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OF THE COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY

Talk Shop Anytime

VOLUME 53 | NUMBER 9
SEPTEMBER 2014

TRENDING

THE SELF-DRIVING VEHICLE FUTURE

THIS NEW TECHNOLOGY IS ON THE HORIZON, BUT MANY QUESTIONS REMAIN UNANSWERED

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MECHANICAL FOCUS

Take a more proactive approach to malfunction indicator lights

TECHNICAL TRAINING

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Aluminum, steel differences impact end product

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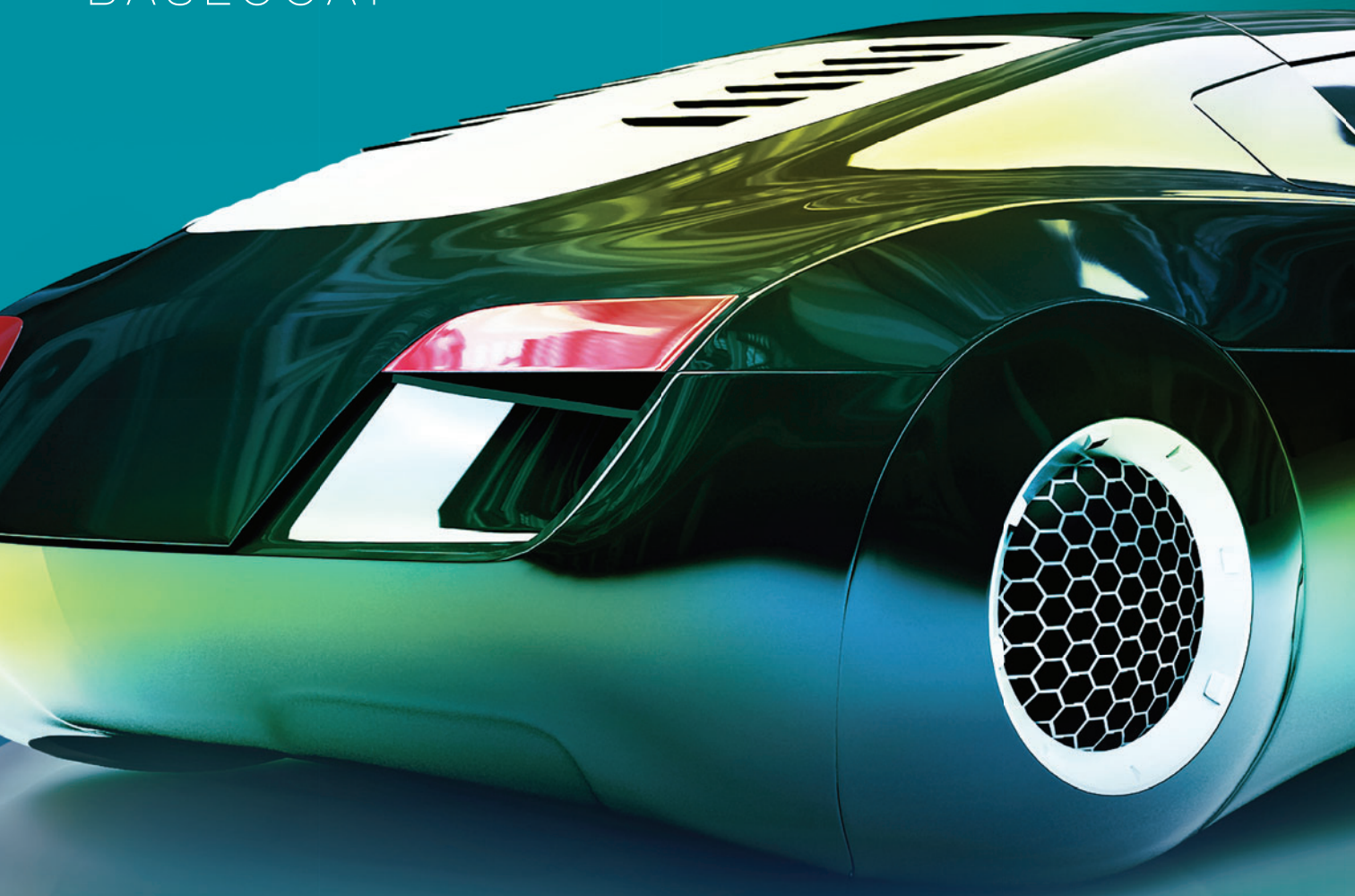
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24950 Country Club Blvd., Suite 200
North Olmsted, OH 44070
Phone: (440) 243-8100
Fax: (440) 891-2675

WWW.ADVANSTAR.COM

EDITORIAL

MICHAEL WILLINS
GROUP CONTENT DIRECTOR
mwillins@advanstar.com
(440) 891-2604

KRISTA MCNAMARA
MANAGING EDITOR
krcnamara@advanstar.com
(440) 891-2746

JAKE RODENROTH
CONTRIBUTING
TECHNICAL EDITOR

STEPH JOHNSON-BENTZ
ART DIRECTOR

CONTRIBUTORS

BRIAN ALBRIGHT
b-albright@abcglobal.net
(614) 237-6707

MIKE ANDERSON
mike@collisionadvice.com
(301) 535-3333

MIKE LEVASSEUR
mikel@keganautobody.com
(484) 237-8410

JAMES E. GUYETTE
jmguyette2004@yahoo.com
(440) 564-9180

GREG HORN
greg.horn@mitchell.com
(888) 388-7796

KEVIN MEHOK
k.mehok@comcast.net
(708) 516-2936

TONY PASSWATER
tony.passwater@aaii.net
(317) 290-0611

TOM MCGEE
tmcgee@autotraining.net
(888) 471-5800

TIM SRAMCIK
tsramcik@yahoo.com
(330) 475-5969

ALFRED THOMAS
alfredthomas@pcl.edu
(570) 329-2712

JOHN YOSWICK
info@crashnetwork.com
(503) 335-0393

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GROUP PUBLISHER
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(610) 397-1667

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ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
lmend@advanstar.com
(773) 866-1514

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ANALYSIS

SELF-DRIVING VEHICLE DEBATE

BY KRISTA MCNAMARA | MANAGING EDITOR

Self-driving vehicle technologies are driving many states to enact legislation, but the protection for repairers is yet to be seen.

MARKET RESEARCH

COLLISION REPAIR AFTERMARKET TO GROW, SAYS FROST & SULLIVAN

11 Rising prices for electronics, lightweight body panels and powertrain components are pushing up collision repair costs, says Frost & Sullivan.

VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY

CHANGING VEHICLE DNA IS CHANGING THE INDUSTRY

11 Transportation is changing significantly; it is impacting collision repair; and anticipating and responding to change is essential.

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FEATURE

MAKING LIFELONG CONNECTIONS WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

BY LARRY SILVEY | ABRN BLOGGER

Spend time with your customers to truly see their point of view. By making a connection with your customer, you can build a customer for life.

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MINDING YOUR BUSINESS

ABRN ROUNDTABLE V

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Shop and association representatives discuss industry issues and make future predictions.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ABRN

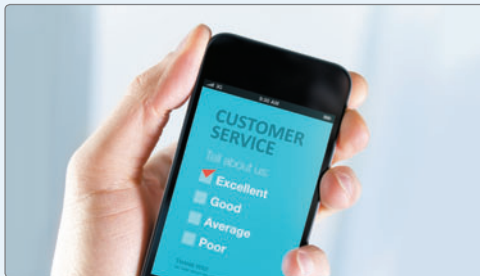
Learn some new and innovative ways to market outside the box.

MINDING YOUR BUSINESS

EXCEEDING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

KEVIN MEHOK / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

26 Put yourself in your customers' shoes to understand what their needs truly are and how to best service them.



THE PROFIT MOTIVE

DOING THE PARTS PROFIT MATH

TOM MCGEE/ CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

34 Determining parts profit margins in your shop may not be as simple as it seems. Many shops also forget that parts margins and markups are certainly not the same.



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TECHNICAL TRAINING

BY TIM SRAMCIK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Paint vendors offer a host of resources to help shops both get the most out of their products and aid them as they build other parts of their business.

TECHNICAL TRAINING

ALUMINUM REPAIR DIFFERENCES

BY SHAWN COLLINS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

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LATEST PRODUCTS & EQUIPMENT TO GET THE JOB DONE

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PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Buy an Eclipse by Advanced Measurement Systems now through Sept. 30, and get a \$1,000 manufacturer rebate. Eclipse provides self-calibration during the entire measurement process.

PRODUCT FOCUS



67 LA-MAN's patented series of SuperStar .01 Micron Filters are a four-stage filter designed to operate most effectively within 25 feet of the point of use.

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BONUS ONLINE CONTENT

ABRN HOW2 VIDEO GALLERY



SEPTEMBER'S FEATURED VIDEO
WELDING TECHNIQUES FOR TODAY'S SHOP

ABRN.COM/WELDINGTECHNIQUES

VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

A LIFE of service and giving back

Paul Baffico, former Sears Automotive Group president and Vietnam veteran, recently released a book about his experience. A docent at the Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, he talks about why he serves at "The Wall."

[URL ABRN.COM/THEWALL]



BLOG SPOTLIGHT

A NEW app, ALLDATA Mobile, lets techs use a VIN to gather repair information and vehicle historical data, allowing shops to establish trends with that vehicle or those of the same make and model.

[URL ABRN.COM/ALLDATAMOBILE]

MIKE BAILEY, a member of the Car Care Professionals Network, an Auto Care Association segment, and operator of Car Doctor in Oklahoma City, Okla., discusses challenges of recruiting employees and navigating government regulations.

[URL ABRN.COM/BAILEY]

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COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY Stats & Trends

Readying your shop for aluminum repairs starts at \$34,000, says Paul Massie, Powertrain and Collision Product, Marketing Manager with Ford Motor Company.



Making lifelong connections with your customers

Spend time with your customers to truly see their point of view and get customers for life

BY LARRY SILVEY | ABRN BLOGGER

Several years ago, I was invited by a Japanese trade show company to make a presentation about the American auto industry. While there, I spent several days touring some of their parts stores and repair garages. One shop in particular I will never forget. Besides it being beautifully designed and meticulously maintained, it offered customers something I had never seen in a shop before, and I haven't seen since. It was the natural answer to Prozac, Xanax and Ativan, all rolled into one. It was, believe it or not, a bank of reclining massage chairs.

Massage chairs are one way to not only attract customers, but also to retain them. My guess is that once you settle into the magic finger chair, you're not going to run all over town to find another shop unless the shop drops your vehicle off the lift.

As creative as this marketing hook is, it most likely will not attract the right kind of customers, let alone retain them.



Ultimately, what you're seeking with your marketing efforts is customer loyalty. The biggest mistake shops make is approaching this from their point of view, rather than looking at what the customer either needs or wants.

So what does the customer really need? Trust that a shop will properly care for their vehicle. That means shops need to make connections with customers. To make that connection, service advisors need to spend time with customers, explaining estimates and service schedules. And, of course, when the shop works on a vehicle, it has to be done right the first time. If you do these two things, you

Continues on page 10



BEST OF THE BLOGS

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BEST OF THE BLOGS are articles written by bloggers on ABRN's community pages

Are wheels included?

ART HARRIS

In CCC One when replacing a wheel, it will typically show a labor of .3, but when replacing all four wheels, the first pays the .3 and the others will show as included. CCC/Motor has been made aware of this issue in DEG inquiry number 7118, but unfortunately they say it will take an "application change" to resolve the issue. Hopefully CCC/Motor will fix this issue in a timely manner.

DEG Inquiry 7118, Issue Summary: If a wheel replacement is selected (new, used, etc.) first, any and all wheels become "Incl" as they are added. Or, if an R&I wheel is added after the replacement, any and all wheels change to "Incl."

If the R&I wheels are selected

first, the database works correctly, adding .1 for each wheel.

Section 7, Suggested Action:

Fix database to properly pay to R&I wheels

CCC/Motor Response: Proposed Resolution: When replacing more than one wheel, the first wheel will give R&R time, the next wheel selected will show included. In order to resolve this issue, it will require an application change, because the system is currently forcing included operations to take place. Continue reading at ABRN.com/WheelsIncluded.

LKQ expands CCC participation

BRIAN ALBRIGHT

LKQ Corp. has expanded its participation in the CCC TRUE

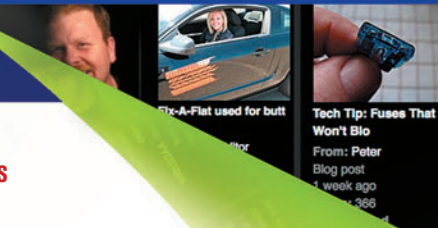
Parts Network, and will offer recycled parts to the network for electronic parts quoting, procurement and invoicing to the repairers and insurers that use the CCC ONE system.

LKQ was the first parts supplier to join the network in 2013 via its Keystone Aftermarket Parts division.

In a press release, Terry Fortner, Vice President, Industry Relations and Market Development for LKQ stated: "LKQ is excited to be the first recycler to fully integrate with the CCC TRUE Parts Network for the electronic procurement and invoicing of recycled parts. The addition of our robust recycled inventory to our existing Keystone aftermarket offering within the CCC TRUE Parts Network further validates our commitment

to enhancing the efficiency and productivity of our collision repair shop customers. This streamlined technology, coupled with our industry leading fill rates, is a revolutionary and positive long-term trend for our industry."

This year, CCC announced that Brandywine Economy Parts, Carro Pacific, ECO Automotive Distributors, Capstone, Pacific Auto Company, PartsChannel, KAPA Auto Body Parts, Perfect Fit/US Auto Parts, Wheeler's Auto Body Supply, 1-800-Radiator & AC, Continental Auto Parts, Professional Parts Group, and PAM's Auto Parts had joined the network. Continue reading at ABRN.com/LKQCCC.





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SHOP OWNER
MIKE LEVASSEUR
*Greenin' at
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THE
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TOM MCGEE
*Doing the parts
profit math*

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T H E
L A S T
D E T A I L
MIKE ANDERSON
*The game is
changing for DRPs*

Making lifelong connections - Continued from page 8

have the opportunity to connect with them. After all, they are standing in front of you!

The wild card here is that all customers drive off and you don't know if they are ever coming back, even if you've done everything right. Without question, if you are to remain a viable service facility, you have to approach customer loyalty in a much more sophisticated and predictable way. Ideally, you, as the

owner of the business, would follow up with a personal phone call. But unless you're working this gig as a hobby out of your backyard, you don't have time to wage a personal telemarketing campaign with your customers.

Rather, you need an automatic system that integrates with your shop management system and will keep you connected with customers. Continue reading at ABRN.com/Connecting.

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Management Success! conventions offer networking with like-minded shop owners in the US and Canada. [ABRN.COM/MSNETWORKING]

• **CREF supports training**

Vehicle technologies require a well-trained workforce for safe and efficient repairs. How do you fit in? [ABRN.COM/CREFTRAINING]

• **Wells Tech: P0014 VVT diagnostics**

Wells Vehicle Electronics investigates the variable valve timing function, and failure and misfire causes. [ABRN.COM/WELLSVVT]

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Noteworthy

READER FEEDBACK TO ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Craig Totten, director of training and technical support at Global Jig North America wrote: "Who is our real customer? And how does having a third party between us and our true customer affect what we do and how a repair is handled? We need to find a way to get back to working for the vehicle owner. What are you doing that works?"

James Moy, senior consultant, Precision Auto Group: The shops I consult with all agree we work for the vehicle owner. We also all agree we would rather deal with the hardest insurance company than with a self pay. It's never cheap enough for the owner and never enough to make a nice profit. We use right to appraisal and assignment of proceeds to collect on short pays. It's just a standard of doing business now.

Mike Orton, owner, Missouri Collision Consulting: A good start to set the record straight that a shop is indeed working for the vehicle owner is to have a contract of repair between the vehicle owner and the shop, not simply an authorization to repair.

Gene Hyers, administrator, Liberty Mutual Insurance: Anyone in the business of auto repair is working for the vehicle owner. We have the responsibility to repair the vehicle properly and economically. To do any less is unethical.

Marty Klyne, senior executive and business coach, Multimedia Publishing: You are working on the insurance company's client's vehicle. Take every opportunity to make this a total quality experience for the car owner and protect your reputation in the interests of repeat and referral business.

Craig Totten: Collision shops and insurance companies should both be working toward the same goal. To repair the vehicle properly and safely for the least amount of money possible. Don't compromise the repair for money, but don't choose repair procedures based only on what will make the shop the most money. The trouble is many in the insurance industry are looking to repair the vehicle as cheaply as possible and many of the collision repair shops are trying to make as much money as they can off of each job. Both of these approaches are doing the real customer — the vehicle owner — a disservice.



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Nick Notte, board president of the National Auto Body Council, talks about its signature programs and giving back to your community. Visit: ABRN.com/NABCGivesback
- **Suspension Diagnostics in the Shop**
Pacific Collision Equipment's Robert Hornedo and Tom Balliet discuss the importance of suspension diagnostics in the repair process. Visit: ABRN.com/CarOLinerSuspensionCheck
- **Welding Techniques for Today's Shop**
Chief's Richard Perry presents common welding techniques and the importance of proper equipment for a better weld. Visit: ABRN.com/WeldingTechniques

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SEPTEMBER 16-19

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NOVEMBER 4-7

- **SEMA Las Vegas, Nevada**

NOVEMBER 6

- **Collision Industry Conference Las Vegas, Nevada**

NOVEMBER 12-15

- **Automechanika Buenos Aires Buenos Aires, Argentina**

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Rising prices for electronics, lightweight body panels and powertrain components are pushing up collision repair costs, says Frost & Sullivan.

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LKQ Corporation donated \$114,000 in parts to collision training schools through the Collision Repair Education Foundation.

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CHANGING VEHICLE DNA IS CHANGING THE INDUSTRY

Transportation is changing significantly; it is impacting collision repair; and anticipating and responding to change is essential.

»» ABRN.COM/DNACHANGE

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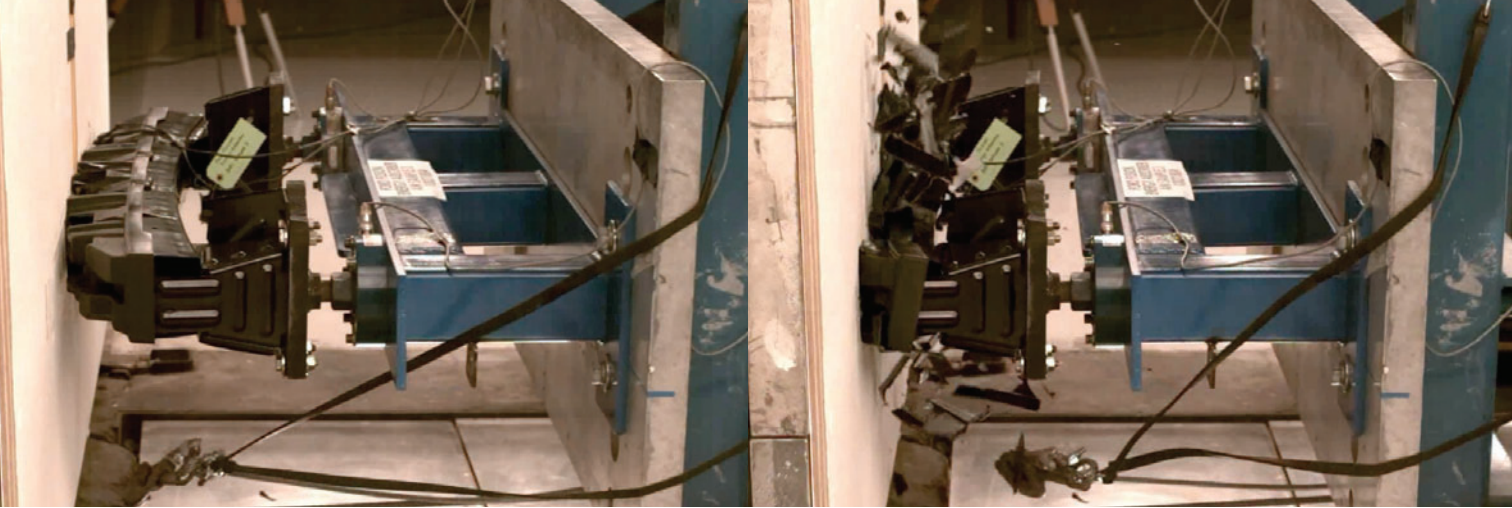
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SELF-DRIVING VEHICLES POSE MORE QUESTIONS

Stephen Regan, Regan Strategies and CIC Government Relations Committee chair, spoke to CIC attendees in July in Detroit about the realities of a driverless future on the collision repair industry.

Three types of technology are impacting the industry: 1) in-vehicle crash avoidance systems and/or automated control of safety functions; 2) vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) communications supporting crash avoidance applications; and 3) self-driving vehicles.

Four states — California, Nevada, Florida and Michigan — and the District of Columbia have already passed laws governing self-driving vehicles, with dozens other in consideration, and they aren't even being sold yet.

Legislation in some cases counteracts existing laws. For example, Nevada and Florida allow texting in automated vehicles, but not in a driver-operated vehicle. Laws are also addressing the OEM liability with autonomous technology systems.

"But there is no legislative protection for those tasked with fixing these cars," Regan says. "The collision repairer really doesn't have the statutory protection that they need."

Allstate's Randy Hanson said autonomous vehicles are a step in the right direction, "but you still have a lot of issues associated with how these vehicles are repaired, who is trained and who will have the infrastructure to make these repairs. The liability element changes significantly. If the repairer has any culpability, how does that change that indemnification agreement? How do we handle claims properly on those vehicles?"

One of the main challenges is the data and who has access, Regan says.

"I think there will be a lot of focus on what the vehicle did in terms of who pays, who is responsible and how it needs to be fixed," Hanson says. "There is a lot of information we now gather just from the customer, so you don't have access to speed, braking, points of impact. These new vehicle 'black boxes' may have the ability to

really help us to access responsibility and how to repair these vehicles."

Some of the concerns for OE manufacturers include the liability, data ownership and aftermarket and salvage parts considerations, Regan says.

Repairers need to consider liability; release of the 'black box' data; determining use of aftermarket, salvage,

recycled, etc. parts for AV repairs; labor rates; costs of repairs; and tools and training considerations, among others.

But AVs are coming, whether the industry fights them or not. "This is going to be socially driven. The social benefits are too great, and are going to outweigh the risks," Regan says. "Everyone should be prepared."

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GO GENUINE COLLISION CONQUEST PROGRAM AIMS TO BOOST DEALER SALES OF HYUNDAI REPLACEMENT PARTS

BY KRISTA MCNAMARA | MANAGING EDITOR



Prices can hinder dealers when selling against often lower cost, alternative, non-OEM parts. Hyundai Motor America is giving its dealers an advantage by providing reimbursement for OEM parts sold, allowing them to more competitively price Hyundai Genuine Parts.

The Go Genuine Collision Conquest program launched this summer and will provide dealer reimbursements for five commonly used collision parts.

“Using Hyundai Genuine replacement parts during the collision repair process provides confidence that the parts will perform as designed and engineered by Hyundai,” the company said in a release.

Hyundai teamed with Overall Parts Solutions to allow dealers and repair facilities to work together using the OPSTRAX and VALUTRAX tools to facilitate the program.

Tiffany Stroupe, senior manager parts sales with Hyundai, spoke with *ABRN* about the Go Genuine Collision Conquest program and what it means for the collision industry.

ABRN: What are the specifics of the Hyundai Go Genuine Collision Conquest program?

TS: The Hyundai Go Genuine Collision Conquest program is designed to provide reimbursement to Hyundai dealers, allowing them to competitively price their Hyundai Genuine Parts against alternative, non-Hyundai parts. These competitive prices help collision repair facilities purchase more Hyundai Genuine Parts, which is great for our dealers and our vehicle owners. Our first transactions took place in August with five collision parts including hoods, fenders, bumper covers, head lamps and tail lamps. These parts and the reimbursement associated with the parts are available for all Hyundai vehicles, regardless of age. The program is open to all Hyundai dealers and, so far, we’ve had a terrific response.

ABRN: Why is it so important for collision shops to use Hyundai Genuine Parts during repair?

TS: Hyundai Genuine Parts are manufactured to exacting engineering specifications for a precise fit without modifications, ensuring quick and proper installation, which means a faster cycle time for the collision repair facilities and higher customer satisfaction among our vehicle owners.

ABRN: The program launched with five types of collision parts available. How were these selected, and will this product offering expand in the future?

TS: These five types of collision parts offer the biggest opportunity for our Hyundai dealers. We may add other collision parts to the program at a later date.

ABRN: Tell us about the partnership with Overall Parts Solutions and how this will benefit dealers and shops.

TS: Hyundai has teamed up with Overall Parts Solutions (OPS), which is a Texas-based company, to allow dealers and repair facilities to work together using the OPSTRAX and VALUTRAX tools in a unique, streamlined interface. Using the OPSTRAX and VALUTRAX tools, dealers and repair facilities are able to see all the parts on a collision repair estimate including the conquest pricing for program parts. Using the program and tools, dealerships and body shops can act immediately on these opportunities.

For more information about the Hyundai program, visit ABRN.com/GoGenuine. 📄



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When I spoke at an industry event earlier this year about our company's efforts to "go green," I didn't focus on the environmental importance of that effort. It's not that I don't feel that it's a key aspect; I just feel everyone has to come to their own opinions about how much they need to do to reduce their "footprint" on the earth.

Instead, I focused on why I believe genuinely focusing on the environment has been good for our business. In some cases, it has saved us money. It's helped us build our company's culture, making employees feel good about what we are doing as an organization, and encouraging their involvement with ideas and improvements. And no doubt about it, it's been a huge marketing tool.

Here's a rundown of some of what we mean when we say we're "Greenin' at Keenan."

- We recycle everything feasible, including metal, tires, paper, cardboard, plastic, glass, toner cartridges, oil, anti-freeze and solvent waste. We use services provided nationally by Connecticut-based NLR to simplify our shipment and recycling of discarded lights, ballasts, batteries and more.
- We've eliminated Styrofoam coffee cups in our customer waiting areas and switched to biodegradable cups.
- This year, we changed out all of our shop lighting to a more efficient style of fluorescent tubes. The cost was about \$13,000 per location, but more than half the expense was offset by energy provider incentives and tax credits, bringing the expected return on investment – thanks to lower electrical bills – down to just 13 months.
- Over three years, we converted all of our shops from oil to natural gas, reducing energy costs by 40 percent.

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- I recommend hiring an energy consultant to look for other ways to help reduce your energy costs. These consultants are typically paid by the energy providers based on the reductions in energy use they provide. We've used three such consultants over the years, each of which found more savings.
 - We buy in bulk, everything from paper towels and office supplies to gloves and respirators. This offers considerable savings and often reduces the amount of packaging to recycle. We then use a van that visits our locations twice a week, dropping off the supplies needed at each location and picking up all the recycling. This generates less carbon emissions than having larger Office Depot or Staples trucks delivering to each of our shops.
 - I'm a skeptic that this will ever be a paperless industry, but we've gone electronic whenever possible and have reduced the amount of our paper files by at least half.
 - We captured some industry headlines and feature articles within our markets in 2009 after we installed a complete solar power generating system at one of our locations. I'm proud to say that investment paid for itself in just over three years. It provides about 65 percent of the power the shop needs during operating hours. And when the shop is closed, the energy flows the other direction and we're selling power back to the grid. We're making somewhere around \$30,000 just for the energy we're selling back.
- We market our green efforts to our customers and potential customers because we are proud to do our part. We're confident that for some of them, it's been a deciding factor when choosing an autobody repair facility. It makes them feel that they are doing their part in saving our most precious commodity – the environment.
- And it's helped us build our company culture in which employees look for ways to improve our business and to feel even better about being part of our team. Our green initiatives set examples for them both at work and home, and send a message that we must all work together because a green earth is a clean earth. ☺

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SHOP AND ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES DISCUSS INDUSTRY ISSUES AND MAKE FUTURE PREDICTIONS

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

FOR A FIFTH year, *ABRN* convened a panel of representatives from shops and shop associations to discuss key issues facing the collision repair industry – and offer some predictions on what may lie ahead.

Here are some of the highlights of this year's roundtable discussion that brought together two independent shops, one dealership shop and two association executives (see sidebar on page 22, "Who Was At The Table?").

ABRN: More automakers are coming out with collision shop certification programs. Is this as a positive trend? Do the requirements and costs seem reasonable? What impact, if any, do you see these programs having on the dynamics between shops, consumers and insurers?

Aaron: I think the positive for the consumer is that it helps them identify repair facilities that have the equipment, training and capabilities as defined by the automaker. The positive for the shop is it gives them a leg to stand on as the professional with certified expertise. It also becomes a different referral source that's more concerned about consistent quality and consumer experience rather than a low-cost focus. You are partnering with somebody who can help influence the consumer's decision to utilize your services, but who also gives you the backing to make sure you can do the best, most high-quality repairs – and hold you to that standard.

April: I think any type of certification program that generates more education and training for technicians and our industry in general is a benefit. The only negative I would see is the cost, being able to generate the income to outweigh it. But anything that provides my technicians more specific repair procedures from the vehicle manufacturers is a benefit for me.

Aaron: Yeah, I can't say if these programs are reasonable in cost, but at the end of the day, the cost should be a pass-along cost. It's not something the shop should have to absorb. In well-functioning markets, shops with lesser skills, capability and quality would be incentivized to improve because those who perform better receive higher degrees of compensation. That's simply not the case in our marketplace. Insurers try to commoditize repairs and use practices that reflect prices based on the lowest common denominator rather than highest performers.

Dan: The programs definitely help raise the bar in the industry, specific to repair quality. I believe they build consumer trust and raise the professionalism of the industry. Is the cost reasonable? It is



Aaron Schulenberg



April Hernandez



Dan Risley

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if that's the business model you want to employ. But the unreasonable part is there could be, for example, multiple welders you must have, a lot of redundancy of equipment. That makes it less reasonable, depending on which and how many manufacturers you want to be certified by. And as Aaron said, by no stretch of the imagination should a shop make those investments without receiving compensation on the back end. An insurance company shouldn't expect to pay the same labor rate. The level of repair is different.

Darrell: I agree the certification programs are a big differentiator. It could cause some shops to no longer be able to compete. We talked for years that technology will be the differentiator; that seems to be coming upon us now through these certifications. Because, frankly, the certifications are quite expensive. With some of the programs, it's very conceivable to spend \$250,000 between equipment and training. At LaMettry's, we have a lot of OEM certifications. It's part of our business model. We also struggle with differentiating the compensation. We try to charge a higher labor rate for aluminum structural repairs, and some insurers will reluctantly go along with it and some don't want to. It becomes difficult to overcome the significant investment that you have. I think we need to get to a point where insurers understand the kind of vehicle a customer has and recommend to them that they have repairs done at an appropriate shop for that vehicle.

ABRN: As the economy improves, more shops seem to again be struggling to find technicians. What one thing are you doing to help address the technician shortage?

Jim: I think teaming up with some of the schools is the best approach. We partner with UTI (Universal Technical Institute), making sure we're there letting students know what they can look forward to. It's a great way to make



Darrell Amberson

a living and we just need to make sure they're aware of it. I also see more recruitment of military people leaving the service. I think those are fantastic candidates: great people, great work ethics. It's another good source to bring people into our industry.

April: One of the things that we've found to be very successful is bringing

in apprentices. We basically train them working side by side with our higher level techs. They seem to really enjoy the hands-on experience. We also try to keep our benefits package attractive for technicians. I think our family environment and our work hours are more positive than some other industries. And we serve on the board for



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the local voc-tech school and try to participate in as many activities as we can with that school.

Aaron: SCRS works with the SkillsUSA competition to help provide resources for both the students competing as well as the advisors who mentor these kids. We also work with organizations like the Collision Repair Education Foundation to help the schools and help connect our membership to those schools. Not just to help shops find technicians, but so the technicians can find the right shops. I think we need to get good techs coming out of the schools into shops that will support their career and foster their development.

ABRN: *Aside from the technician shortage, is there a specific industry issue that you would most like to see addressed?*

April: It's not rare for us to see prior vehicle damage that wasn't repaired or repaired well. So I think some type of certification process, some sort of requirement that repair facilities repair cars based on OEM recommendations, is absolutely necessary. You have to have a license to cut hair, but (in our state) there is no licensing or any type of regulation as far as opening a repair facility, or for technician certification or anything of that nature.

Jim: Like April, I think correct and safe repairs are the biggest challenge our industry has. The trend that I'm seeing that I think has the most potential to help our industry is the post-repair inspection. That is the one thing that will keep shops accountable for making proper repairs. People are out there doing that now. From what I've seen, it's fairly

successful. I think the free market is going to have the answer before government does.

Dan: We're working on one big issue and that is most-favored nation clauses. In my opinion, that is probably the biggest issue we have in the industry. It has an impact not just on those shops that are direct repair shops; but also it negatively impacts non-DRP shops, consumers and even other insurance companies. We've begun the process of trying to eradicate those from our business. It's going to take us some time, but it's an issue we're not willing to let go of because of all the various people who are being negatively impacted by it.

Aaron: At the end of last year, the United Kingdom Competition Commission came out with its preliminary findings of its review of the insurance industry in the U.K. and there was one sentence that I think succinctly sums up the biggest industry issue we have: "Competition between repairers to obtain business from insurers is focused on low cost rather than high quality of repair. That is, repairers are insufficiently rewarded for offering a high quality of repair." I

SHOPS EXPECTING FUTURE GROWTH

All three shops participating in this year's ABRN Roundtable said they are very optimistic (a "9" or "10" on a 10-point scale) about their company's growth prospects over the next six to 12 months.

"We are growing by adding shops and believe our model is causing us to gain market share," Darrell Amberson of LaMettry's said.

"In our market, we are seeing an increase in consumers that have educated themselves about the claims process and are seeking higher quality repairs versus a lower cost repair," April Hernandez

of Hernandez Collision Center said. "We have also seen a number of repair facilities in our market close their doors, resulting in less competition."

Jim Sowle of Sewell Lexus Collision Center said that recently opting out of one major insurer's direct repair program has had some impact.

"While we have had a reduction in volume over the past 18 months, profitability has never been higher," Sowle said. "As we continue to get better at retaining our customers, the volume will continue to rise at the higher margins."

WHO WAS AT THE TABLE?

April Hernandez is the manager of Hernandez Collision Center and a second-generation owner of the company, which has two locations in Savannah and Hinesville, Ga. She serves on the Collision Division Operations Committee of the Automotive Service Association (ASA).

Darrell Amberson is the president of operations of LaMettry's Collision, which has eight locations in Minne-

sota's Twin Cities market. He is also chairman of ASA's national board of directors.

Dan Risley is the executive director of ASA.

Aaron Schulenburg is the executive director of the Society of Collision Repair Specialists (SCRS).

Jim Sowle is the body shop director at Sewell Lexus Collision Center in Dallas, Texas, and a national director on the SCRS board of directors.

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think if the consumer market were to demand (an end to) the practice of indemnifying losses based on low-cost principles rather than high quality of repair, the market would provide the necessary incentive for more of the industry to focus on quality adherence and consumer experience.

ABRN: We always end the ABRN roundtable with your predictions, something that you think will have happened in the industry five years from now, by mid-2019.

Dan: I have several predictions. MFN clauses will be banned from the property-casualty market under their current structure. A corporation not currently doing business in the United States will purchase one of the large MSOs here, and at least two MSOs in the U.S. will expand beyond North America. Certified collision repair facilities participating in direct repair programs will be charging a higher labor rate than other shops in the program in the same markets; basically, the system as we know it today, with labor

rates being defined by insurance carriers for a given market, will be a thing of the past. And State Farm will allow Select Service shops to choose a parts procurement tool that's good for their business based upon (the shops') needs.

Jim: I will say that 50 percent of all collision repairs will have post-repair inspections of some sort. It will be the norm, not the exception.


April: I think there's going to be a growing trend in the number of repair facilities that are more manufacturer-specific. It kind of goes along with the certification programs we discussed. You may have MSOs that have one facility designated to each manufacturer's vehicles.

Aaron: I think the percentage of OEM certified repair facilities in the U.S. will have doubled, if not tripled.

Darrell: Shops will be in a stronger position in terms of their relationships with insurers. Insurers have already cut their own claims staff so much that we are in that position now, but within five years our industry will come to

that realization. There will be 20 percent fewer shops, but also we'll have to be more careful in terms of how we identify that number: Is it rooftops or businesses? Consolidation is going to have a lot to do with that. The Big 4 consolidators will become the Big 3, and two of them will be publicly-traded companies. I also think a shop certification plan will be developed within five years.


ABRN: A national shop certification program, independent of the automaker programs?

Darrell: Yes. And hopefully it won't be with government involvement. It will probably more likely involve to a large extent I-CAR and some other entities. 



JOHN YOSWICK
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

John Yoswick is a freelance writer based in Portland, Ore., who has been writing about the automotive industry since 1988.

 E-mail John at [jyoswick@spiritone.com](mailto: jyoswick@spiritone.com)

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EXCEEDING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR CUSTOMERS' SHOES TO
UNDERSTAND HOW TO BEST SERVICE THEM

BY KEVIN MEHOK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

ALL OF US are customers every day. Huge multi-million dollar companies battle over us, and spend billions of dollars annually to speak directly to us through advertising. In our role as a customer, we have expectations about the products or services we look to purchase. Since we value our money and how we spend it, we are very selective when trying to decide what to spend it on.

In our industry, very often people have an expectation of a body shop when they think about visiting you. Usually the

experience prior to the visit is not pleasant, and they would much rather be almost any place else but your shop, with damage to one of their prized possessions.

One of the keys to doing a better job with your customers is understanding and empathizing with the customers that come to you. Fake sympathy will be spotted a mile away, and is a huge red flag to most people. Understanding a bad situation, and portraying that understanding, is much more genuine, and puts customers at ease.

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¹2013 Employer Health Benefits Survey, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, August 20, 2013, <http://kff.org/report-section/2013-summary-of-findings/> Accessed 11/19/2013. ²Aflac Company Statistics, October 2013, One day processing turnaround based on business days after required documents are received. Online claims available for Accident, Sickness, Cancer & Wellness claims. ³Eastbridge Consulting Group. U.S. Worksite/Voluntary Sales Report. Carrier Results for 2012. Avon, CT: April 2013. **Coverage is underwritten by American Family Life Assurance Company of Columbus. In New York, coverage is underwritten by American Family Life Assurance Company of New York.** Worldwide Headquarters | 1932 Wynnton Road | Columbus, GA 31999

What do customers really expect when they come to your shop? If you don't know, you can't exceed those expectations. In most cases, the average customer expects a quality repair; a fair price; honesty; quick turn-around time; and professional treatment.

Customers typically don't know much about our industry. It's part of your job to educate and provide them with a thorough understanding of what will take place throughout the repair. Let's address the average expectations one by one, and add in a few tips to exceed each of these expectations.

A quality repair

No one comes to your shop expecting a poor repair. They expect the best repair at the lowest possible price. We will address price later, but for now let's focus on quality. I have heard for years, "This repair is industry standard quality." Yet I still see runs, cobbly paint, bad body lines and sand scratches. Don't defend poor quality as "industry standard." You have to demand a higher standard of quality than your customers. Not only does the repair need to be of the highest quality, but toss in a few extra things: touch up the entire car; do a mini detail; buff yellowing headlights; fix small dings in the panels you are blending; or buff a few scratches — for free. Most customers won't expect this, thus you are exceeding their expectations. I have a quote from a Ford Motor Company service bulletin from the 1930s on my desk. It says, "Poor work, even if performed gratis, is not good business." It was true then, and still is today.

A fair price

No one wants to overpay for anything. Most people want the best deal possible. I don't think discounting your prices to crazy levels is the answer to capturing work. Some discounting is possible, but don't give away the store. Doing something cheaper won't make the customer any less picky when they pick up the vehicle. Customers lose trust if you initially say, "This job is \$100, but I'll give it to you for \$10." My first thought would be you were ripping me off before!

Offer a quality repair for a fair price the first time. Don't negotiate from your initial estimate; the damage on the car

is what it is. To repair it properly will entail the same basic costs no matter who does the repair. A lower estimate from another shop might just indicate damage was missed on their appraisal that was included in yours. This can help you gain a customer's trust, and show that you are more professional than the cheaper place.

Honesty

Customers can see through a lie, and once you have been caught in one, you lose all credibility. Don't do it. Even if the truth is really painful, most people will understand. If a car is behind schedule, be honest and tell the customer it's behind and what you are doing to get it back on schedule. Customers expect honesty. No tricks here. Give it to them.

Quick turn-around time

Most customers rely on their vehicles in their daily routine — to go to work, take family to school, run errands. Their lives literally depend on them being able to get around. The average customer has no idea how long it takes to perform the work we perform. It is up to us, as professionals to educate them. This goes back to honesty. Don't tell someone what they want to hear with regard to repair times; tell them what it will really take, with the possibility of additional delays.

I know there are several formulas out there to calculate repair times. I like using four to five hours a day, with two days added for parts. For example, the labor totals on your estimate, paint and body labor added together equal 15 hours. Divide that 15 hours by five, and you get three. The repair, if all goes well, should take three days. If parts are needed, and the vehicle is being dropped, add two more days for a total of five. It's a pretty accurate calculator, and provides a really good range for repair.

Of course, during repairs additional damage could be discovered that would add to that repair time. If that happens, call the customer to inform them of the delay and why. During the repair, I suggest calling the customer every other day with status updates. Most shops today offer multiple ways — text, email and photos, phone call —

for a customer to get status updates. Updates, no matter how they are done, are important. Customers expect to be kept informed.

Proper scheduling is really important when discussing turn-around times. Always take into account your workload, building capacity and restrictions, employee skill level and attendance when scheduling work.

Professional treatment

Professional treatment starts with the look of your building, its cleanliness and condition. A clean, organized office and shop, says "we are pros" without you saying a word. Again, think of yourself as a consumer. Would you rather go to a dirty, greasy-spoon diner, or a five-star restaurant? You staff should look professional, too. Require clean, neat clothing. Try to create an atmosphere in your office that is comfortable and welcoming. Remember, many of your customers are going to be women with children in tow, so make some accommodations for them. Train your staff in the proper way to greet and speak with your customers. Check with your paint rep to see if they offer some type of customer service classes.

All of us generally do the best we can with what we know. Once we gain more knowledge, we do better. Also, common sense and courtesy can go a long way.

I really believe that once you put yourself in the position of your customers, it becomes very easy to provide exceptional service. It simply takes dedication and effort and you will see the rewards in glowing customer reviews and a steady stream of business to your door. 📧



Kevin M. Mehok is CEO of CrashCo Collision Centers, a division of Auto Care Collision Group, Inc. In his more than 30 years of experience in the collision industry, he has worked with CarCare Collision Centers and Collision Centers of America. He also served in an executive level position with Collision Team of America, Gerber and several other Chicago-area consolidators.

✉️ E-mail Kevin at kevinm@crashcollision.com

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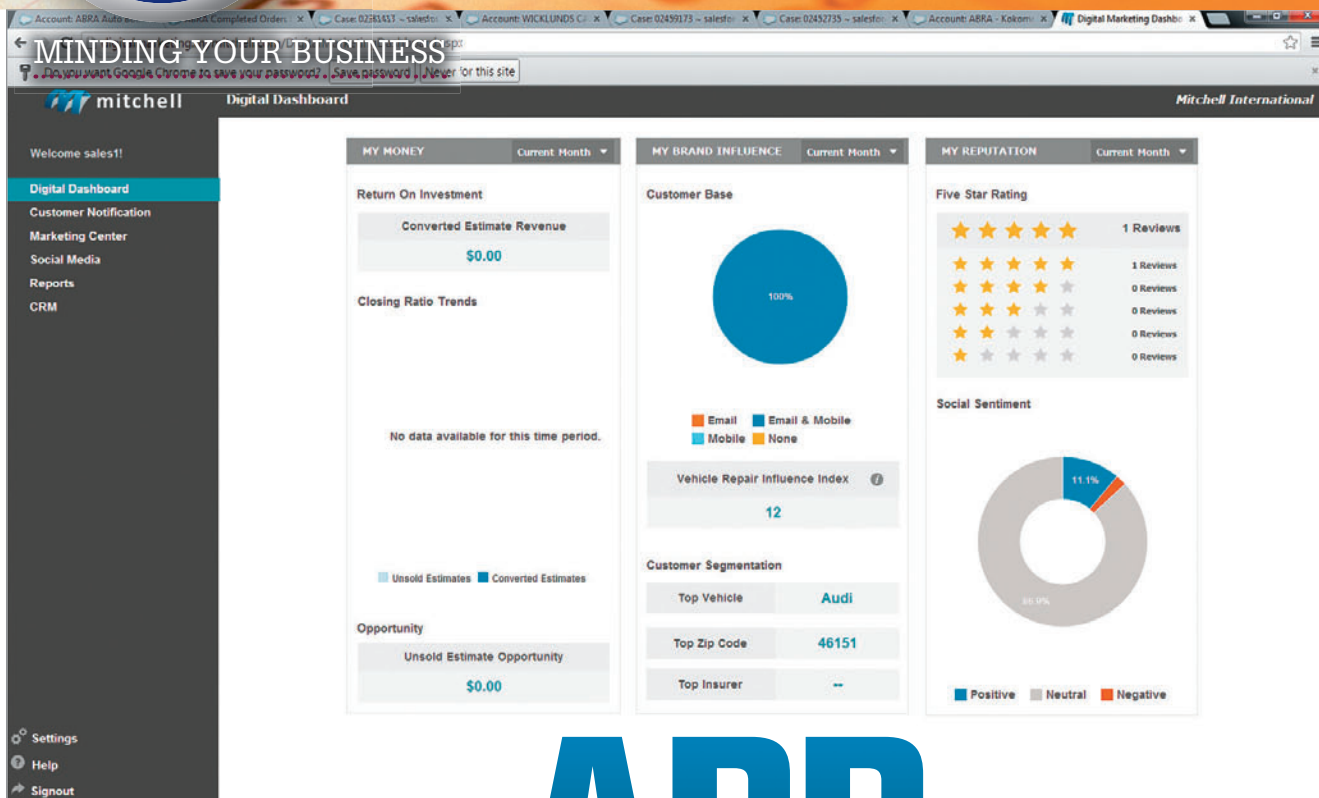
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THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

SMARTPHONE APPS ADDING CONVENIENCE TO SETTLEMENTS AND REPAIRS

BY JAMES E. GUYETTE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

SOME MIGHT have seen the Allstate television commercial in which a teenager dents the family car. He explains the carrier's QuickFoto Claim app to his mother, only to discover that Mom is already circling the vehicle snapping pics of the damage.

Such app-driven interactive reporting systems for obtaining estimates and facilitating other aspects of claim settlements and collision repairs are enroute to becoming a viable option among insurers and their tech-savvy policyholders.

"Everything is moving in this direction," says C.J. Przybyl, a co-founder and president of Sapsheet, which has an app similar to Allstate's. "Instead of driving to a body shop, you can submit photos on your smartphone, receive an estimate within hours and either take a direct-deposit payout or schedule an appointment at a body shop."

Along with other carriers, Sapsheet is being utilized by

insurance providers such as USAA, National General, Country Financial, Farmer's, American Family, MetLife and Chubb.

Basically, the technology functions via a crash victim taking smartphone photographs of the damage, and a staff of appraisers at the other end of the connection prepares the estimate and disseminates the data for subsequent actions.

Consumers are readily embracing this technology. "It's all ages and groups of people," Przybyl says. "We'll be going international, but first we want to get our arms around it in the United States."

Repairers are getting acclimated to the technology as well. The app is available free to policyholders; insurers pay Sapsheet a fee per estimate, and the system has been programmed for easy setup among the participating carriers. "They can just plug and play," says Przybyl. "We're like a virtual appraiser."



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	Model Year	Radiator*	AC Condenser*
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ILX	2013-14	\$166.65	\$133.33
ILX Hybrid	2013-14	\$166.65	\$133.33
MDX	2014	\$166.65	\$133.33
TLX	2015	\$166.65	\$133.33

*Prices listed are MSRP. Contact your local Honda or Acura dealers for details.

More than half of Screenshot's claims close the same day, with most settled within two days. The company is averaging 50,000-plus transactions per year.

Screenshot co-founder and CEO Brad Weisberg latched onto the idea for the company in 2005 when he walked out of a Red Lobster in an unfamiliar town and discovered that he was a victim of a hit-and-run parking lot incident. An aggravating search for an acceptable body shop netted estimates ranging from \$300 to \$1,200.

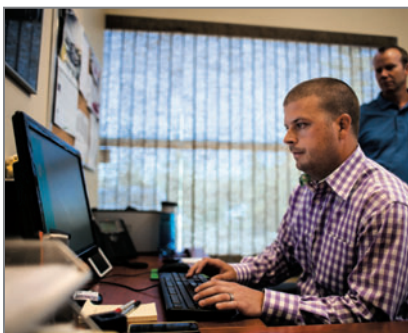
That motivated Weisberg to establish BodyShopBids, aimed at the motoring public. Realizing that the average driver has a crash just once every seven years, in 2012 the firm's focus shifted to insurers and the name was changed to Screenshot – which Weisberg describes as “the only self-service claims solution from dispatch to settlement, providing faster cycle times and accurate estimates.”

According to Przybyl, opportunities abound for experienced appraisers and estimators who join the Chicago-based operation. “They're hired for their exceptional ability to provide precise estimates by looking at the photos submitted through the platform.”

Connectivity on the go

“The flexibility of the customer uploading the photos provides the option for the customer to be serviced when, where and how they desire,” says Allstate spokesman Justin Herndon.

“QuickFoto Claim is the latest in a series of claims-related capabilities within Allstate Mobile designed to enhance our customers' mobile experiences with Allstate,” says Bob Wasserman, senior vice president of marketing. “This new capability makes the claims process even easier and more convenient.”



Smartphones take hold

At Mitchell, “we are exploring the market opportunities” for self-reporting systems similar to Screenshot and QuickFoto Claim, says Greg Horn, vice president of industry relations.

“There's a market for it, but I don't think it will take the market by storm,” he says, noting that not everyone is app-savvy, and many crash victims still prefer the personal touch when dealing with such an important event in their lives.

“As smartphones take hold in the consumer market, our customers are increasingly asking for mobile offerings that allow them access to information on the go,” adds Product Management Director Brian Elmi. “With the advantages offered by mobile devices, more businesses will continue to gravitate towards this trend.”

Elmi says that “as with any new technology, there are roadblocks in adoption. Within our industry we see two major ones: The willingness of companies to invest in tablet/mobile devices for their workforce, and concerns around data security.”

He tells ABRN that “we are constantly enhancing our mobile solutions by offering workflows that lend themselves to a mobile environment. Mitchell's mobile offerings today range from a mobile solution for field appraisers who need to view their dispatch assignments and find the most optimal route, to glass shops that want to look up National Auto Glass Specifications parts and pricing information, to repair facilities that want to optimize their shop workflow by capturing photos, managing tasks and updating the repair status at the vehicle.”

In July the company rolled out a new RepairCenter Digital Marketing module that includes social media and analytics, voice and digital CSI surveys, automated email reminders, referral rewards, email campaign templates, a smartphone app with mobile reminders, an appointment scheduler, and a database and metrics dashboard.

Wireless access

Previously available only for iPads, in January ALLDATA launched an Android version of its Mobile app for repairers. “A tech can take his or her tablet

out into the parking lot, on test drives, into the bay and even under the car. This truly is an industry-changing product,” says President Jeff Lagges. “Efficiency is everything when it comes to remaining competitive, and our mobile app is all about efficiency.”

Market dynamics

Utilizing Android, Audatex's AutoWatch gives body shops a method for enhancing customer service and improving communications by allowing vehicle owners to view the progress of their repairs online.

“The new app empowers collision repair shops with an easy way to update and access AutoWatch data from anywhere at any time,” says Patrick Schmidlin, vice president of product management.

Product director Gordon Henderson says, “Shops are eager to use their mobile phones as a means to provide customers with instant online repair updates. We anticipate further growth ahead as vehicle owners increasingly rely upon their smartphones and the Internet to stay on top of the issues impacting their daily lives.”

Audatex's AudaExplore GoTime package was introduced last October. “There's a perfect storm of change hitting the market – from a new generation of vehicle owners, to the pervasiveness of mobile devices to newly available self-service offerings that enable new ways of engaging vehicle owners never before possible until now,” says Neal Lowell, AudaExplore's vice president of product management and innovation. “Our GoTime line of mobile solutions empowers insurers and repair facilities to address these market dynamics head on, with features that take business efficiencies and the vehicle owner experience to the next level.”



JAMES E. GUYETTE
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

James E. Guyette is a long-time contributing editor to ABRN, Aftermarket Business World and Motor Age magazines.

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PAINT STORE IN A PARTS STORE



PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Doing the parts profit math

Determining parts gross profit margins is not as simple as it may seem

BY TOM MCGEE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Every week I have the opportunity to look at several profit or loss statements for shops in different parts of the country. When we do a shop analysis, one of the areas that we look at is parts margin.

Not only are shops dealing with one or more estimating systems and parts procurement methods, but they also handle multiple types of parts, vendors and discounts or markups to determine the sale price or cost of the parts.

For most shop owners, parts seem pretty simple. We have income for the parts sold and a cost for the parts purchased. So when looking at parts margin as a key performance indicator (KPI), I am often asked, "Why is there a fluctuation in my parts gross profit margin?"

Gross profit margin

Gross profit margin is calculated by subtracting cost of goods sold (COGS) from total sales and dividing that number by total sales. For example, if a shop sells a part for \$125 and has a cost of \$80, the gross profit margin is 36 percent.

Discount from list price

When you calculate your parts margin, you need to consider the discounts you are receiving from your vendors. For example, a shop may have negotiated different discounts off the list price with different dealerships.

If a shop purchased parts from three different dealerships and each had a dif-

ferent negotiated discount, the shop's gross profit margin would fluctuate depending on the list price of the parts and the discounts used to determine the cost paid.

Cost plus a markup

Is there a difference between margins and markup? Absolutely. More and more in today's world, these two terms are being used interchangeably to mean gross margin, but that misunderstanding can have a drastic impact on the bottom line. Markup and gross profit margin are not the same! Shops must have a clear understanding of the two within a pricing model. The term markup refers to the percentage difference between the actual cost and the selling price. Many shop owners mistakenly believe that if a part is marked up, say 25 percent, the result will be a 25 percent gross profit margin on the income statement. But that's wrong.

For example, when a shop buys a used part for \$100 and marks it up 25 percent, the selling price is \$125. When you calculate the gross profit percentage on that part [$\$125$ (sale) - $\$100$ (cost) divided by $\$125$ (sale)] the gross profit margin percentage is only 20 percent.

Parts vendor volume

The number of parts purchased from each vendor will also cause a fluctuation in the gross profit margin. For example, if one week or month you purchase more OEM parts than you do LKO (used) or aftermarket, the margin will increase or decrease depending on the discounts applied to each part.

Parts vs. materials

When you start analyzing your parts margin, you also need to consider how your estimating system is handling materials such as seam sealers. For example, if you charge seam sealer to a vehicle repair order, and the estimating system treats that material as a part, you may be impacting both your parts and paint margins. In this situation, it is not uncommon to have the sale of the seam sealer shown as part revenue and the cost applied to your paint and materials. While it may not be significant if you only consider that one vehicle, it can be important over a period of a month, quarter or year.

Markup vs. margin

When purchasing parts or other products or services on a cost plus a markup, you must understand the gross profit percentage you will make on that purchase. We have created a table for you that shows the gross profit you will make based on the markup percentage applied. Try it free for a limited time by going to www.ationlinetraining.com/abrn1409. It also makes a great tool for training and coaching your staff on how the work they do makes a difference to the business. ☞

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On- and off-site training courses are available from most paint companies. Each has its advantages.

THE KNOWLEDGE YOUR PAINT
VENDORS WANT YOU TO HAVE

BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

One of the more popular terms tossed around when shops talk business is stakeholders. A stakeholder is anyone who is affected by your business (its objectives, policies and actions), and therefore has an interest in it. Stakeholders can include a shop's owners, employees, creditors, customers, its community and its suppliers.

As stakeholders, these folks have an invested interest in a business's survival.

Some stakeholders also are resources who possess the means to help a shop as it searches for ways to improve operations. This is particularly true with some of your suppliers. Paint vendors, in particular, offer a host of resources to help shops both get the most out of their

products and aid them as they build other parts of their business. Notable here is that paint companies want shops to come to them for this help since taking advantage of their programs benefits both the paint vendor and the repairer.

What help can you expect from your paint vendor? Let's look at some of the offerings and recommendations from each paint company — help that, undoubtedly, many of your competitors already are taking advantage of.

Axalta

Like other companies, Axalta provides technical data sheets with information on preparing, mixing and apply their products. They bolster this information with an online product catalog accessible from

a variety of web-based platforms including tablets, iPads and smartphones. Axalta says the catalog is user friendly and intuitive, helping make information as easy as possible to locate.

The company also is including Quick Response (QR) codes on its labels. Customers utilize a QR reading application (available on most mobile technology) to go directly to the applicable product information in the online catalog.

Axalta customers may additionally utilize the company's Acquire Plus EFX spectrophotometer, which reads effect colors to quickly and accurately match colors. Customers seeking more help can turn to the company's website (www.axaltacs.com/us), which provides access to Axalta Learning Campus courses,



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AkzoNobel

Technical Services Specialist Cindy Greenfield reports that one of the most common requests her company receives



IMAGE: BASF

Since mixing and finish preparation can be particularly challenging for shops, vendors provide a number of resources, including online help and hotline numbers for these issues.

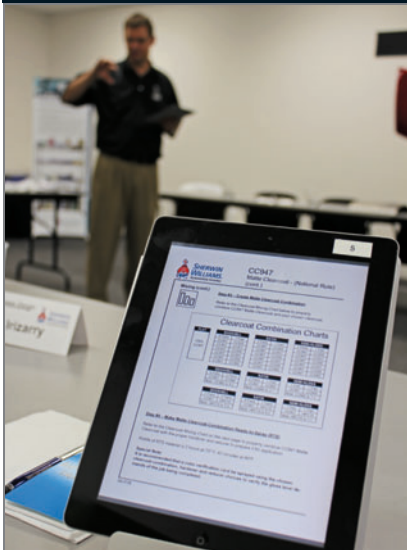


IMAGE: SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

Classroom training utilizing iPads and other mobile electronics are available from Sherwin-Williams and other vendors. In some cases, students are given electronic training documents that they can bring back to their shops.

involves competitive codes. She explains, "I've worked with a number of shops that are converting to our products, and sometimes they request a product from our system they can cross with what they have from another company."

To handle these situations, AkzoNobel utilizes a tech help line run in-house by a five-member staff. Greenfield says the staff has been successful nearly 86 percent of the time locating an applicable code.

The company also runs automotive training centers that offer classes (held over the course of 2-3 days) featuring a mix of classroom theory and hands-on application of AkzoNobel products. Greenfield recommends shops take advantage of the classes on a yearly basis.

"It's the best way they can keep up to date on the newest products and changes to ones they're already using," she notes. "It's also a good way to brush up on their skills, talk to their colleagues and ask questions."

AkzoNobel also engages in in-house training at shops and provides training videos on its YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/AkzoNobelAAC) customers can view at their leisure.

Shops who use the company's Sikkens brand products have access to the Acoat Select business development program. The program features 25 courses, including Implementing Repair Planning, Preparing for a Process Centered Environment, Estimating Consistency and Financial Analysis.

Technical Manager Fitz Moles says the courses have a proven track record of helping shops build profits as they seek to expand their own operations or make

their businesses attractive to consolidators.

BASF

Joe Skurka, Manager of OEM and Industry Relations for BASF, notes the business tools his company provides shops — particularly its assistance in helping shops identify coming trends and preparing customers for them.

"The big question we get all the time is 'What's the next big thing?'" he says. Among the most significant trends, Skurka notes, is continuing governmental pressure for shops to employ low VOC products, which his company offers.

"The other trend we see is the need for shops to gain manufacturer certifications," he says, "Whether it's becoming certified to paint aluminum on Ford vehicles or products from other auto manufacturers, this is going to be something nearly every shop is going to have to adopt."

BASF offers assistance in earning these certifications, specifically helping guide shops to the proper OEM resources.

BASF also offers a number of training courses to keep shops updated on its products. Skurka says shops should plan to attend the training at least every two years to keep up with continual changes. He also suggests customers speak with BASF jobbers who receive training and are available for questions.

Training schedules are available on the BASF website (www.refinish.basf.us), along with data and safety sheets and a number of business seminars customers can view anytime.



IMAGE: SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

Off-site training gives painters the opportunity to learn from their colleagues away from job distractions.



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ChemSpec

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spray-outs, which the company reports is the world's largest swatch collection.

Both the software and swatch systems may be integrated with ChemSpec's Easimeasure spectrophotometer, which reads the color of the panel for color matching. The Easimeasure can store 65,000 international colors and provide direct reference to corresponding Easimix and swatch codes for each color.

PPG

PPG provides a host of online resources. Randy Cremeans, Collision Segment Marketing Director for North America, notes their value but says hands-on training and experience offer additional benefits that shops shouldn't ignore.

For this reason, PPG offers training both in-house and at its training centers. "Our reps will stay at a shop we're converting until the employees feel as comfortable as possible with the new product," Cremeans says. He notes that PPG will take the same steps with an existing customer if the shop believes sending its workers to training will be too expensive or could negatively affect its operations.

Still, he recommends that shops take advantage of off-site training. "Typically, there are too many distractions at a shop for employees to get the most from training classes conducted there," he explains. "The benefit of training at one of our centers is that we get the full attention of those attending."

Owners and managers can similarly benefit from PPG's range of business improvement courses. Cremeans says PPG recommends the classes to help its shop customers better maintain their entire operation. "Where else can shops turn but to their paint suppliers who know the industry and can offer the help they need?" says Cremeans, who notes that the only other alternative for shops looking to acquire business training is sending employees to business school. That's simply not realistic for most shops, he says, since it involves an investment of time and resources most don't have.

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IMAGE: SHERWIN-WILLIAMS



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The training provided by paint companies is superior since it's industry specific and proven. "It's our job to give shops the things they need to make money," adds Cremeans.

Sherwin-Williams

Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes employs a business policy that views customers as "business partners," according to Business Consulting Manager David Dewalt. The company offers a number of programs designed to help these partners upgrade multiple areas of their operations — everything from painting to estimating and overall business planning and strategy.

"Having great paint products just gets you in the game," he adds. "Our goal is to offer shops a total solution to improve their improve their performance and get the attention of customers and insurers to gain more market share."

Along with paint training (which currently is being regionalized and extended into more local areas), Sherwin-Williams


offers training in areas such as express scratch repair, lean stock setups and collision design.

To help ensure lessons are carried back to a shop, Sherwin-Williams classroom training is conducted electronically with iPads. When the course has ended, students are given a flashdrive with all course information. They need only plug the drive into their own computers to access both the information and the Sherwin-Williams website, which contains a number of other training resources, including videos.

Sherwin-Williams also offers in-house help from its area service reps who can perform individual shop evaluations known as shop impact assessments. These assessments determine what programs and changes would best benefit a business.

Dewalt says Sherwin-Williams' programs aren't designed to be a one-size-fits-all solutions. Service reps help shops institute changes — such as lean processing — designed uniquely for each shop.

The ultimate goal of the company's programs, says Dewalt, is helping ensure shops repair as many cars as possible. "That process starts the minute a vehicle enters a shop, and that's what today really determines a shop's success," he says.

Paint vendors offer more help than just that mentioned here. Contact yours to make sure you're getting all the help you need to make your business the best it can be for all its stakeholders. 



Tim Sramcik has written for ABRN, Motor Age and Aftermarket Business World for more than a decade. He has produced numerous news, technical and feature articles covering every aspect of the collision repair market. In 2004, he was recognized for his work by the American Society of Business Publication Editors.

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DARRYL HOLLENBECK SHOWS HOW TO CREATE AN OLD-SCHOOL LACE PAINT EFFECT IN JUST A FEW SIMPLE STEPS.

BY **JOHN WOODWARD** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

It's no surprise Darryl Hollenbeck is obsessed with cars, especially the classics. The roots of the Hollenbeck family tree reach down to some of the first repair shops in California and on up to the start of Oakland's custom scene. At age 21, he started his career at his uncle's garage, and then honed his skills in various places for 15 years before opening Vintage Color Studio in 2003.

Focusing on rides from the 30s, 40s and 50s, the Vintage crew painted their way to a truckload of magazine covers and major awards over their first decade in business. This year, Hollenbeck returned to one of the most prestigious winner's circles with a second America's Most Beautiful Roadster award at the 2013 Grand National Roadster Show in Pomona, Calif.

When asked about his accomplishments, Hollenbeck is not one to brag, attributing his success to the good fortune of pairing up with great customers and projects. Awards aren't what motivate him; it's always the work. "I still get butterflies when I go into the booth

to paint," he says. "That's the reason I keep going back. I love what I do."

Hollenbeck can teach a bit of what he does. A throwback style from the 1960s, the lace technique, is one he describes as a bit of a lost art. A touch of lace goes a long way, he acknowledges, but on the right project in the right amount, it's killer.

Lace selection

The right lace will make or break this technique. "Pattern clarity is the key to doing it right," Hollenbeck says. Most fabric stores offer many workable choices, although Hollenbeck prefers vintage material. Patterns with larger elements are better suited for hoods and roofs, but always opt for lace with dense designs. Lace with large holes will not lay flat, distorting the effect. Also, avoid fabrics with glitter that may affect the paint surface.

Base coat

Hollenbeck applies three coats of PPG ENVIROBASE® High Performance

basecoat color over the entire panel, a custom mint green.

Pearl midcoat

Next, three coats of ENVIROBASE High Performance T457 Green Pearl are applied over the entire panel. Then the area is taped out for the first lace pattern on the green effects section.

Lace pattern

Creating a sharp pattern requires careful masking (**FIG. 1**). "Make sure the lace is pulled tight to the panel so there are no wrinkles," Hollenbeck explains. "You have to stretch it a little bit, but you want to stretch it evenly. You don't want a gap between the panel and the lace."

Light coats

Using low pressure to avoid lifting the lace during the application, Hollenbeck applies light coats of a custom dark green. "Once the lace starts turning color, you should have good coverage."



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Peel and clean

Peel the lace from one end to the other in a single, slow sweep. Tack the surface to remove any lint or threads left behind.

Edge fogging

To heighten contrast, the border of the green panel is fogged with the custom dark green color (**FIG. 2**). “The panel is darker on the edge and

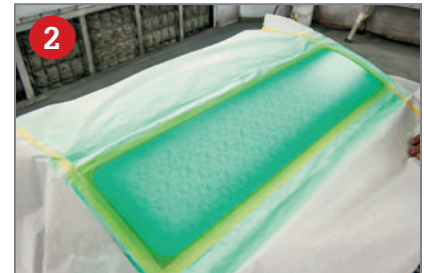
lighter in the center. It’s kind of a cool effect.”

Second panel prep

After masking out the green section, Hollenbeck preps the second panel, adding a 1/8 inch stripe on the inside for variety (**FIG. 3**).

Blue lace

The lace for this section is the same pattern, except with larger elements (**FIG. 4**). It was painted using the same steps as the green section.



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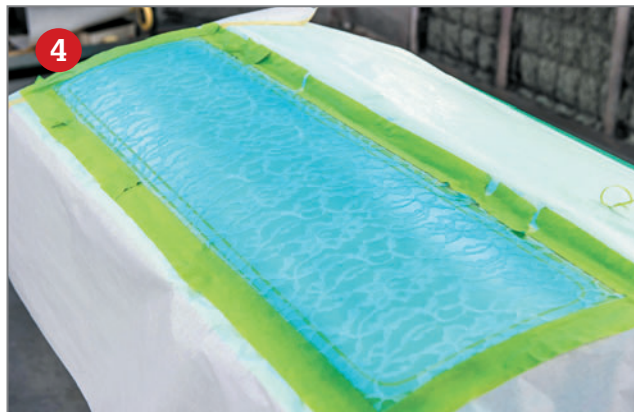
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Clearcoat

Hollenbeck sprayed two coats of EC750 ONE VISIT Appearance Clear with the ECH7090 Slow Clearcoat Hardener. After sanding flat to even the lace texture, he sprayed two additional clear layers. 



**JOHN
WOODWARD**
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

John Woodward has been writing about the automotive and collision repair industries for more than 20 years. He has a master's degree in English from the University of Iowa and teaches writing at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Mich.


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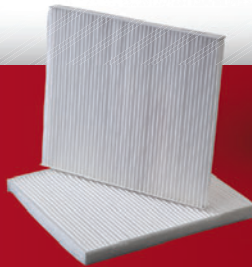
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1



WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT ALUMINUM REPAIR?

DIFFERENCES IN ALUMINUM AND STEEL CAN IMPACT THE REPAIR PROCESS AND THE RESULTS

BY **SHAWN COLLINS** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Have you heard about the 2015 Aluminum F-150? Of course you have, unless you've been living in a paint booth somewhere. Aluminum is the topic du jour and the hype is only escalating.

The collision repair industry has been through significant changes before and has weathered the storm just fine. Need I remind you of unitized structure, waterborne paint, ultra-high strength steels and lean manufacturing? Early adopters and shops that have been adjusting to these curve balls as they came along will have little difficulty making aluminum repairs mainstream. For shops that have not adjusted as the industry changed, it

may take a little more time and investment, but now would be a good time to make those upgrades.

Equipment realities

When new technologies or big changes come along in the collision repair industry, the hysteria and shady sales pitches are sure to follow. Beware the salesman that tells you that you need special tools and products specially formulated for aluminum repairs.

Yes, some special tools and equipment will be necessary, but most products and materials that are used for steel repair can also be used for aluminum repair. There may be subtle

process differences such as abrasive grade adjustments, but 3M's position, with very few exceptions, is that all materials currently used for steel repairs can be used for aluminum repairs as long as they are used in accordance with directions for use. It is also important that tools and materials used for steel repair are kept separate to avoid cross contamination.

The same seam sealers, body fillers, undercoats and abrasives can be used on both substrates. Just knowing that drastic material changes will not be necessary should alleviate a great deal of anxiety. The difference lies not in the products and materials

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needed for the repair, but in the repair process itself.

Body work

The physical properties of aluminum are different than that of steel, making the repair process quite different. Steel has a memory when bent or deformed and has a tendency to go back to its original shape during the repair process. With steel, heat can aid in the reforming process, but may not be recommended on many of today's high strength steels.

Conversely, aluminum has a tendency to remain in its current shape or remain deformed when damaged. The grain structure of aluminum differs from that of steel because it is much less inclined to re-align during the repair process, and unlike steel, aluminum should always be heated during straightening.

This can make repairs difficult and require different equipment and more finesse and patience. A trained and experienced technician will also be required because if the aluminum is accidentally stretched while repairing, the panel is no longer repairable.

Aluminum dent pulling systems should allow the technician to keep



pulling pressure applied while the damaged area is heated and massaged back into shape. The equipment is very different and more expensive, but the materials are still the same in most cases.

When finishing the repair with body fillers, most premium body fillers and glazes contain high-quality adhesion promoters and are approved for use on aluminum when directions and standard operating procedures are observed. These premium fillers can be used on bare aluminum or over epoxy primer, as some OEMs require. When sanding, follow the grade recommendations of the car maker. OEMs will generally recommend a finer grade when working on aluminum as opposed to steel, and never coarser than grade 80. Special aluminum-compatible abrasives are not necessary, but never use the same sheet of sandpaper on aluminum if it was previously used on steel. The abrasives are the same, but it is a good idea to segregate them in separate cabinets according to substrate.

Corrosion protection

Many technicians think that because aluminum doesn't rust, corrosion protection is less important or even unnecessary. Sealing repaired joints tightly during repairs is very important to prevent oxidation and corrosion from occurring. Applying protective coatings like anti-chip coatings and undercoating is also necessary to protect the aluminum body. Stone chips can start the corrosion process on aluminum by allowing oxidation to creep under the paint film and cause blisters known as filiform corrosion.

ADVANCED TOOLS AND PRODUCT SOLUTIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Tackling aluminum repairs in your shop? Here are key things you need to know:

- You will need some special tools, but many standard tools and products will work
- Use separate tools and work areas to avoid contamination
- The science of the substrate drives the process
- Always follow standard operating procedures
- Corrosion protection IS critical
- Use this opportunity to review shop hygiene
- Now is the time to train your technicians for tomorrow's repairs

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After heating or using dent pulling equipment on aluminum, a cavity wax must be used to re-seal the surface of the aluminum on the back side. The back sides of any welded joints also need to be coated with a cavity wax. The corrosion protection process is very similar to that of steel, and the products that can be used are the same. No specially formulated seam sealers, rust-proofing or anti-chip coatings are required — the same products used for steel can all be used during aluminum repairs if the directions for use are followed.

Although the aluminum panel bonding process is often slightly different than the steel bonding process, some panel bonding adhesives are also compatible. Look for those that are OEM approved for aluminum. Panel bonding adhesives undergo extensive testing in order to be specified by a

car maker, so there is no question about its ability to bond aluminum parts successfully.

The cost perspective

Aluminum has been used for vehicle construction for decades, but this resurgence will have some significant impact on the shops, the most significant of which will be the new equipment cost. From hand tools to welders and riveters, there will be many big-ticket tools that will be required to repair the F-150 or any other aluminum vehicle. There will be some lower cost alternatives in some cases. Ford will not require a permanent aluminum clean room, but will recommend, at the least, a curtained-off area.

This would be a good time to examine overall shop hygiene and look for improvement. With aluminum and other different substrates soon to ar-

rive, the shops are going to have to improve cleanliness and handle the car with hygiene in mind. Even with a curtained work area, it's very likely that steel dust particles will make their way to the aluminum vehicle. The solution for that situation is to clean the panels well, immediately before applying any coatings or fillers.

The use of self-generated vacuum tools can also be used to keep the dust particles to a minimum while keeping the equipment spend down. It will be important to evaluate the equipment needs and to prioritize what is really needed and what can be done with existing equipment.

It remains to be seen how the adjustment to mainstream aluminum repairs will go for collision repair shops. Many shops have made similar adjustments in the past and are well prepared to make this change without much difficulty. The advent of water-borne paints had an impact on the paint shop, whereas the aluminum change will impact the metal shop and leave the paint shop, for the most part, unscathed. The good news is that there may be small adjustments in the paint shop, but nothing major.

The other good news is that the allied materials needed for aluminum will also change very little, even though some marketing campaigns may say otherwise. You will not have to concern yourself with wholesale changes or many additional part numbers for materials, which frees you up to spend your energy sorting out the equipment needs and obtaining training for the technicians.

3M's Automotive Aftermarket Division has available standard operating procedures for aluminum repair. Visit www.3Mcollision.com/aluminum for more information.



SHAWN COLLINS
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Shawn Collins is Senior Technical Service Engineer with 3M. He is a past I-CAR instructor and also worked with AAA Auto Salvage as a collision industry specialist.

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IMAGES: DONNY SEYFER

From the moment the vehicle arrives at your shop, your staff is planning the path to repairing the damage and getting the car back on the road. So while you are doing your teardowns and blueprinting, let me suggest that you also record any diagnostic trouble codes (DTC) that are in the systems of the vehicle, assuming the battery is still intact.

Most scan tools and vehicles can perform a test for all of the DTCs and give you a list. Most scan tools can also print them for you. This will include your powertrain control module, supplemental restraint systems, security systems and any body-related control modules that are on the network. Print out the trouble codes and if your tool does not have a definition for all of the codes, look them up in your service information and note them on the print out.

When I teach my streamlined diagnostics class to mechanical technicians, I recommend that they try to determine which codes are the root cause. In the case of an accident, I think a different approach is called for. Looking at the damage, if you see a rear proximity sensor code for a damaged rear bumper cover, I think you can safely assume that you will be addressing that problem during body repairs. If, on the other hand, you see a code with a P or U in front of it such as a P1605 - PCM Keep Alive Memory Test Error, you may have damage that you cannot see yet. These trouble codes should not intimidate you. Spend a few minutes looking at the possible causes and reconsider the type of damage. A P1605 can be caused by a lot of bad things, but it can also be caused by the Battery Positive memory or "keep alive memory" circuit being open. Many of these circuits have fuses

Many emergency responders will cut the battery cables when there is apparent electrical damage. The storage facility that this Ford Escape came from tried to jump the "dead" battery several times, not noticing that the negative battery cable had been cut. No you are not missing anything — we repaired it so we could test the vehicle for other electrical issues.

BY **DONNY SEYFER** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Annoying lights that scream from the dash are the final part of returning the car to pre-accident condition for most of the collision shops I do diagnostic work for. I have a couple suggestions for taking a more proactive approach to malfunction indicator lights that should help not only your cycle time, but reduce the need for supplements.

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that could be damaged in a collision. Do a little investigation and make a note on the diagnostic print out, letting your estimator know what you believe you are going to have to test or inspect and give it a labor time. Maybe you think it will take a half hour or maybe you see a lot of tests and it will take you two hours.


By looking to see how many codes may be related directly to damaged parts and possibly to one another, you can make that sometimes daunting list of codes look much more manageable and give your estimator a clearer picture of the extent of the damage.

We can't complete an article on this topic without talking about scan tool packages. If I don't hear this question at least once during a class, I assume they have all fallen asleep: "What scan tool should I buy?" There are a number of answers to that, but let's try to narrow it down a bit. First, you



(Left) Oxygen sensor open. P0134 a quick visual inspection can tell you if the harness is damaged and give your estimator needed information to arrange for repair or further testing. (Right) You don't have to bring a high-dollar scan tool to the triage. Quality code readers are not expensive and much more portable than the big laptops and handhelds. Get your codes and put them on your check-out sheet.

must consider what you work on. If your shop is a specialty shop that works on only a few brands, you should look into a tool that gives you lots of OE tool features or the OE tool itself. There are services that will assist you with diagnosis when you connect the car for them over the Internet. You will have to check their policy, but for the purposes of triage, you will need to know if you will be charged each time they connect. There are fairly inexpensive tools that are laptop based or small handhelds that will give you a decent generic feature set. Where that can be limiting for the collision specialist is in body-related codes that are not as generic across manufacturers as the emission/powertrain-related DTCs are. Companies like Autel, Auto Enginuity, Auto Logic, Bosch/OTC and Snap-On are just a few companies that make competent multi-line packages. One of the things you have to consider is that these tools and their OE counterparts are not buy-it-and-forget-it products. They require regular updates, and there is a cost associated with that.

It has become a necessity of repairing cars that we have these tools on site. In my opinion, the time you waste waiting on a mobile diagnostician, a dealership or a repair shop quickly offsets having a tool that allows you to do all but the most difficult diagnosis. By tracking these problems before you start repair on the body, you are afforded the chance to pregame some of the parts you may need and if something looks really challenging, make an appointment with a repair shop that fits into your repair cycle, rather than having an otherwise completed car waiting to go to mechanical before it can go home. 



DONNY SEYFER
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

Donny co-owns Seyfer Automotive, Inc. in Wheat Ridge, Colo., and is chair-elect of ASA. He is a regular contributor to ABRN and sister publication Aftermarket Business World.

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SKYACTIV: Keeping the Zoom in Zoom-Zoom

Mazda takes a total approach to design.



The Red highlighted sections show the design of the support structure. This system gives Mazda vehicles an improved ride, much like the ride of a heavier vehicle, yet keeps it fuel efficient and gives it nimble handling. Energy from an impact is also dissipated throughout the vehicle's framework.

BY **TIM JANELLO** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

What is Mazda's SKYACTIV technology? Let's break it down. "SKY" is about preserving the environment by lowering CO2 emissions. "ACTIV" is about preserving the excitement of driving by making the driver an active part of a system Mazda disguised as a car.

I am amazed at the new technology and the twists taken on some old ideas you see in Mazda's SKYACTIV technology. One of the ideas that really caught my eye was raising the compression ratio of the gasoline engine to 14:1 and lowering the diesel engines to 14:1 compression ratio. How they did this and made it work is very interesting.

Background

Mazda launched its SKYACTIV technology for model year 2011. Mazda took on the challenge to promote driving pleasure while being environmentally friendly and providing

outstanding safety for its vehicles' occupants. Mazda began the redesign around 2008 with the idea that by 2015 it could increase fuel economy by 30 percent over 2008 models, without decreasing driving pleasure or safety.

Mazda believes the internal combustion engine is still going to be a major player in the future. It made the decision to position itself to merge the internal combustion engine with present and future technologies such as electric drive, while keeping the driving experience alive. Mazda backs the concept of having the engine, transmission, body and chassis all work as a system, including the driver. Some of

the problems Mazda faced were improving already highly efficient engines, both automatic and manual transmissions and giving the vehicle a rigid body and chassis while maintaining safety from a lighter weight car.

We all know that an internal combustion engine is not efficient. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 70 to 80 percent of the energy produced is actually lost either through heat or friction.



The high-pressure fuel injectors are hiding behind the fuel rail and pressure sensors. The intake runners are designed and tuned to take advantage of swirling the air as it enters the cylinders.



The most noticeable change is the "well" in the center of the piston for mixing the high-pressure injected gasoline and air. This well allows for a rich mixture to ignite around the spark plug then burns lean as the swirling air mixes from around the outside of the cylinders for a clean burn.

First, Mazda took a hard look at both its gasoline and diesel engines to figure out how to pull more useful energy from the engines. One of first things considered was gasoline direct injection (GDI) technology. That was not good enough, though; they wanted to improve it. Hot-rodders know that high compression engines typically put out more power, but squeezing the air that tightly costs energy. Mazda engineers also took aim at reducing internal engine friction and weight.

SKYACTIV-G (Gasoline Engine)

Engineers have been chasing Homogenous Controlled Combustion Ignition (HCCI) engines for a while. Gasoline Direct Injection (GDI) is a gas engine designed much like a diesel, and the newest step toward getting more energy from combustion. The gas is injected under higher pressures directly into the combustion chamber, allowing for a more complete burn.



The deep "well" in the center of the pistons allow for the fuel spray to penetrate deeper into the cylinder's air charge for improved mixing to lower soot. The 14 to 1 compression ratio allows Mazda to advance injection timing, providing for a better air-fuel mixture. The exhaust gas recirculation system can also be seen at the back of the engine feeding into the intake just above the electronic throttle plate.

To get more power with less fuel, Mazda increased the combustion expansion ratio to 14:1. This means a smaller combustion area, thus increasing down pressure on the piston. Engine knock robs power, increases emissions and causes engine damage, so they first lowered cylinder temps. Mazda decided to remove more residual exhaust gases from the cylinder.

There is some exhaust back pressure with a major part being push-back from the other cylinders. To overcome this, Mazda played on the idea of long tube tuned exhaust headers. They measured the timing of each exhaust pulse to determine the needed length to prevent push back at low to mid rpm range. The exhaust tubes needed to be 600 mm long between cylinders on opposite strokes to reduce exhaust gas push-back. To fit the exhaust manifold in a reasonable space, they used a wrap-around Y-type tube design. Then the two tubes run into one pipe dumping into the catalytic converter, leading to the 4-2-1 design. This cut the residual cylinder gases from 8 to 4 percent, lowering the cylinder temps to help defeat engine knock.

The engineers now faced a major issue with the catalytic converter's light-off time due to the distance from the exhaust ports. They adapted another old idea of retarding ignition timing to increase exhaust gas temps to heat the catalytic converter fast enough to prevent any increase in exhaust emissions. But this causes cold run misfires, so they made a deep cavity in the piston, specifically shaped so the air and fuel are directed toward the spark plug, creating a stratified charge around it. The piston cavity shape prevented the combustion flame from coming in contact with the piston, causing combustion cooling loss, which would prevent flame growth. Mazda also mapped the engine for the shortest time the air and fuel spend in the chamber before ignition and intensify air flow turbulence in the chamber for better mixing.

These combustion chamber changes allowed them to reduce the piston weight by 20 percent, reduce connecting rod weight 15 percent, and reduce piston ring drag 37 percent. The engi-

neers didn't stop there; valve train friction losses were next on the list. The engineers used another hot-rod trick of roller rockers in the form of roller followers on the cam. Mazda still was looking for more energy reduction, so it reduced the oil pumping losses 45 percent by electronically controlling the oil pump. All of the weight and friction reductions allowed Mazda engineers to increase fuel economy by 15 percent and add 15 percent low to mid range torque over previous models.

SKYACTIV- D (Diesel Engines)

Mazda's engineers defied conventional wisdom by lowering their diesel engine to a 14:1 compression ratio. This lowered emissions enough to do away with expensive exhaust after-treatments like Selective Catalyst Reduction (SCR) or Lean NOx Trap (LNT), but increased performance and fuel economy. This idea and some other improvements give the Mazda diesel 20 percent better fuel mileage while meeting Euro Stage 6, Japanese Long Term, and US Tier2 Bin5 emissions.



Improvements to the torque converter can be seen in the cutaway. The torque converter lock-up clutch pack is shown close to the front, middle of the assembly. The upper rear of the converter shows the redesigned torus (vane) and dampener system. The fluid heat exchanger (located on this side of the transmission) has been added for improved fluid temperature control.

Lowering compression ratios reduces combustion heat, lowering NOx. This allows more advanced injection timing, giving the air and fuel molecules more time to better mix before combustion. This lowers combustion flash temperatures, which lowers NOx and the better mixing gives a more complete burn greatly reducing particulate matter.

Mazda went after that expansion ratio, which is greater at top dead center. But change caused other problems to arise. Lower compression causes lower heat, so how do you start and idle a cold diesel with low compression, plus get any power for acceleration? The answer required several new ideas like using multi-hole piezo injectors capable of rapid response times and 9 injections per combustion stroke.

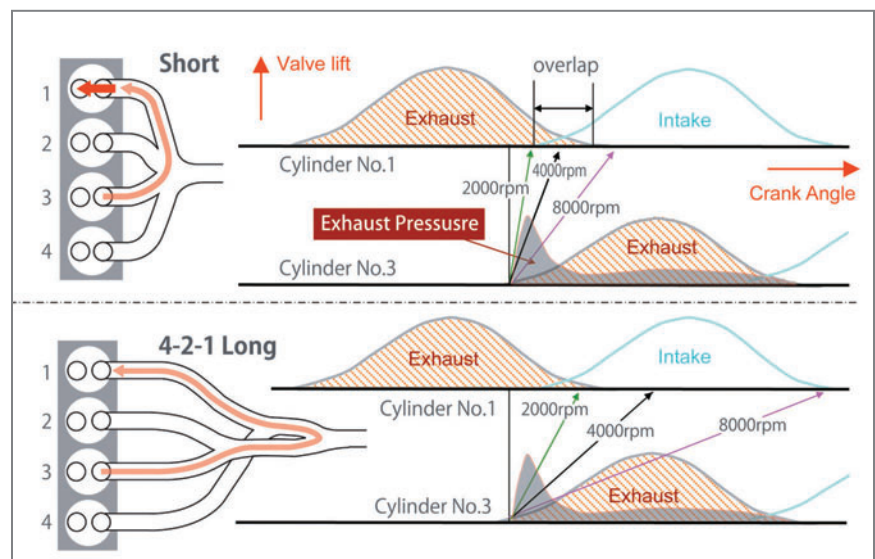
This allowed them to not only do the pre-, main and post-injection most diesels do, but to modify the injection times per cycle for operating conditions and allow for precise high pressure injections for cold starts. The highly atomized fuel helps cold starts, but also Mazda adopted super-fast heating ceramic glow plugs to ensure quick starts. To overcome cold run misfires, Mazda adopted Variable Valve Lift on the ex-

haust. Knowing that only a single combustion cycle was needed to make exhaust temps rise, they open the exhaust valve on the intake cycle to pull exhaust back into the chamber for rapid cylinder heating. Most manufactures use the exhaust gas recirculation system, but that takes too much time for heating to occur.

Most diesels today has turbochargers, but Mazda went to new lengths, looking at performance engines that use a two-stage turbo charger design. Most diesels have turbo lag, so the two-stage turbocharger enabled them to have smooth responsive torque output while decreasing emissions.

A two-stage turbo is one small and one large turbo mounted together sharing the same exhaust and intake pipes. This allows for switching between turbo profiles, giving the best air charge for the operating conditions. A small turbo will spool up, using less exhaust to give good boost at low rpms, and the large turbo produces boost at higher engine speed giving a great torque curve over the entire driving range.

Mazda's diesel engine advances allowed them to change to an all aluminum block and a thinner cylinder head,



Mazda's drawing of how the 4-2-1 exhaust system (bottom of drawing) draws the exhaust out of the cylinders without allowing it to be pushed back into another cylinder when compared to traditional systems (top drawing). Keeping the exhaust from reentering a cylinder effectively lowers the cylinder temperature, helping to prevent engine knock and lower emissions.

cutting 62 lbs., plus shaving the pistons' weight by 25 percent.

SKYACTIV-Drive (automatic)

Mazda combined the best advantages of each transmission type to make each one better. They looked at the advantages of a conventional (step shifting) automatic transmission, continuously variable transmission and a dual clutch transmission. It improved fuel economy 4 to 7 percent by reducing slip, cutting weight and reducing friction losses.

A torque converter gives smooth starts and shifts, but robs mpgs. To get rid of slippage between shifts, Mazda improved the torque converter. To reduce the slippage, it locked the converter up just after takeoff. This required tighter electronic controls of both the engine and transmission plus better cooling of the multi-disc lock up clutch. The engineers controlled noise, vibration and harshness by providing a damper and compact torus in the torque converter,

but also redesigned everything from the engine to the exhaust system.

To improve transmission oil pressure control they combined hydraulic controls with electronic controls into a Mechatronics module. To get better shift quality, Mazda engineers came up with direct linear solenoids for quicker, more precise pressure control response.

SKYACTIV-MT (manual)

Mazda came up with some different slants on manual transmission shifting and internal redesigns to lower weight by 16 percent and reduce friction by 1 percent. Mazda wanted to develop two levels of manual transmissions, a large and mid-size to handle different types of power plants or combinations of. Space and weight were a major concern along with that driving experience theme.

It first looked to improve shift feel and shorten the shift stroke. This required redesigning the internal stroke



Mazda removed the reverse idler and relocated some gears in their manual transmissions, allowing for shorter shafts for a more compact design.

by adding a small module spline to move the synchronizers. It adopted lock ball type synchronizers, shift load cancellers and ball bearing on the slides

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to give an easier but positive feeling shift. It rearranged the gears, moving first gear to the top shaft, using a common 2nd/3rd input gear, and doing away with the reverse idler shaft. This allowed for a more compact and lighter weight yet tough, fun shifting transmission.

SKYACTIV-Body

Mazda wanted to keep a crisp looking, aerodynamic body that would turn heads. It was determined to lower the weight by 8 percent, improve rigidity by 30 percent and still meet worldwide safety standards. Some of the ideas it went for were “straightening” and “continuous framework.” Straightening refers to removing or decreasing underbody curves giving a straighter frame-like platform. Continuous framework means a completely bonded upper and lower structure combined into

a dual brace configuration to spread any forces over the whole body. This gives the ride a tighter feel by absorbing impacts from bumps and improves crash safety.

In this body redesign, even the door hinges were improved. The redesign also included weld-bonding of the roof as an assembly before welding it to the body structure. Body materials were also changed to a higher tensile-strength steel material.


SKYACTIV-Chassis

Last but certainly not least, Mazda engineers knew the chassis needed to be revisited with all the changes made to the powertrain and body. Remember they wanted to be able to adapt to any type of power plant and lighten the overall weight. If the engineers were to control the ride and keep the fun in driving, the suspen-

sion needed to be lighter, but offer more rebound control.

Mazda improved low to mid-speed agility and high speed stability by adding electric power steering to increase yaw gain. The steering ratio was increased for better low speed response and better road feel at highway speeds. Through the use of electronic controls the turning effort is speed adaptable. It also increased both caster angle and caster trail for a better straight ahead driving feel.

The rear suspension was reworked to increase road grip and reduce rear wheel bounce. The rear suspension dampeners were moved rearward giving a straighter line for rear wheel impact control. To add to this rebound control for absorbing road bumps and keeping the wheel in contact with the road, the rear trailing arm was moved upward above the wheel centerline. This allows the wheel to swing up to roll over a bump rather than the impact pushing backward on the wheel axle causing more energy to be absorbed by the body. The engineers incorporated the old idea of “box channel frame” construction for a more rigid cross member while lowering the weight 14 percent. The front member was extended reducing the offset of the front lower control arms. The rear cross member was also given a bigger front to rear span to reduce the link offset for better wheel to body control.

Mazda engineers went back to the drawing boards to redesign their vehicles to blend with future technology while still keeping the fun in driving. They went against the normal thinking processes and made it work. Zoom on Mazda! 

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TIM JANELLO
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

Tim Janello is an assistant professor for Southern Illinois University in Automotive Technology teaching baccalaureate students for the past seven years. He has 40 years of experience in the automotive repair field with Master ASE certification and L1.

 Email Tim at tjanello@siu.edu

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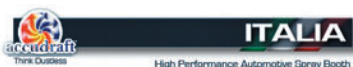
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THE LAST DETAIL 

I predict that getting and keeping direct repair programs is about to change dramatically. As always, I'm not arguing here whether DRPs are good or bad. But I am predicting that if you are a DRP shop that just waits for an insurer to tell you how you did last month or last quarter, you will get passed up by those taking a more proactive approach.

Some of this is technology driven. As I describe below, new tools give shops more information than ever about how they are doing in real time. But part of it is just the new reality facing insurance companies. The fact is they are having trouble increasing their top line (sales). Competition makes raising rates difficult. More people are carrying high deductibles or liability-only insurance. Teenagers are waiting longer to start driving. More people are using car-sharing programs. All this adds up to fewer premium dollars for insurers.

I also think insurers have squeezed shops about as much as they can. The average cost of repairs, which was mostly flat or even dropping over several years, is starting to rise.

The result? I think we will see more insurance companies laying off staff, shedding brick-and-mortar and turning even more to technology. More insurers, for example, are using programs offered by the information providers that allow non-DRP shops to exchange estimates and supplements with insurers much as DRPs do. This will save everyone time, but it also helps the insurer build data about non-DRP shops' performance.

To me, it's like a pro baseball team having a farm team. If you're a DRP shop now and you have a bad month, the insurer slaps you on the wrist and says, "Get better." But if they have a pool of data on non-DRP shops, they can immediately send you to the bench and bring in someone proving themselves as a performer.

For DRP shops, that means it is critical to know how you're doing in real time, when you still have time to adjust. One East Coast MSO, for example, has agreed if they miss certain targets with Insurer X, that insurer gets an additional discount for the next 90 days. You better believe that MSO wants to know every day how it's doing in terms of those metrics.

Some of you may know I did some boxing when I was in the service. One of the reasons I think boxing has declined in popularity is because it's one of the few sports where you don't know the score until the end. A boxer may be like a DRP shop

THE GAME IS CHANGING FOR DRPS

Waiting until the end of the month to have an insurer tell you how you did won't cut it


“It is critical to know how you are doing in real time, when you still have time to adjust.”

that thinks they are doing really well in a month only to find out they didn't. If that boxer or DRP shop knew the score in real time, they could adjust their strategy as needed.

Fortunately, there are new tools that can help shops do just that. I know of at least one company offering a 24/7 scorecard showing a shop (whether a DRP or not) how it's doing in terms of key metrics. And at least one rental car company is offering similar reporting.

With permission from some shops I work with, I use the Enterprise Automated Rental Management System (ARMS) tool to track those shops' performance (just as they can each track their own). I can pull up the stats for one client shop, for example, and see their average length of rental (for last year) was 9.5 days, 2.3 days faster than the average in their market. (We can't see other individual shops' numbers, only a market average.) We can see average labor hours per job and per day. We can see these numbers for drivable or non-drivable cars, or for claimants versus insureds, or for an individual insurance company's jobs at that shop.

That East Coast MSO that I mentioned checks that tool every day. They know that if their numbers for Insurer X are not as good as market average, they need to improve them. The program can even help them know which jobs to make a priority to ensure that happens. That saves that MSO significant dollars the added discounts would cost them.

I believe the game is changing. Only pro-level performers will get and keep DRPs. You need to know your score in real time so you can adjust your strategy. 

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Mike Anderson, a former shop owner, currently operates COLLISIONADVICE.COM, a training and consulting firm.

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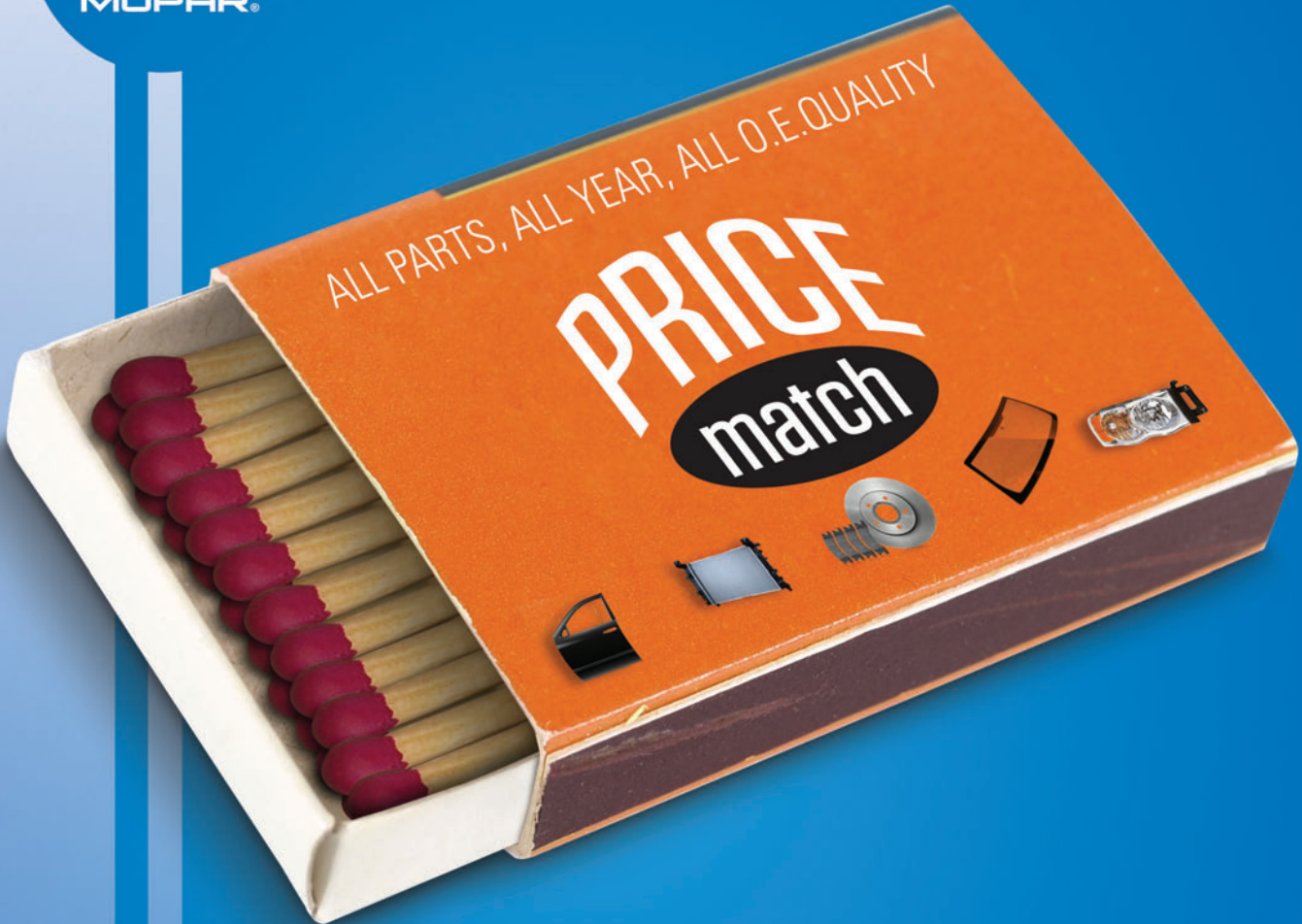


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