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**Ted the Technician:  
How To Communicate for  
Better Automotive Service**

# Ted the Technician

## How to Communicate for Better Automotive Service

Today's cars, light trucks, and sport-utility vehicles are high-tech marvels with digital dashboards, oxygen sensors, electronic computers, unibody construction, and more. They run better, longer, and more efficiently than models of years past.

But when it comes to repairs, some things stay the same. Whatever type of repair facility you patronize--dealership, service station, independent garage, specialty shop, or a national franchise--good communications between customer and shop is vital.

The following tips should help you along the way:

Do your homework before taking your vehicle in for repairs or service.

Today's technician must understand thousands of pages of technical text. Fortunately, your required reading is much less.

- \* Read the owner's manual to learn about the vehicle's systems and components.
- \* Follow the recommended service schedules. Keep a log of all repairs and service.

When you think about it, you know your car better than anyone else. You drive it every day and know how it feels and sounds when everything is right. So don't ignore its warning signals.

Use all of your senses to inspect your car frequently. Check for:

- \* Unusual sounds, odors, drips, leaks, smoke, warning lights, gauge readings.
- \* Changes in acceleration, engine performance, gas mileage, fluid levels.
- \* Worn tires, belts, hoses.
- \* Problems in handling, braking, steering, vibrations.

Note when the problem occurs.

- \* Is it constant or periodic?
- \* When the vehicle is cold or after the engine has warmed up?
- \* At all speeds? Only under acceleration? During braking? When shifting?
- \* When did the problem first start?

Professionally run repair establishments have always recognized the importance of communications in automotive repairs.

Once you are at the repair establishment, communicate your findings.

- \* Be prepared to describe the symptoms. (In larger shops you'll probably speak with a service writer/service manager rather than with the technician directly.)
- \* Carry a written list of the symptoms that you can give to the technician or service manager.
- \* Resist the temptation to suggest a specific course of repair. Just as you would with your physician, tell where it hurts and how long it's been that way, but let the technician diagnose and recommend a remedy.

Stay involved... Ask questions.

- \* Ask as many questions as you need. Do not be embarrassed to request lay definitions.
- \* Don't rush the service writer or technician to make an on-the-spot diagnosis. Ask to be called and apprised of the problem, course of action, and costs before work begins.
- \* Before you leave, be sure you understand all shop policies regarding labor rates, guarantees, and acceptable methods of payment.
- \* Leave a telephone number where you can be called.

## Choosing the Right Repair Shop for Your Vehicle

Glove Box Tips from  
Ted the Technician

No matter what you drive--sports car, family sedan, pick-up, or mini-van, when you go in for repairs or service, you want the job done right. The following advice should take much of the guesswork out of finding a good repair establishment.

### I. Preliminaries

Don't just drop your vehicle off at the nearest establishment and hope for the best. That's not choosing a shop, that's merely gambling.

- \* Read your owner's manual to become familiar with your vehicle and follow the manufacturer's suggested service schedule.
- \* Start shopping for a repair facility before you need one; you can make better decisions when you are not rushed or in a panic.
- \* Ask friends and associates for their recommendations. Even in this high-tech era, old-fashioned word-of-mouth reputation is still valuable.
- \* Check with your local consumer organization regarding the reputation of the shop in question.
- \* If possible, arrange for alternate transportation in advance so you will not feel forced to choose a facility solely on the basis of location.

Once you choose a repair shop, start off with a minor job; if you are pleased, trust them with more complicated repairs later

### II. At the Shop

- \* Look for a neat, well-organized facility, with vehicles in the parking lot equal in value to your own and modern equipment in the service bays.
- \* Professionally run establishments will have a courteous, helpful staff. The service writer should be willing to answer all of your questions.
- \* Feel free to ask for the names of a few customers. Call them.
- \* All policies (labor rates, guarantees, methods of payment, etc.) should be posted and/or explained to your satisfaction.

\* Ask if the shop customarily handles your vehicle make and model. Some facilities specialize.

\* Ask if the shop usually does your type of repair, especially if you need major work.

\* Look for signs of professionalism in the customer service area: civic and community service awards, membership in the Better Business Bureau, AAA-Approved Auto Repair status, customer service awards.

The backbone of any shop is the competence of the technicians.

\* Look for evidence of qualified technicians, such as trade school diplomas, certificates of advanced course work, and ASE certifications--a national standard of technician competence.

### III. Follow-Up

\* Keep good records; keep all paperwork.

\* Reward good service with repeat business. It is mutually beneficial to you and the shop owner to establish a relationship.

\* If the service was not all you expected, don't rush to another shop. Discuss the problem with the service manager or owner. Give the business a chance to resolve the problem. Reputable shops value customer feedback and will make a sincere effort to keep your business.

### A Word about ASE

Perhaps years ago, a shade-tree mechanic whose only credentials were a tool box and busted knuckles was enough. But today's quality-conscious consumers demand more.

The independent, non-profit National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) conducts the only industry-wide, national certification program for automotive technicians.

Consumers benefit from ASE's certification program since it takes much of the guesswork out of finding a competent technicians.

ASE certifies the competency of individual technicians through a series of standardized specialty exams (brakes, transmissions, engine repair, etc.)

## Getting Your Vehicle Ready for Winter

### Glove Box Tips from Ted the Technician

Mechanical failure--an inconvenience any time it occurs--can be deadly in the winter. Preventive maintenance is a must. Besides, a well maintained vehicle is more enjoyable to drive, will last longer, and could command a higher resale price.

Some of the following tips can be performed by any do-it-yourselfer; others require the skilled hands of an auto technician.

First things first. Read your owner's manual and follow the manufacturer's recommended service schedules.

- \* Engine Performance--Get engine drive-ability problems (hard starts, rough idling, stalling, diminished power, etc.) corrected at a good repairshop. Cold weather makes existing problems worse. Replace dirty filters--air, fuel, PCV, etc.

- \* Fuel--Put a bottle of fuel de-icer in your tank once a month to help keep moisture from freezing in the fuel line. Note that a gas tank which is kept filled helps keep moisture from forming.

- \* Oil--Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your manual--more often (every 3,000 miles) if your driving is mostly stop-and-go or consists of frequent short trips.

- \* Cooling Systems--The cooling system should be completely flushed and refilled about every 24 months. The level, condition, and concentration of the coolant should be checked periodically. (A 50/50 mix of anti-freeze and water is usually recommended.)

DIYers, never remove the radiator cap until the engine has thoroughly cooled!

The tightness and condition of drive belts, clamps, and hoses should be checked by a pro.

- \* Windshield Wipers--Replace old blades. If your climate is harsh, purchase rubber-clad (winter) blades to fight ice build-up. Stock up on windshield washer solvent--you'll be surprised how much you use. Carry an ice-scraper.

- \* Heater/Defroster The heater and defroster must be in good working condition for passenger comfort and driver visibility.

\* Battery--The only accurate way to detect a weak battery is with professional equipment. Routine care: Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all connections. If battery caps are removable, check fluid level monthly.

Avoid contact with corrosive deposits and battery acid. Wear eye protection and rubber gloves.

\* Lights--Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs; periodically clean road grime from all lenses.

To prevent scratching, never use a dry rag.

\* Exhaust System--Your vehicle should be placed on a lift and the exhaust system examined for leaks. The trunk and floor boards should be inspected for small holes. Exhaust fumes can be deadly.

Cold weather will only make existing problems worse. A breakdown--never pleasant--can be deadly in the winter.

\* Tires Worn tires will be of little use in winter weather. Examine tires for remaining tread life, uneven wearing, and cupping; check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. Check tire pressures once a month. Let the tires "cool down" before checking the pressure. Rotate as recommended.

Don't forget your spare, and be sure the jack is in good condition.

Carry emergency gear: gloves, boots, blankets, flares, a small shovel, sand or kitty litter, tire chains, and a flash light. Put a few "high-energy" snacks in your glove box.

## Keeping Your Vehicle in Tune with the Environment

Glove Box Tips from  
Ted the Technician

Car care is definitely a win-win situation. Besides helping the environment, a properly maintained and operated vehicle will run more efficiently, will be safer, and will last longer--up to 50% longer, according to a survey of ASE-certified Master Auto Technicians. The following tips should put you on the road to environmentally conscious car care.

- \* Keep your engine tuned up. A misfiring spark plug can reduce fuel efficiency as much as 30%. Follow the service schedules listed in your owner's manual. Replace filters and fluids as recommended.

- \* Check your tires for proper inflation. Underinflation wastes fuel--your engine has to work harder to push the vehicle. Wheels that are out-of-line (as evidenced by uneven tread wear or vehicle pulling) make the engine work harder, too. Properly maintained tires will last longer, meaning fewer scrap tires have to be disposed.

Every ten days, motorists who drive with under-inflated tires and poorly maintained engines waste 70 million gallons of gasoline.

### Car Care Council

- \* Keep your air conditioner in top condition and have it serviced only by a technician certified competent to handle/recycle refrigerants. Air conditioners contain CFCs--gases that have been implicated in the depletion of the ozone layer. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, almost one third of the CFCs released into the atmosphere come from mobile air conditioners; some simply leaks out, but the majority escapes during service and repair--so it's important to choose a qualified technician.

- \* Do-it-yourselfers: dispose of used motor oil, anti-freeze/coolant, tires, and old batteries properly. Many repair facilities accept these items. Or call your local municipal or county government for recycling sites. Never dump used oil or anti-freeze on the ground or in open streams.

Each year twenty times the amount of oil spilled by the tanker Exxon Valdez in Alaska is improperly dumped into America's environment by do-it-yourselfers.

### Automotive Information Council

- \* Observe speed limits. Mileage decreases sharply above 55 mph.

\* Drive gently. Avoid sudden accelerations and jerky stop-and-go's. Use cruise-control on open highways to keep your speed as steady as possible.

\* Avoid excessive idling. Shut off the engine while waiting for friends and family. Today's vehicles are designed to "warm up" fast, so forget about those five-minute warm ups on cold winter mornings.

\* Remove excess items from the vehicle. Less weight means better mileage. Store luggage/ cargo in the trunk rather than on the roof to reduce air drag.

\* Plan trips. Consolidate your daily errands to eliminate unnecessary driving. Try to travel when traffic is light to avoid stop-and-go conditions. Join a car pool.

Remember, how your car runs, how you drive it, and how its fluids, old parts, and tires are disposed of all have serious consequences on the environment.

## **Getting Your Vehicle Ready for Summer**

Glove Box Tips from  
Ted the Technician

EPA

National Institutes for  
AUTOMOTIVE SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Summer's heat, dust, and stop-and-go traffic will take their toll on your vehicle. Add the effects of last winter, and you could be poised for a breakdown. You can lessen the odds of mechanical failure through periodic maintenance...Your vehicle should last longer and command a higher resale price, too!

Some of the following tips are easy to do; others require a skilled auto technician.

Getting Started--The best planning guide is your owner's manual. Read it; and follow the manufacturer's recommended service schedules.

\* Air Conditioning--A Marginally operating system will fail in hot weather. Have the system examined by a qualified technician.

\* Cooling System--The greatest cause of summer breakdowns is overheating. The cooling system should be completely flushed and refilled about every 24 months. The level, condition, and concentration of the coolant should be checked periodically. (A 50/50 mix of anti-freeze and water is usually recommended.)

DIYers, Never remove the radiator cap until the engine has thoroughly cooled! The tightness and condition of drive belts, clamps, and hoses should be checked by a pro.

\* OIL--Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your manual--more often (every 3,000 miles) if you make frequent short jaunts, extended trips with lots of luggage, or tow a trailer.

\* Engine Performance--Replace other filters (air, fuel, PCV, etc.) as recommended--more often in dusty conditions. Get engine driveability problems (hard starts, rough idling, stalling, diminished power, etc.) corrected at a good shop.

\* Windshield Wipers--A dirty windshield causes eye fatigue and can pose a safety hazard. Replace worn blades and get plenty of windshield washer solvent.

\* Tires--Have your tires rotated about every 5,000 miles. Check tire pressures once a month; let the tires "cool down" first.

Don't forget your spare, and be sure the jack is in good condition. Examine tires for tread life, uneven wearing, and cupping; check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. An alignment is warranted if there's uneven tread wear or if your vehicle pulls to one side.

\* Brakes--Brakes should be inspected as recommended in your manual, or sooner if you notice pulsations, grabbing, noises, or longer stopping distance. Minor brake problems should be corrected promptly.

\* Battery--Batteries can fail any time of year. The only accurate way to detect a weak battery is with professional equipment. Routine care: Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all connections. If battery caps are removable, check the fluid level monthly.

Avoid contact with corrosive deposits and battery acid. Wear eye protection and rubber gloves.

\* Lights--Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs; periodically clean dirt and insects from all lenses.

To prevent scratching, never use a dry rag.

\* Emergencies--Carry some basic tools--ask a technician for suggestions. Also include a first aid kit, flares, and a flashlight. Consider buying a CB radio.

#### A Word about ASE

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ASE certifies the competency of individual technicians through a series of standardized specialty exams (brakes, transmissions, engine repair, etc.)

#### ASE CERTIFIED

We employ technicians certified by the National institute for AUTOMOTIVE SERVICE EXCELLENCE. Let us show you their credentials

Certified technicians are issued pocket credentials listing their area(s) of expertise and usually wear blue and white ASE shoulder insignia, while employers often post the ASE sign on the premises. There are over a quarter million ASE technicians at work in every type of repair facility.

This publication has been reviewed by the Environmental Protection Agency. Distribution of this document does not constitute or imply EPA endorsement of any ASE service.

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