed, but we know better than that.

Your family probably has a service story. Your family member or members may have joined the military to see the world, have a job, to fight our enemies. It doesn't matter. They have all served and been exposed to danger and suffering, both physical and psychological. Most have never gotten their due.

So, in recognition of our veterans who are now working in service repair and the collision industry, Mike Willins, Advanstar Automotive's Group Content Director, has created and scheduled a special Military issue in May. This is a groundbreaking issue only offered by Advanstar Automotive's suite of magazines — *Motor Age*, *Automotive Body Repair Network* and *Aftermarket Business World*. The highlight will be the profiles of



the people who have served and now work in the industry as shop owners, techs and distributors. To be included, please contact me at lksilvey@att.net. Moreover, we'll feature technical stories on the repair and restoration of military vehicles, job placement for returning troops and some other surprises. You won't find this in any other

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Printed labor report in Audatex

When replacing a component in Audatex, there may be some question of the included or not included items that are associated with it. If in doubt, I suppose you could select each additional part in question to see if it shows as included, but there is a much simpler way to find the answer. Audatex has the option to print or view a labor report. This report will show what items are included in the replacement time for a component and also where and how that labor has been applied. The Audatex Database Reference Manual has a section dedicated to the labor report and can be found on page 26 Section 2-3.

We all know Audatex builds their labor different than CCC and

Mitchell, so the labor report may be a valuable tool during the estimate process to answer some questions we have but also to make sure we write all the necessary items in a small or large operation. The labor report will show the full value for an item then shows what time has been included and gives a "net" value. An example would be when replacing a front bumper reinforcement. The labor report may show items like the bumper cover, head lamps and fog lamps listed then shows what time was allocated in the bumper cover time.

The labor report is a great opportunity to confirm included and non-included items, but what if your shop does not have Audatex?? The labor report can be viewed during the estimate process and also printed. The adjust-

er or estimator can print the labor report for you when requested, that is if they are willing and the setting is enabled in their system. There is an option to turn off the labor report in system settings. Personally I do not see a reason to turn it off but unfortunately some companies do have it turned off. View an image of a labor report at ABRN.com/LaborReport. You can see it provides some critical data that could be valuable during the estimate process.

2014: The 3 must-haves

As we have kicked off yet another year, I see the hardest part as keeping the focus on what I can control. It's easy to review a year and place some blame out-

side your circle.

The common excuses are insurance, DRP programs, steering, lagging economy, untrained workforce... yada...yada...yada.

When I find myself in this hole of thinking, I immediately go back to three core principles. It's the only things I need to know and focus on to run a successful business in the collision repair industry.

1. Cars are worthless, people are priceless. Like many of you, our small collision repair shop saw a variety of cars — from classics needing restoration to daily drivers just looking to get back on the road.

Continue reading this blog by visiting ABRN.com/2014musts.

March 8, 2014
@ 12 p.m. EST

Diagnosing Cat Converter Codes

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THE SHOP OWNER

MIKE LEVASSEUR

A smarter healthcare approach

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THE FUTURIST

GREG HORN

The future is hot formed

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MIKE ANDERSON

Negotiating the non-included

automotive publication. Thanks, Mike, for the shout out to our “aftermarket troops”!

We certainly hope with the publication of this issue that this isn't the end of the discussion because there really is no end to this discussion. We need to keep it alive for veterans past, present and future. That said, I couldn't be prouder of my dad and my son. They and millions of others have stood up for

all of us, whether they joined in peacetime or wartime. And I couldn't be prouder or more grateful to those in this industry who have served. Moreover, I am grateful that Mike has asked me to help in this endeavor. We pledge to work our tails off for the May issue to try to do our troops justice. It is the very least we can do. Continue reading at ABRN.com/VetStories

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- **Medal of Honor Ford unveiled**

DanAm, distributor of SATA spray equipment, revealed the 1956 Thunderbird convertible to be auctioned in benefit of the Wounded Warriors Family Support Fund. [ABRN.COM/MEDALOFHONOR]

- **Is your shop ranking on Google?**

Tom Zoebelin, AutoBody-Review.com marketing director, talks Google changes and their impacts to your site. [ABRN.COM/GOOGLERANK]

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Noteworthy

READER FEEDBACK TO ONLINE ARTICLES

LindedIn Discussion: Charlie Hill says, “I am taking an automotive body and collision course at a community college. I'm interested in getting involved in the industry and open to any advice.”

Robert Medved: There is a huge skills gap in this country that needs to be filled. There will be many opportunities as long as you continue your education and keep up with technology. It's so different then when I graduated from a collision and refinishing program. Back then, what you learned was good for a long time. Comparatively, if what you learn today is still good six months from now, you'll be lucky. Also, keep an open mind and try to understand the real issues facing this industry. Don't allow the pessimism you'll see from some drag you down and get in the way of your success. Good luck to you!

Kenny Proctor: I've trained several guys that spent a lot of money on body/paint education. I would hire a guy that hooked up with a veteran body guy and

learned this trade through experience, rather than from a book. The classroom will give you a good orientation, but hands-on experience, making mistakes and figuring out how to correct them is what makes a good body man. By no means am I saying you are wasting your money. Just find someone with years of experience who will take you under his or her wing, and you'll have a bright future in this industry. Good luck!

Robert Medved: I agree that if you can be paired with a good, experienced tech as a mentor, that would be an invaluable experience. The challenge is finding the right mentor. There are plenty of experienced techs who are pros at their job, but that doesn't mean they are capable of teaching and mentoring a new tech. As far as the schooling, if your school is NATEF certified and includes I-CAR curriculum, then by all means stay there. Vehicle technology is changing so rapidly that many techs have a difficult time keeping up. Unless the shop they work in has a training program for techs, it is easy to fall behind. Special handling in the repair process is crucial with super high strength steel, composites and aluminums being introduced into each new model, so training never ends.



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Mike Anderson discusses ways to improve your estimating skills and avoid missing out on bottom line dollars.

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MAY 13-15

- **PBES Conference Baltimore, Maryland**

JULY 29

- **Collision Industry Conference Detroit, Michigan**

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A smarter approach to healthcare

Take some control over the high cost of medical benefits

At more than \$500,000 a year, health insurance is our company's No. 2 expense, second only to payroll. We've worked hard to continue to offer 100 percent coverage for all of our 150-plus employees.

A good broker is key to controlling the high costs of medical benefits, and it's beneficial to find a large brokerage firm with value-added services. One such service is offering a "health advocate" for employees to contact. This person can offer a variety of services, including patient advocacy, prescription drug approvals and access to specialists. Without the help of this type of advocate through the broker, employees are left asking the shop owners or management for help navigating the complicated healthcare system, which can detract from day-to-day operations.

In addition to advocacy, a good brokerage firm may offer assistance with some human resource issues such as COBRA and family medical leave. Overall, the resources they offer might save you the equivalent of a \$50,000- to \$70,000-a-year staff member.

Once your broker has suggested some plans, I highly recommend meeting in person to make sure you really understand all the details and options. Medical insurance is complicated, and I don't think just comparing plans on a spreadsheet is enough to make the best decision for your business.

Another way to reduce cost is by making our employees better consumers when it comes to healthcare. We encourage that by using a healthcare reimbursement agreement (HRA) rather than a traditional insurance plan. An HRA is similar to a health savings account (HSA) plan in that it has a high deductible — \$2,000, in our case. But it also has an important distinction from an HSA, which I will explain below.

To help offset that high deductible, we give each employee a special type of pre-paid card loaded with \$1,000 that can be used, for example, toward their co-pays. It's a "smartcard" that allows its use only for healthcare services, and prevents it from being used for groceries, clothing or anything not associated with the healthcare plan.

Because employees want to get the most they can from that \$1,000 (and their own out-of-pocket medical spending), they become better shoppers for healthcare. As with everything, healthcare prices vary. You can pay \$80 for an X-ray, or you can pay \$350. You can spend \$100 on a prescription, or \$4. This plan really encourages employees to do what all of us should do: be smarter consumers of healthcare.

Entering our third year with an HRA plan, we did make one change regarding emergency room visits. Those now have a \$200 deductible. In the past, an employee with the flu might go to the ER and swipe the card rather than choosing a more sensible method to get appropriate medical attention. Similarly, prescriptions carry standard co-pays.

These changes are important because of one key provision of our HRA. If an employee doesn't use all of the \$1,000 on the pre-paid card, that money is returned to the business. That's why we chose this plan over an HSA, in which the unused money generally rolls over to the next year and belongs to the employee, even if he or she leaves the company.

With the HRA, we receive a monthly usage report. Privacy laws conceal the type of healthcare received, but we are able to track the value of the cards. This data provides us with some guidelines for future healthcare renewals, helping us focus on the important healthcare needs of our employees.

Under our initial plan three years ago, employees used 40 percent of everything we placed on the pre-paid cards. Once we added the ER deductible and set standardized co-pays for prescriptions, the amount of the pre-paid total used dropped to just 18 percent. That's a huge savings.

Healthcare insurance is, and will remain a major expense. That's why it's so important to work with a broker who can offer you viable options and valuable added services, and to encourage your employees to spend healthcare dollars wisely. ■

"ONE WAY TO HELP REDUCE COSTS IS BY MAKING OUR EMPLOYEES BETTER CONSUMERS WHEN IT COMES TO HEALTHCARE."

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Mike LeVasseur is president and COO of Keenan Auto Body, which has 11 shops in Pennsylvania and Delaware.

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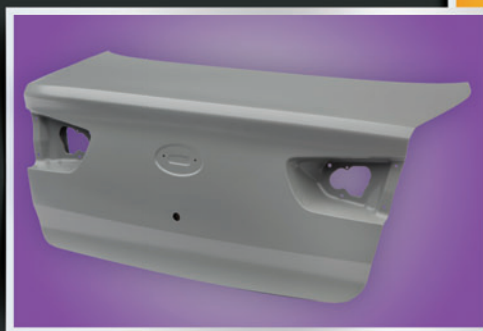
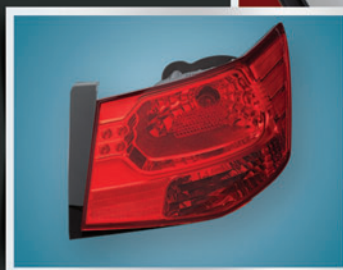
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The future is hot formed

Carmakers are looking to a newer hot stamping process over cold rolling

Since the beginning of vehicle construction, the majority of steel panels and structure came from cold rolled steel. Cold rolling is a metal working process in which metal is deformed by passing it through rollers at a temperature below its recrystallization temperature. Cold rolling increases the strength and hardness of a metal by introducing defects into the metal's crystal structure. The process is most often used to decrease the thickness of plate and sheet metal.

Cold rolling has been an effective process, but today's carmakers are focusing on alternative materials for construction – and refocusing on altering the steel itself. A newer process – called hot stamping or press hardening – is the process of forming metal while it is at temperatures in excess of 1,650°F, and then cooling it quickly in the die. The process converts low-tensile-strength metal to a high-strength steel that weighs in at 150 to 200 kilopounds per square inch (KSI).

Baking in strength

A press-hardenable material, primarily boron steel or aluminized steel, is heated to more than 1,650°F in an oven in the first stage of the press line. The material is transferred quickly to a press, where the part is formed while the material is still very hot. Then the part is rapidly cooled by being held in a water-cooled die cavity for a few seconds at the bottom of the press stroke.

“HOT-FORMED STEEL IS BEING USED BY MANY CARMAKERS ON ENTRY-LEVEL VEHICLES AS A WAY OF SAVING WEIGHT AND STRENGTHENING CRITICAL COMPONENTS SUCH AS A AND B PILLARS.”

The hot stamping process sounds pretty simple: Heat up a steel sheet until it is red-hot, stamp it into a form, and keep it there for a few seconds while it cools. However, in the case of modern hot stamping, relatively complex formed and angled parts must be formed in a single-step stamping process.

What results is a fairly intricate part that is much stronger and lighter than the base material. For example, boron steel, in its original state, has tensile strength of around 50 KSI – but after it is hot formed, its tensile strength is about 200 KSI.

Complexity can simplify

Because hot stamping allows the forming of complex parts with a single stamp stroke, multi-component assemblies can be formed as one component, eliminating some subsequent joining processes, such as welding. However, new techniques are required for the repair of ultra high-strength hot-formed steel. Straightening and reshaping of even minor deformations are not possible, because of the high-tensile yield strength and the rebound effect of hot-formed steel. A damaged component must be completely cut out and/or partially replaced in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications.

The use of butt-welding to repair ultra high-strength hot-formed steel can cause weakness in the repair, because of micro-structural changes arising from heating the steel during the welding process. To help ensure optimum repair integrity, most vehicle makers have service solutions incorporated during the development of the body structure that allow affected components to be replaced wholly or partially in special parting sections.

Hot-formed steel is being used by many carmakers on entry-level vehicles as a way of saving weight and strengthening critical components such as A and B pillars. That means it is critical in the repair estimating process that this type of steel is identified, to carry out a proper repair. The use of traditional cutout and butt-welding repair will weaken the structure and throw off air bag timing, with potentially fatal consequences. Knowing the manufacturer's repair procedures has always been important, but now it can mean the difference between life and death. ☞

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ABRN.COM/GREGHORN

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If there's a topic you'd like me to address, I'd love to hear from you.

Greg Horn is vice president of industry relations for Mitchell International.



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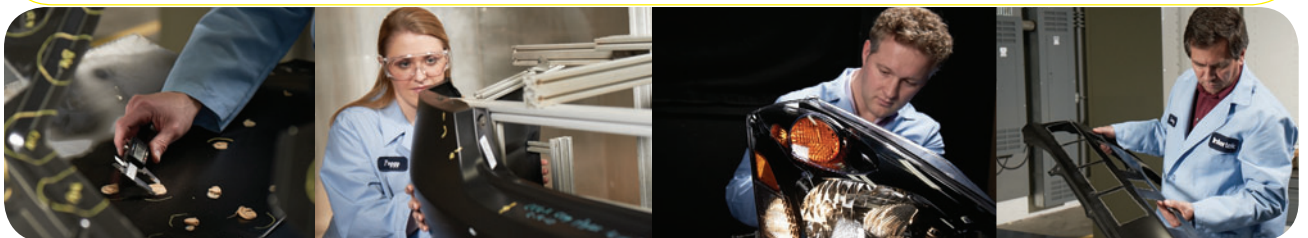
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Looking for the 'Easy' button

Don't let ever-changing industry activity put a strain on your awareness of current issues

Looking at industry issues from recent months, there has been a great deal of focus and effort placed on parts procurement mandates and other business process mandates that have very little benefit to the actual vehicle owners or repairers. Although the parts mandates accelerated in 2013, it was far from being a "surprise attack" to our business future. So, how did so many in the industry get blindsided by it?

First, the speed of doing business in today's ever-changing market has accelerated to levels for which not many have taken the time to become fully prepared. Whether it is because of a lack of staffing, implemented technology, or unwarranted expectations of insurers, the pressure to meet insurer key performance indicators (KPIs), satisfy the vehicle owners, meet promise dates and reduce costs has never been so high. The bottom line is that as an industry, everyone is running at full speed as if trapped inside of a hamster wheel. They are just trying to get the work on the cars in their shop completed, process paperwork and keep the vehicle owners happy – and then go home and try to forget about it all.

This type of perpetual activity slowly drains the very essence of awareness of what is happening around us. The mental and physical strain has been overwhelming to many, and this is where our industry can easily be taken advantage of. If you are too busy to see industry changes coming, and too busy to stop them,

"IT SEEMS THAT EVERYONE IN OUR INDUSTRY IS LOOKING FOR THE 'EASY' BUTTON. BUT SUCCESS TAKES ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDUSTRY THAT ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE ACTUALLY TAKE ON."

it becomes pretty easy to find your self in the midst of a type of reality that you do not like, but didn't do anything about.

No shortcuts


As in other industries today, it seems that everyone in our industry is looking for the "Easy" button. If we could only hit that button, just like in the commercials – miraculously, it could all be handled! Unfortunately, unlike the commercials, the world and our business do not work that way. It takes an engagement in the industry that only a small percentage actually take on.



What are we doing today that is comparable to hitting the Easy button in our shops? Many are selling their businesses, which may serve as an easy way out so owners don't have to worry about keeping up on the market and its continuous evolution any longer. Many don't take a stand on any issue – they may complain a little, but it's easier to simply give in. They use excuses such as "I had no choice" or "I can't afford not to."

Contrary to the relief the Easy button may offer, there is an important saying a percentage of dedicated repairers believe in and live by: Anything worth having is worth fighting for. Unfortunately, the 80/20 rule often applies here – 20 percent of the industry finds itself doing the work and fighting for the remaining 80 percent.

This minority often works very hard on industry committees and in associations to have a say in shaping the future of this industry. They also often stand up for what is right, regardless of the personal and business costs they may have to face in doing so. They often battle in courtrooms and legislative arenas on behalf of the rest at their own expense. But without them, the future would definitely become a reality none would want.

Are you going to become a part of the engaged, active and fighting 20 percent, or stay in the 80 percent, letting others fight the battle for you? Your business future just might hinge on which role you choose. 

**Tell Me
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ABRN.COM/PASSWATER

Tony Passwater, president of AEII, has been in the collision industry since 1972.

“With Blowtherm, we didn’t have to purchase additional fans and blowers to get the air flow we needed.”



“I talked with three other shops that had Blowtherm equipment and visited another facility to see the booth in action and I liked what I saw. The long and short of it is everyone else wanted to sell me a booth, but then sell fans and blowers on top of it, which is not the case with Blowtherm’s Air Speed system.”

“The ease of operation with this booth has allowed us to increase from 6 to 8 booth cycles per day. This has boosted shop production which equals direct profit. Our insurance business has expanded rapidly due to greater volume output capability.”

“Our painters can monitor the heating and cool down settings which make this booth more user friendly than most products I’ve seen and lends to a substantial savings on utilities.”

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THE POWER OF TWO
 Minor business improvements can have a major impact on success and profit.
ABRN.com/ProfitMotive

MINDING YOUR BUSINESS

MAXIMIZE YOUR SHOP PROFIT

TIPS TO HELP BOOST THE BOTTOM LINE AND SHOP SUCCESS

BY KEVIN MEHOK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

WANTING TO own a nice car in my younger days, but lacking the money to buy one, I bought cars that needed lots of TLC. Because I could perform the paint work and minor repairs, I was able to fix them up and turn a profit when I sold them. In reality, I didn't look at the entire investment, with materials and my time. When I did some real calculations years later, I found out my profit margins weren't so good after all.

I have a feeling some of us do this today in our shops. We think we understand the idea of profitability, but do we? Profitability is defined as the financial benefit realized when the amount of revenue gained from a business activity exceeds the expenses, costs and taxes needed to sustain the activity.

This sounds pretty simple; however, it is imperative to determine several important metrics before you can accurately gauge your profit, and then work toward improving it.

Initially, let's look at each repair your shop performs individually. You should make money on every job you do. Simplistically, your repair charges should be more than your cost by a certain percentage. Is it always?

I am not talking about the occasional job you have to eat,

or the rental cost. In general, the profit you generate on each repair is what you use to pay all of your shop's expenses, outside of those directly tied to the repair cost. If you don't know that average profit on each job you do, you should.

If you do not currently utilize some type of management system, buy one. You won't survive in our highly competitive industry doing things by hand. As a rule of thumb, you should generate at least 40 percent to 50 percent bottom line profit on every job. Departmentally, you should be shooting for about 35 percent profit on parts, 40 percent profit on paint and material, 60 percent profit on labor, and 30 percent on sublet work. Your system will allow you to run reports that display these basic numbers by department. Look at each department individually and make the improvements needed.

In all repair centers, labor generally offers you the greatest profit potential at the 60 percent profit target. You should try to fix more whenever possible. This is the first step toward maximizing your profits — sell more labor. You should try to maintain labor sales of at least 50 percent of your overall sales. Train your estimators to always look to repair first, rather than replace. Often, a damaged panel will pull, and

is repairable after pulls are completed, even if it doesn't look like it at first glance. Repairing a panel is usually faster than replacing one as well. Remember, the faster a car moves through your shop, the faster you get paid, and the faster you can bring in additional work. Everyone wins when your cycle time is lower.

How you pay your employees will impact your labor profit as well. I am a firm believer in commission over hourly or flat rate. Paying your techs on commission always guarantees a certain percentage of labor profit, no matter what the labor rate on the particular job is. If you pay a 40 percent commission, you will always make 60 percent profit on the labor, unless you over flag. Charge for what you do. I know that with some DRP programs this might be hard, but you should always charge for what you legitimately can.

Become a student of the P pages, and use them for your backup when needed. Paying on commission should also help you drive production. I advocate not paying the tech for the entire job until it is completed. This way, there is a certain amount of urgency by your techs to get the car done. Again, the faster the car is done, the faster you get paid.

Next, let's look at your parts profits. You should know by manufacturer what percentage of profit you make when you sell a part. I know of one shop that can make up to 60 percent per part sold on aftermarket parts. So it makes sense for this business owner to try and sell more aftermarket parts. Again, you have to approach the transaction from a business standpoint, not from a body tech's view, or even that of an insurer. Obviously, there are instances and circumstances that are going to dictate what type of parts are used in all repairs, but knowing the profit numbers will help you work smarter when selling certain lines. If you are in an area where you can work with your vendors for better discounts, do so. What a vendor offers isn't always the best they can do. A lot depends on volume, and timeliness of payments, etc. You won't know unless you ask. A vendor's service is also a consideration with regard to profit. If your percentage is 2 points better from a vendor that stocks nothing,

and it takes you days to get a part, the discounts won't outweigh the slowdown in cycle time. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to generate an acceptable profit on parts, so be vigilant, smart and persistent at all times regarding your cost and markups. Remember to charge for what you put on the vehicle. Adding the charges for the \$10 in clips that you are now tossing in for free can generate quite a bit of revenue.

Paint and materials seem like they go up every day. Every time oil goes up, so do material costs, but not the allowable material charges in most agreements. The first suggestion I generally make to most shops is to get a handle on waste and potential theft in this department. I have set up a system in our shops called Can Ban, where every tech gets a certain allocation of material on a cart every day. The cart is theirs, and is easy to maintain by filling it to a certain point with the pre-decided upon material list. The parts manager fills it daily, and tracks the techs usage on a spreadsheet like form with each fill.

Our standardized list allows us as the shop management to choose the most cost effective material available. I don't stock more than we need to do our repairs, and the stock is checked daily. The carts are occasionally cleaned, and product in excess of the standard allocations is removed and put back in the shops stock. On one such clean-up day, 6 rolls of tape, and nearly two boxes of excess sand paper were gathered up and re used from the paint shop. The value of the rolls and the paper was well over 100 dollars, that would just have been wasted had it not been seen, and repurposed. Every shop has waste. Working to minimize yours will help boost profitability. Since using this Can Ban method, our material bills have dramatically reduced, and I firmly believe we use what we buy, we don't waste it.

Monitor your mixing reports, and make sure there aren't lots of over mixes and re mixes occurring. If there are, get your jobber or supplier involved for further training. No one can afford to mix too much, or waste paint mixed improperly. Set up a specific list of certain materials your shop will use but, for example, don't stock both hook it and stick it sandpaper. Choose one subsystem

or the other, and use it. Keeping multiple kinds of the same grit sandpaper is really wasteful, and expensive. I rely heavily on my paint suppliers for help here, and suggest you do too. That is part of the service they offer, so make sure you use it. If you do not have a contract with a supplier, shop around and look for the best pricing. I recently compared several jobbers price on a particular kind of sandpaper. Out of 4 suppliers, each one was different, with one being almost \$4.00 per box more. This was the same product from the same manufacturer. Obviously, I chose the least expensive option, and have found that the vendor is very competitive in all product lines, and has been able to save my shop me lots of expense over the past few years on supplies.

Perhaps the biggest expense in your shops is the same as mine, and that is fixed costs, like rent or mortgage, heat, light, taxes, phone bills etc. All the things you need to pay for, but have less control over than the cost going into your repairs. I suggest you tabulate all these expenses, and just like the costs involved in the repair directly, look at each one individually, and see what can be done to reduce them. If your mortgage is high, try to refinance. If your car payments are staggering, maybe consider getting a less expensive vehicle, or rolling some costs into a loan with less interest.

The best way to impact profit is to increase sales out of the same square footage you use today. The base overhead will go up slightly with increased sales, but at a smaller percentage than the sales revenue increase. The key is really to never be complacent in your business in any area. Many of us find ourselves wrapped up in the problems of the day to day operation, and don't take the time to look at all the areas that may be suffering and in need of attention. It happens to the best of us, but realizing you have a problem, is the first step toward correcting it. The morning after you read this, spend a couple hours looking at all these issues before you start your normal day. I think you will be surprised at what you see. From then on, spend some time every day to look at the big picture, and soon you will find your day, and the shops bottom line, looking a lot better. ■

PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Addressing the parts challenge

One way or another, the parts procurement process needs to be addressed

BY TOM MCGEE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Recently, the industry has been focused on the parts procurement process. While this has created tremendous controversy and debate at just about every turn, the procurement of parts is really just a component of the parts challenge that shops need to address.

As you look at the overall repair process and the key performance indicators that a shop should be measuring, parts have a significant impact on the shop's overall performance and profitability.

Shops need to implement a process to prevent incomplete and inaccurate parts orders and have a goal of a one-time parts order. The more often a shop places additional parts orders, the more often they experience delays in the repair process.

Shop and vendor expectations

To reduce cycle time, increase touch time and meet the promised delivery date, both the shop and the parts vendor must accomplish certain goals. For example:

- The shop must have a process that allows for a complete teardown so that all parts are identified for removal and installation (R&I), repair or replacement. Parts that are to be replaced need to be identified with an accurate part number.
- The parts vendor must send the correct parts in a timely manner.

Communication

Parts process communication needs to be done both with internal staff and also with vendors.

Poor communication with the staff can lead to incomplete parts ordering, lack of follow-up on missing parts or confusion about who is responsible for the process.

It is also important to talk with your vendors regarding service. Shops need to track parts delays, parts returns, incorrect parts, damaged parts, credits and delivery delays with each vendor used. These all impact the shop's KPIs, and communication with vendors can help reduce or eliminate the problems from reoccurring.

Price matching

We deal with multiple vendors and types of parts (OEM, aftermarket, used or recycled, and rebuilt or remanufactured) and each has its own benefits and challenges. One area that I frequently see shops automatically leaning toward is the price matching between OEM and aftermarket parts.

Look closely at the pricing structures between the OEM and aftermarket parts vendors you use. We have all seen aftermarket parts that do not fit a vehicle; we have also had experiences where the parts fit properly every time they are used on a particular year, make and model vehicle. If the part fits every time, and is appropriate for the customer and the vehicle, then

avoid giving away the profits gained by the use of the aftermarket part.

Parts SOPs

Because the parts process affects the entire business, from the time the vehicle arrives until the final invoicing has been completed, it is critical to develop standard operating procedures. Benefits of developing and implementing SOPs:

1. A positive customer experience
2. Development of a business culture around customer satisfaction, quality, efficiency and continuous improvement
3. Development of a team built around defined and attainable standards and goals, with procedures to achieve them
4. Consistency in the repair process, both in the front office and in the shop
5. Reference tools for employee training, cross-training and retraining
6. Establishment of expectations and accountability at all levels (who does what, where, when, why and how)
7. Improved repair process efficiency
8. Improved confidence in relationships with vendors and insurers
9. Reduced comebacks and rework
10. A tool for performing internal audits

Involve your team

When looking to make a change, communicate with your team. Once you have identified your goal, get their opinions and feedback. They know what is working and what isn't and can help make the corrections to see improvement. If the team is involved, they begin to share your vision and goals and take ownership in the process. ■

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SHOP PROFILE

A snapshot of one of the industry's leading shops

PIKE'S CARSTAR COLLISION CENTER / MADISON, OHIO



Shop staying power

Longevity comes from family ties, community service

BY JAMES E. GUYETTE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

A family-focused work atmosphere, ongoing participation in numerous community activities and a sincere commitment to providing top customer service have combined to provide a peak level of performance at Pike's CARSTAR Collision Center in Madison, Ohio.

As one of the first shops in the nation to become a CARSTAR franchisee, and the chain's inaugural entry into the Buckeye State, Pike's celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2013 amid an array of honors saluting the integrity and business acumen of owners Doug and Tamara Pike.

In addition to accolades from the franchise's corporate headquarters, Pike's was proclaimed Business of the Year by the influential Madison/Perry Area Chamber of Commerce.

"I was overwhelmed," says Tamara Pike, expressing her surprise and delight as the couple's community involvement and charitable contributions were chronicled in a prominent newspaper profile by Dave Deluca of the *Ashtabula Star Beacon*.

"It was quite an honor," Tamara exclaims. "We may have to devote an entire wall space to all of the plaques and awards. There were so many," she continues. "They included recognition from the Lake County commissioners, the Ohio Senate, Madison Schools, Madison Township, the Village of North Perry and many others."

"We don't do these things for recognition," adds Doug Pike. "We're just people

doing our bit to help people."

"If you could say only one thing about Doug," according to CARSTAR spokeswoman Debby Robinson, "it would be that he is always honest and up front."

Says Doug in response: "We put people back in their cars with their families. Nothing is more important than that."

This focus on family ties is found throughout all aspects of the business. It was there from the beginning three decades ago and remains a key factor to this day.

"The support of my wife and daughters is what has made our business successful for the past 30 years," Doug points out. "I am blessed to have them by my side."

Tamara serves as office administrator, handling marketing, human resources, accounting and bookkeeping along with other management tasks. "With only a high school diploma, she has attended industry training and business seminars alongside of me," he reports. The constant pursuit of education has been a critical component in building and maintaining a profitable business in a tough market.

AT A GLANCE

Pike's CARSTAR Collision Center

Name of shop

Madison, Ohio

Location

Doug and Tamara Pike

Owners

1

Number of shops

30

Years in business

12

Number of employees

36

Number of bays

14,000

Square footage

25

Number of DRPs

\$2,069

Average repair ticket

\$28,782

Average weekly volume

3 days

Average cycle time

BASF

Paint supplier

Car-O-Liner

Frame machines used

CCC

Estimating system used

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Internet site



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With 12 employees and 36 bays, Pike's posted \$1.5 million in gross revenues last year.

Doug and Tamara's three daughters – Alaina, Danielle and Rachel – all work at the business in various capacities.

"There is nothing more precious to me than family, and I am honored to have mine working with me," says Doug. "Each of us has our job and does it well. We have always gotten along and had fun together, and doing this in a work atmosphere has been as enjoyable and rewarding as at home."

These warm and fuzzy feelings are apparently felt by the non-family staffers as well, given that the five technicians have tenures topping out at 27, 15 and 12 years of service.

"We retain great personnel by treating them respectfully and honestly," Doug says, stressing that individual professional fulfillment remains an important element of the business model.

"We offer to pay for all I-CAR (training) and ASE (certification) to maintain our Gold status," he reports. "Our employees are our biggest asset. Without their knowledge, skill and commitment, we are out of business."

Operational efficiencies are also enhanced by a sense of top-to-bottom trust that exists throughout the enterprise, a situation that allows Doug and Tamara to keep abreast of all the latest industry educational offerings.

"During our time away from the office, whether it's personal or for business – such as conferences, training, meetings, etc. – we have always been able to count on our staff members," says Doug, who likewise anticipates a smooth switchover to waterborne paint as the goal for conversion is set to soon arrive.

Mainstreaming benchmarks

As you might expect, having a cordial and professional work environment easily extends to delivering competent repairs, a happy clientele and word-of-mouth referrals. "Customers and their satisfaction are our number one priority," Doug says. "Our customer service representatives and estimators treat our customers with the utmost respect and understanding. We track our CSI and review and retrain as necessary."

Dating back to 1989, the company has annually averaged a customer service index rating of 4.8 on a scale of 5.

Pike's participates in 25 direct repair program (DRP) affiliations, which accounts for 47 percent of sales. Selected mechanical repairs, alignments and towing augment non-insurance-paid bodywork, and relations with insurance carriers are routinely monitored to ensure peak satisfaction.

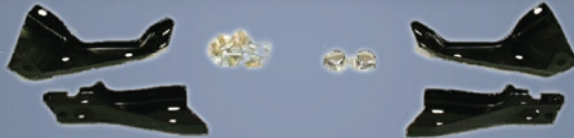
"We continually review with them our performance with their company and work with them to mainstream their benchmarks, always treating them with the utmost respect," says Doug, adding that "our biggest challenge in running a profitable business is keeping up with the ongoing changes and demands of the insurance industry. We are committed to using the best quality parts and service available."

Located in the heart of the Lake Erie snowbelt east of Cleveland amid a spectacularly bucolic scenic setting, "just getting more cars to the door" remains a marketing challenge in a rural region hosting a limited pool of vehicles.

Madison carries with it an interesting history. Once an important port rivaling Cleveland in size, bog iron was forged along Arcola Creek and big schooners were constructed of timbers on the beach at the north end of Dock Road. In time, however, the industry and workers moved on and the land reverted to wilderness. Later came farming, enriched by a high water table and sandy soils perfect for producing grapes and nurs-



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ery stock. The *Mother Earth News* was previously headquartered in the village; the community currently consists of generously sized properties and former lakeside cottages now populated year-long by residents who commute to jobs held elsewhere.

"Snow and deer hits have a great impact on sales, making summer our slowest time," Doug explains, alluding to the marketing importance of maintaining such close ties to the community's hometown activities.

Sponsoring teams in the local youth and adult leagues, Doug and Tamara frequently donate time, money and energy to causes such as the Madison Food Bank, Make-A-Wish, the American Legion's Veterans Day Dinner, the Madison High School Band, the Old Fashioned Days street festival, reverse raffles, charitable auctions and other worthy events.

An ambitious name-recognition marketing effort features billboard, print and radio advertisements.



Doug and Tamara Pike

One bite at a time

A graduate of the Auburn Career Center auto body program, Doug worked as a combination repairer/painter for eight years at various collision centers while nurturing the goal of someday owning his own shop.

"My father, David Pike, was my first and greatest mentor," Doug recounts. "He taught my four brothers and I the importance of integrity and gave us the strength

and confidence to pursue anything we wanted in life. My admiration for him is at the highest level."

And while always knowing he wanted to run his own facility, Doug found himself with the opportunity to do so in 1983 when his employer was going out of business. He purchased the equipment and supplies, becoming a business owner with no business education.

At the beginning, to get the operation on its feet, Doug and Tamara worked crazy hours. Doug would be in the office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. When they closed for the day he would work in the back until midnight. Tamara would get up and go in at 3 a.m. to do the accounting and personnel work, coming home at 8 a.m. Doug would have their oldest daughter ready for school eating breakfast, and then he would leave for work.

"All we were sure of when we started the business was that it would not interfere with family," says Doug, "and that we would always operate above board and with the thought that we would treat people the way we wanted to be treated."

And together Doug and Tamara continued to seek out the proper training via a series of seminars and educational programs, culminating in a 3M ARMS management class taught by Lirel Holt, who at that time was beginning to establish the CARSTAR network of independently owned shops. Doug and Tamara soon came aboard the fledgling franchise.

"My admiration for this man is only second to my father," says Doug of Holt's lasting influence. "He was helpful in teaching me to look at my business from the outside, and he also taught me to keep it simple: 'One bite at a time.' He also gave my wife and I an opportunity to do something we never would have imagined doing before we met him." ❧

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**FITTING
NEW PARTS**

CORRECTLY ADJUSTING GAPS AND FLUSHNESS GOES A LONG WAY TOWARD CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND JOB SUCCESS

 BY **ALFRED THOMAS** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

According to I-CAR's Snapshot of the Industry report, R&R bolt-on parts is the top trait in which a shop expects an entry-level employee to be proficient. It is also one of the first things a customer will check. As a customer examines a finished repair, Fit and Finish are most easily seen and evaluated (**FIG 1**).

Research shows people decide in seconds whether they will like your work. In sales, a customer will make up his or her mind in the first 45 seconds. If the fit and finish is not good as the customer approaches the vehicle, they will not be satisfied.

Despite its importance, replacing bolt-on parts is often given to the most junior worker in the shop without guidelines for that make and model, as the worker is expected to know. But evaluation details take practice and experience.

As a seasoned worker walks around a vehicle, he or she will instinctively look for things such as gaps, positive and negative flushness, and opening and closing effort. This technician will question whether the misalignment extends past just the bolt-on parts into a structural area, and therefore need structural alignment, whether the fender will hit the door as it opens, and whether the undamaged side is truly undamaged. All these items should have been caught and noted in the damage report, but from time to time such details slip by — and if we are to expect a good fit, they will need to be evaluated. All in all, it is not an easy task.

For those engrained in the collision repair industry, checking a service manual for the proper gap may not be the first thing that comes to mind. This is because in the not-too-

distant past, this type of information would not have been in the manual. Not all gaps will be available, but many of today's manuals do have them — and can be easily checked from your computer or smart device.

Removing damaged parts

Even before a part is removed from the vehicle, taking a quick walk around is very helpful. Check the undamaged areas of the vehicle for gap size and uniformity (**FIG 2, 3**). A homemade gap gauge can easily be made from a paint stick, adding tape to it to match the undamaged side's gaps (**FIG 4**).

Also check for flatness — either negative or positive — and ease of opening on the undamaged parts. These areas should act as a reference for replacement parts.

Use a flat hand or a credit card to check for positive or negative flushness (**FIG 5**). The doors, hood, hatch and other openings should be operated and checked for smoothness or misalignment — all of which should be checked before the old damaged part is removed. If additional damage is noted, a supple-

ment should be prepared.

As the old part is disassembled, the fasteners should be bagged and tagged to help with reassembly. Replacements for fasteners that are damaged should be ordered as the vehicle is disassembled, when there is sufficient time to

get new ones in before assembly. If any unusual wire routing or attachments are noted — how many shims are present, for example — take a quick photo with a smartphone (**FIG 6**) so you can have it for reference when reassembling.



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Control Management System





A tagged bag of parts and photos can come in handy. Some shops even have the estimator or shop foreman mark the vehicle as “Repair” or “R&R,” to speed things up (**FIG 7**).

Minding the gaps

During the initial inspection, the vehicle should be checked for structural damage. To visually check this, all the gaps should be checked to determine whether they are consistent over the entire vehicle. Gaps generally are from 2 to 8mm, with steel panels having the smallest gaps and plastic and aluminum panels needing more room for terminal expansion.

The gaps on all doors, hoods and deck lids should be even on all sides, and they should open and close with ease. If they bind, it means there may be structural or alignment problems. Doors should smoothly align and close over the striker plate without effort — and without needing to be raised to close. On older vehicles, the hinges should also be checked for bushing wear, which is likely not a result of a collision.

Flushness

Not all panels are mounted flush. In fact, many manufacturers recommend a slight positive flush mount (0 to 2mm) for forward parts such as fenders to help with wind noise and moisture leaks (**FIG 8**). As the wind passes over the forward-mounted parts, it does not cause a turbulence or noise as it hits the next panel. Also, some fenders must be mounted a bit positive so that as the door opens, it will clear the fender. Often in even minor collisions, as the fender is moved back even slightly, the now-narrowed gap renders the door inoperable. As the occupant tries to get out and force is applied, the fender incurs additional damage.

Structural vs. panel misalignment

If structural misalignment is suspected, the vehicle should be measured to determine whether corrections need to be taken before trying to fit the new part. Even with adjustments built into bolt-on parts, a structural misalignment, however slight, will make it im-



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possible to align the new part. Examples of this include elongated holes (**FIG 9**) for forward and aft movement, or large square holes (**FIG 10**) for movement forward and aft.

These types of adjustments come in many forms, such as slotted or elongated holes (**FIG 11**), large square holds (**FIG 12**), J-clips (**FIG 13**), shims (**FIG 14**), and adjustment stops, just to name a few. These are all used to fine-tune a vehicle's alignment as new parts are being assembled.

Attaching the new part

Once the vehicle is checked for proper structural alignment and the adjacent panels are checked and protected from

damage (**FIG 13**), the new part can be dry-fitted. This step is important if the shop paints the parts off the vehicle, then assembles the completed work. Once the part is sent to paint, when it comes back its attachment must be easy and without binding and scraping, so as not to damage the fresh paint.

When checking alignment, the old attachment marks can help. If the new part is put in place, it is likely that it should be attached where the previous part was placed (**FIG 14**). When aligning a new part, start the bolts loosely in their holes. Then tighten them — starting where the vehicle is stationary, such as at the rocker, where there are now movable parts. Move up to the A-pillar, where the door may or may not be aligned correctly.

Next, move down to the front, and tighten the bolts at the front by the hood. Note that the bolts are only lightly tightened (except for the rocker bolt) because it may be necessary to loosen them and adjust the gaps and flushness as all the pieces come together. When fitting large parts such as hoods, get a fellow technician to help as they are first put in place (**FIG 15**); you can fine-tune them by yourself later.

With the new panels in place and the mounting bolts lightly tightened, begin the fine-tuning. Start where the adjacent panels are stationary, moving to where there are a number of movable panels — such as the core support, where fenders, header and hood all may need to be aligned. Check gaps, flushness and ease of operation. When the alignment is complete, all the bolts should be final tightened.

Although the explanation above is for a fender, all bolt-on parts should be fitted from an area where it is least difficult to align. Stationary parts provide a starting point; you can then progress to areas where multiple movable parts come together.

Special attention should be given to openings such as doors, hood and deck lid. When fitting an opening, the striker or latch should be removed and the part fitted before the latch is adjusted. That is, the part should be adjusted to the opening, with the latch being adjusted to the fitted part. If the

TECH TIPS


- Verify and inspect new parts.
- Protect adjacent parts.
- Dry-fit before sending to paint.
- First fit from the stationary adjacent part, then forward and rearward, inward and outward, and finally upward and downward.
- Use the undamaged side as reference.
- Use old location marks as references.
- Remove the striker or latches before fitting openings.
- Use a gauge (even a paint stick works) to check side-to-side gaps.
- Sight down the gaps for evenness (rockers, hood, etc.).
- One telltale sign that a door may have been damaged by a fender hitting it is paint damage on the edge of the door. If found, expect that the door may need adjusting, along with the new fender.
- Don't final-tighten the fasteners until all adjustments are completed.

CONTROVERSIAL FITTING TECHNIQUES

Although unibody vehicles are flexible and may sag when a fender is unbolted, using a floor jack under the fender rocker to flex the upper door fender gap or under the bumper mount to tighten the gap may be a mistake. If a vehicle is resting on its suspension and the gaps are not even, there may be structural damage — and it should be corrected before fitting the fender.

Jacking the core forward to get proper forward fender adjustment may also be a sign of structural misalignment, and measurement may be necessary.

If parts must be forced to obtain alignment, something is wrong. Look for what is causing the difficulty, and correct it. If force is used and the vehicle is subjected to normal road vibrations, all of your hard work may be lost.

latch is in place as the opening adjustments are attempted, it is much more difficult to complete (see “Tech Tips” sidebar). 

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TECHNIQUES  INFOCUS

Exhausting work

Use extra diligence the first time you see a vehicle to help confirm exhaust problems are related to a collision, not wear and tear



Inform your customers that new exhaust parts will produce a “tinny” sound during the first few weeks of use.

PHOTOS: ALAN WALKER

BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

“The car sounds funny now.” Ever heard that one before? You perform a repair, and the customer returns shortly thereafter with complaints or concerns about rattling noises under a vehicle or an engine that seems to run much louder. Your first thoughts lean toward exhaust problems. The situation quickly turns difficult because the customer suspects the problem is collision-related, which it could be. The customer also wants you to solve the problem now.

You have a big problem on your hands – namely, determining who is going to pay for this work. There’s no way an insurer will pick up the tab if the insurer isn’t absolutely convinced the problem is related to the collision. That can be difficult if you’re dealing with an older car whose exhaust may already have been damaged by corrosion or through normal wear and tear. Since your shop and the adjuster already have looked at the vehicle, there’s a very good chance the insurer will balk at paying for more repairs. When that happens, you’re either going to have to take care of this work

yourself or be stuck with an unhappy customer who will take the vehicle elsewhere and never come to you for repairs again.

While considering those options, think of this. This entire ugly scenario could have and should have been avoided in the first place.

Several months ago, *ABRN* examined a comparable issue involving customers returning with suspension issues (visit ABRN.com/suspension). In these cases, shops similarly risk losing money and customers over repair problems that don’t seem to turn up until after a vehicle has left their property.

The solution for both areas is the same. Spend a little extra time investigating and diagnosing problems with these systems the first time you work on a vehicle. There's a great chance you'll spot potential or existing problems then. Not only will this head off customer come backs, it's a great way to capture this work and put some extra money in your coffers.

Note: This article will focus on exhaust problems that can be linked to collisions or that involve repairing damaged or deteriorated parts that can be spotted during a basic inspection. Problems related to emissions or more sophisticated exhaust issues will not be discussed here.

Inspection directions

The best time to begin looking for issues is during the estimate. Important here is that exhaust problems often are hidden. Though you may feel like dismissing them in vehicles with relatively light hits, never make this mistake. Take the extra time to put the vehicle on a lift and perform a proper inspection.

This means working gradually from the front of the vehicle to the rear and searching for damage or deterioration to all parts that make up the exhaust. This includes all the pipes, brackets, hangers, clamps, resonators, joints, seals and the muffler.

A proper inspection involves the right tools. Here, you'll need five: Proper lighting, a metal tool such as a small ball peen hammer, a rubber mallet and finally your eyes and ears.

Working towards the rear of the vehicle, tap on each of the exhaust's parts. Check that each resonates with a solid sound and without any rattling.

Perform a visual inspection at each part and check for damages. Look for any "excessive" metal flaking or deterioration that may result in leaks. Check for any binding of components or contact with the vehicle undercarriage. Make sure all the parts fit tightly. No part on the exhaust should be loose. Also, look for proper parts alignment since alignment is critical for exhaust performance. None of the mounting hardware should show signs of excess pull or stress.



(Left) Use a rubber mallet to tap on the catalytic converter to search for any internal damage. (Right) When performing an inspection of the exhaust, use a ball peen hammer or comparable tool to tap on parts to determine if they are damaged or need replaced.



Thorough exhaust inspections will allow you to capture work like catalytic converter replacement, instead of sending it out your door.

Once you've finished at the tail pipe, lower the vehicle. If the vehicle is in running condition (or when it can run), start the engine and raise the vehicle again. Look for vibration and any excessive movement. Listen for excessive noise or odd noises. Turn the vehicle off, and examine the catalytic converter.

Caution: The converter may be hot. Perform this examination while wearing heat resistant gloves.

Put away your ball peen hammer (or similar tool) and use a rubber mallet to lightly tap the converter. All you should hear is a solid thump. If the tapping produces any rattling noises, the substrate in the converter may have been damaged. Make sure these noises are emanating from the converter and not from any other loose exhaust components.

If the noises are located in the con-

verter, check further for any broken-up substrate in the pipes and muffler. If the converter is damaged, it will need to be replaced (more on this later.)

When the vehicle is drivable, continue the exhaust inspection with a road test. Listen again for any unusual sounds or odd noises from the exhaust. Roll up the windows and note any exhaust odors that may leak into the vehicle.

That's it. A proper inspection, which shouldn't take any longer than 30 minutes, will uncover the vast majority of existing or potential exhaust issues. By noting them at this point in the repair, you'll have plenty of time to notify the insurer and your customer. You'll also have paved the way for your shop taking care of any work.

A repair for every problem

After the inspection, your techs will need to determine the right course of

action to handle any repair issues. This is where you'll turn to OEM and other repair information to produce a proper diagnosis and the correct repair steps. Fortunately, most exhaust problems you'll see should be fairly easy to diagnose, especially following a proper inspection. Further, the repairs you'll need to perform won't involve a lot of complicated work (yet another reason why you don't want to lose this work to another shop).

Consider these common exhaust issues and their most likely sources.

Problem: External exhaust rattle

Likely source: Heat shield weld failure

Rust and heat cycling can cause the welds on the heat shield to fail, as can collision damage. Repair with new welds or install exhaust clamps to hold the pipe in place.

Problem: Exhaust hangs too low (may scrape speed bumps)

Likely source: Missing, damaged or worn hangers/rubber insulators

You should note this problem during the inspection. Replace all damaged or worn parts. If you need to install insulators, make sure they hang straight and have no fore or aft tension on them.

Problem: Loud exhaust tone

Likely source: Internal muffler failure

Obviously, this is a case where you would replace the muffler. Note that some aftermarket mufflers may produce exhaust noise louder than their OEM counterparts. When discussing replacement options with the customer, be sure to point this out. Better still, become familiar with aftermarket mufflers you might be installing.

Problem: Reverberating noise in passenger compartment or a droning sound when speed is maintained

Likely source: Internal muffler failure

Note previous instructions on replacing mufflers.

Problem: Tinny or ringing sound from exhaust components, most notably at low speeds.

Likely source: New exhaust system or parts

Oftentimes, new exhaust systems will produce this sound. It's perfectly normal and eventually will diminish once carbon forms on the inside of the pipes. Advise the customer to drive the vehicle normally.

Converter concerns

If the catalytic converter needs replaced, you'll need to keep a few things in mind.

First, you need to make sure the problems that led to its failure don't similarly ruin the replacement. Even if a collision caused the damage to this part, don't dismiss other existing problems with the exhaust system that could do harm to a new converter. Therefore, before installing the replacement, take the following steps:

Step 1: Retrieve all PCM (Powertrain Control Module) trouble codes and perform required repair procedures for any stored codes.

Step 2: Address any exhaust system leaks.

Step 3: Examine the O₂ sensor operation to ensure vehicle is in fuel control.

Step 4: Evaluate the mechanical condition of the engine — including running a cooling system pressure test. Doing so helps prevent future contamination of the replacement converter.

Next, you need to locate the right converter replacement, which can be something of a challenge if you're using an aftermarket version.

To determine which converter to use, you'll need the vehicle's Emissions Control Information Label. It's typically located in a visible area of the engine compartment, for example, strut tower, the hood underside, radiator support, fan shroud or firewall. If the label is missing, you'll need to contact a new car dealer for a replacement.


The label indicates the vehicle's emission's certification. For example, a vehicle is a California Emissions Certified model if the Emissions Control Label references: "California," "ARB," "CARB" or "50-State."

Finally, you'll need the Engine Family Number (EFN), which also is on the label. This information is critical if you work in a state that mandates replacement converters be CARB-compliant.

Emissions information is critical when looking up parts in the application catalog, both to ensure proper fit and to ensure you adhere to state-mandated aftermarket replacement converter regulations. For example, California mandates that aftermarket replacement converters for any vehicle licensed in the state must be CARB-compliant. In New York, only vehicles made in model years 1993, 1994, 1996 and newer must use converters that are CARB-compliant.

On the subject of aftermarket exhaust parts, you'll need to keep an eye out for the numerous aftermarket exhausts on the market. Customers who invest in these systems will be particularly mindful of any changes to them following a crash. These changes can be esthetic (dented or scratched chrome) or loss of power or performance.

Spend some time at the beginning of the repair talking to these folks to learn why they made the investment and what their expectations will be when they get their vehicles back.

As with any exhaust work, time wisely invested up front will be rewarded when the work is done and you get to send a happy customer on his or her way. And doing so will eliminate those pesky comebacks that could have been avoided. 



When examining the exhaust, work from the front of the vehicle to the rear and make sure you have plenty of light.

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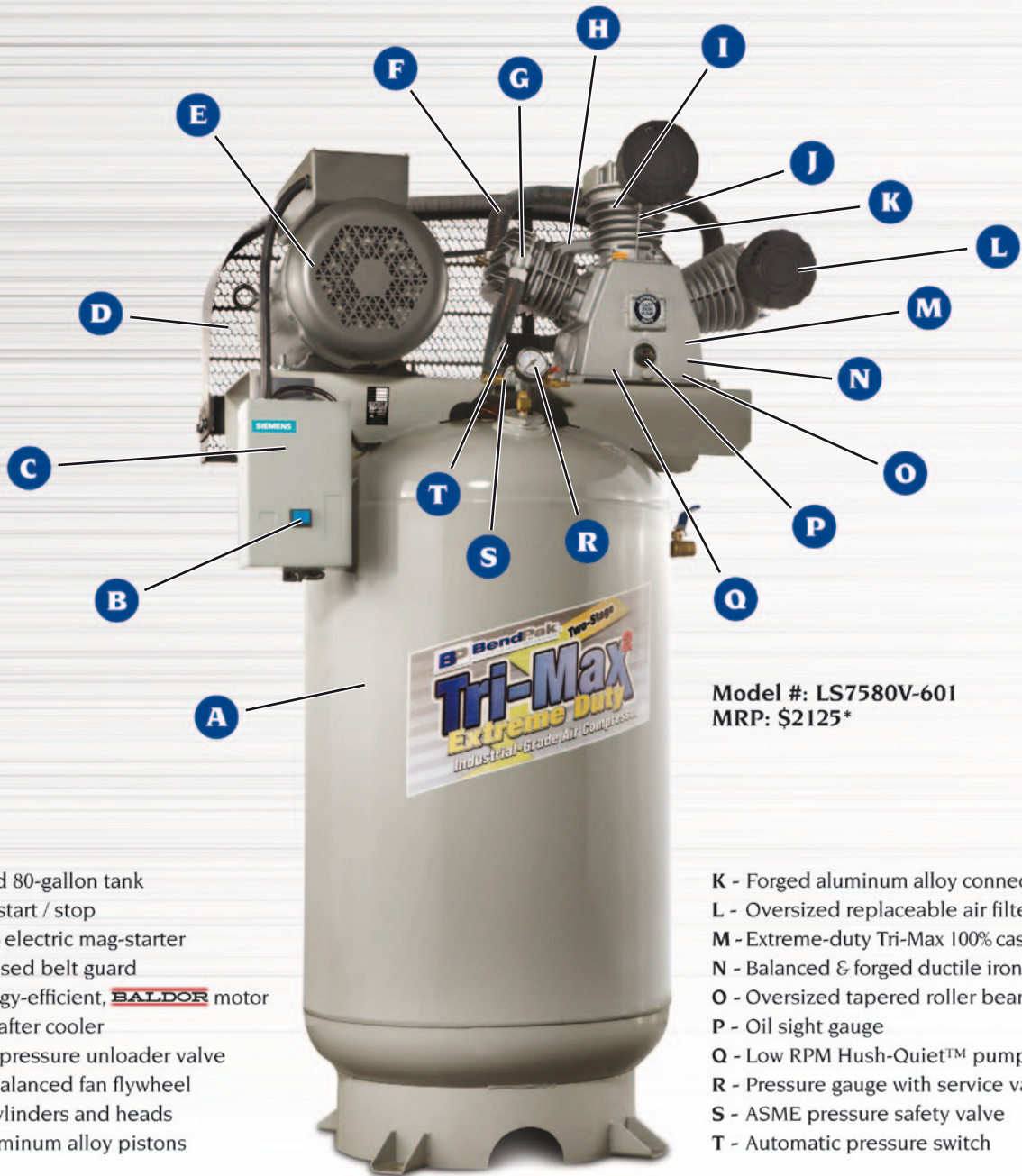
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The telematics workload

Telematics can encourage drivers to bring vehicles into your shop for maintenance, but are you prepared to work on these systems?



IMAGE / DONNY SEYFER

BY **DONNY SEYFER** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Nowadays, there is a lot of talk about telematics. Some are concerned telematics will be used against the very people who brought the vehicle into their household in the first place. The other side of that discussion argues that by having a vehicle that keeps track of your patterns, likes and vehicle condition, it provides convenience to the owner. Regardless of where you come down on this discussion, the connected car exists and you have to be able to work with them.

Before we delve into what connected cars can do, let me first state the most difficult problem I see for the future of telematics — financial — so that you can consider this issue while we look at system features in production and coming down the line. Who pays for the service? Until that is

solved, the debate of telematics is mostly of interest while the service is included in the honeymoon period of ownership.

You may be thinking that telematics are only important for navigation, entertainment and emergency services, but

think about where we are going with vehicle telemetry systems. We have cars today that can parallel park themselves, avoid accidents and locate the edges of the lane you should be driving in. And all of these operations require telemetry of some sort. For the most part, this is done with cameras and proximity sensors, but the next generation is currently operational where a combination of GPS and a smart grid underneath or around the vehicle will help it locate itself geographically. For this technology to work, the car must be able to “feel it’s skin.” In other words, it has to know how far a component extends from it and how close an object is to within an inch or so. Herein lies a new set of repairs and calibrations that are going to be required to return a damaged vehicle to pre-accident condition.

We have been repairing and recalibrating steering wheel position sensors for some time. In general, they are pretty easy to setup once the vehicle is aligned properly; however, I wonder what happens to an automatic steering system or accident avoidance system’s effectiveness if the vehicle has an alignment-related pull. Time will tell us how that works out.


Likewise, I wonder what happens to the traction control system that automatically brakes when an object that is too close if you change the tires and it results in a change in stopping distance. Most of us who live in areas of snowfall have experienced an ABS system trying to do its job in the snow when it has a tire with poor snow traction. The brakes

lock up so easily that the car or truck can sail right through an intersection with both of the driver’s feet mashing the brake pedal to the floor.

Telematics is also a moving target for the software. If a vehicle has a GPS sensor, a WiFi card and the equivalent of sight and touch, there are a lot of things you can do with it. I drive a 2013 Focus ST with the automated center stack.

The software has been updated at least 2 times that I know of in the eight months I have owned it. Initially it had a WiFi system that did not connect to anything, and I am really not sure what it would be used for except as an access point for other devices brought into the car. However, after the dealer ran an update, I was able to connect to my home wireless network. One morning a week or two later, I started the car and the screen said something about performing system maintenance. This leads me to my list of things you can do with this ability and the aforementioned sensors.

- Update software on various modules in the car while the car is shutdown;
- Update navigation software to include the latest road work
- Locate the car if it is stolen or the payments have not been made
- Upload driver behavior, which is handy for parents, but can be scary for drivers if you don’t know who is watching you.
- Upload diagnostic information. The question of who gets this information is huge for mechanical shops
- Download my latest playlist to the center stack
- House my credit card information so when I drive through at a burger or coffee joint. my car pays the bill for me.
- Upload crash diagnostic information at the time of impact to first responders. If you think this sounds far fetched, think about all of the diagnostic information the Supplemental Restraint System can generate. Yaw and inertia sensors can provide information about physical position, and seat pressure sensors will only get better and send approximate size of occupants. The SRS and stability control data could also reveal if a car is upside down.

Privacy issues aside, you can see that there are going to be or already are functions on these vehicles that are more than a little likely to be involved in repairing collision damage. My best advice is that you need someone on staff who is gaining practical knowledge of scan tools. I guarantee this is not the last time we will discuss telematics. 



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THE LAST DETAIL [✓]

One of the commonly overlooked estimating items is the repair of adjacent panels after the removal of a damaged panel. For example, once a rear body panel is completely removed, the trunk floor will have to be repaired in order to fit the new panel. It's also not uncommon for taillight pockets, rain gutters, troughs and sometimes even the frame rails to require some repair.

As I've noted in previous columns, you can use a four-question process when negotiating this or any non-included operation.

Question 1: Is it required to fully and properly repair the vehicle? It's obvious when looking at the condition of these adjacent panels that it is. It's virtually impossible to remove a welded panel without causing damage to the adjacent panels or attaching components.

Question 2: Is adjacent panel damage included in any other labor operation? All three of the major estimating system providers agree that it is not. The "labor exclusions" portion of the AudaExplore Database Reference Manual (Section 4-2), for example, clearly states that "repair labor does not include additional labor to repair the replaced panel and/or adjacent panels, which may become distorted, burned or damaged by welding, drilling, grinding and straightening."

Similarly, on page G39 of the Motor Information Systems' "Guide to Estimating" (which is the basis for the CCC Information Services' estimating system), there's a special notation about welding zones and adjacent panels. It says that labor operation times do not include time for repair of adjacent panels resulting from normal cutting, welding and grinding procedures.

And P4 of Mitchell International's "Procedure Pages," lists under "additions to labor times," the repair of "parts adjacent to parts being replaced."

If you don't have copies of any of these documents from the Big Three estimating systems, you can download them at no charge from the "Get Educated" section of the Database Enhancement Gateway (DEG) website (visit ABRN.com/DEGweb). I recommend having printed copies handy for estimators or blueprinters. It will help them prepare better estimates and puts documentation in

“It is very clearly defined by all of the information providers that adjacent panel repair is necessary and is not included in any other labor operation.”

NEGOTIATING THE NON-INCLUDED

Don't forget to add for repair, refinish of adjacent panels after welded-panel removal

their hands that can help support those estimates if questioned.

In any case, it's very clearly defined by all of the information providers that adjacent panel repair is necessary and is not included in any other labor operation.

Question 3: Do the estimating system providers provide a pre-determined time or calculation method for this procedure? Again, the answer is no.

"The amount of damage can vary considerably depending upon process and technique used by the servicing technician," the note in the Motor "Guide to Estimating" states, for example. "Motor recommends these factors be considered before finalizing any repair cost estimates."

That means it comes down to the fourth question in negotiation of any non-included procedure.

Question 4: What is it worth? Though repair of adjacent panel damage is clearly necessary, it is a judgment item. Although your experience (and that of your technicians) will help you know how much time the process is likely to take, you also can help justify your judgment times through some videotaped time studies within your shop.

Although I've focused here on the repair of the adjacent panels, there may be other non-included procedures and items as well. Refinishing may require blending into these adjacent panels (top and undersides). Time may be needed to match the look of factory seam sealers. Sound deadening pads are often included on these panels, and if damaged during removal of a panel, they will need to be repaired or replaced.

In short, damage to adjacent panels can add significant time to a repair, and these steps should be documented on your estimates. ■

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AUTO SWITCHING

TO SWITCH TO A DIFFERENT BASE METAL, SIMPLY PICK UP THE APPROPRIATE TORCH AND PULL THE TRIGGER, THE MICROPROCESSOR AND WELD PROGRAMS DO THE REST.



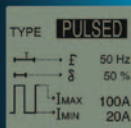
MIG WELDING

FEATURES THREE MIG WELDING TORCHES AND THREE WIRE SPOOLS THAT ARE SET UP FOR THREE DIFFERENT BASE METALS (ALUMINUM, SILICON BRONZE, STEEL).



TIG/STICK WELDING

EVERYTHING NEEDED FOR TIG AND MMA/STICK WELDING. TIG WELDING CAN BE DONE IN CONTINUOUS OR PULSE MODE.



PULSE & SYNERGIC MODE

COMES PRE-PROGRAMMED WITH SEVERAL DIFFERENT SYNERGIC CURVES, WITH THE ABILITY TO PROGRAM AND SAVE CUSTOM CURVES.



OEM APPROVALS

WITH THE RELEASE OF THE 2015 F150, THE SP-5 IS APPROVED BY FORD TO REPAIR THE NEW ALUMINUM BODY. SP-5 IS ALSO APPROVED BY GM, HONDA AND MORE!





Automotive
Finishes

 **BASF**
The Chemical Company

Where Speed Meets Green

R-M® believes you shouldn't have to choose between being productive and being VOC compliant. That's why we're introducing Onyx HD™ Low VOC Productive System, a compliant solventborne alternative that dries quickly in most shop environments. When you switch to Onyx HD, you can enjoy the benefits of a tried and true solventborne system that meets all VOC standards for North America and uses COLOR-MAX®, one of the fastest and most accurate color tools in the industry. To learn more, please call 800-825-3000 or visit www.basrefinish.com/onyx-sb.

