

Comments on “The Sting”

Reprinted from Motor Age Magazine, September 1995

I read with great interest the letter, *Why Sting us Every Time*, by Mr. Tony Marchetti in the June 1995 issue of Motor Age. In reality, the article only strengthens the perception most people have about the auto repair industry and auto technicians; they can't fix cars in a timely and cost effective manner, no matter how much training they have. Moreover, auto mechanics over charge, or worse, charge for repairs not made or not needed. I also believe that the auto industry itself is solely to blame for this perception.

I am 43 years old and have been working on cars since I was 12 years old. I've worked at two GM dealerships since 1974 and am an ASE Master Technician and a GM/Oldsmobile Master Technician. In addition, I write a column on auto repair for The Family Handyman Magazine.

I agree 100% with Mr. Marchetti. The “bad guys” that are always showcased in these articles make up a tiny percentage of the industry. I also recognize that the public must be made aware of the complexity of an automobile's advanced electronic systems and what it takes to diagnose and repair them. But, if you asked 100 people on the street, 95 believe this is how the industry operates. Why? Because the few who are rip-off artists are not the problem. It is the incompetent who soil our reputation. Industry leaders are forcing the truly gifted technicians out of the business.

In 1980, we (auto service tech's) were told we were going to be lifted to a new plateau. We were now technicians and not mechanics. We would have to become certified, because of all the new technologies (computers, emission systems, etc.). The best part of this new age thinking, would be that our incomes would increase along with our stature. For over 11 years I believed all of this.

About three years ago it became painfully clear to me, that no matter how good I was at diagnosing and repairing cars, the industry was doing things the same way it did 25 years ago. Why pay a flat rate technician \$20 to \$25 per hour to do routine maintenance the quick lube stores pay Fluid Service Technicians \$5 per hour to do the same thing. The same goes for Midas, Goodyear, Sears, etc. These mass markets shops only want the “gravy repairs”, leaving the technical repairs to repair shops and the dealerships. As for the flat-rate system, its time has passed.

When Mr. Marchetti asks about the doctor charging twice for the same ailment, how would you feel if he or she had to do open heart surgery, in say, 2.5 hours. Do you think he or she might rush to get to the next surgery in or might take a short cut to get the surgery done quicker? To me that is an appalling thought.

When I was growing up, if you were unable to do anything else you, you could always become an auto mechanic. Two generations have believed this; ours and our parents. This is why I enrolled in the CITE/Vocational Education Program at Temple Univ.,

(Philadelphia, PA). I have decided to become an automotive instructor at either the community college or high school level. I see it as the next logical step in my own personal evolution. I want to be part of the solution and not part of the problem that faces the next generation of auto service professionals.

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Editors note: Thanks for your comments. You are not alone in your reaction to the Good Housekeeping article. Thank you for your letter. You make some excellent points.

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