

## Helpful tips on how to talk to your mechanic

All too often, minor automobile repairs turn into major problems due to poor communications between car owners and their mechanics.

While mechanics seem to speak a language all their own, consumers can narrow the automotive communications gap by following a few simple rules, says Dave Bowman, a former Indy 500 mechanic.

"It's very important that both you and your mechanic understand what you are trying to say," says Bowman. "Good communications in the beginning will save you a lot of time later, and will ensure the problem is corrected properly. But keep things simple to avoid any mix-ups."

Bowman, who is now technical communications manager for Allied Aftermarket Division, suppliers of Fram, Bendix and Autolite products, recommends that you find a mechanic you can trust and who's willing both to talk and to listen.

"Even if you seem to be boring the mechanic, don't be afraid to describe the symptoms fully, leaving nothing out. If the mechanic seems too bored to listen, you may want to find one who will," says Bowman.

• Take the car for a test drive with the mechanic. This is the best way for a mechanic to hear engine noises or get a real feel for the problem. If the mechanic can spare 15 minutes to do this, he may save both himself and you a lot of problems later.

In addition, a good mechanic often will suggest a series of diagnostic tests to ensure that the right thing gets fixed the first time.

• Describe to the mechanic exactly when the problem occurs. Does it occur when you start the car, after it's been running for a while, when stopping? This information will enable the mechanic to narrow the possibilities down quickly.

• Require a written estimate. Never give a mechanic carte blanche. Tell the mechanic to give you a call if he finds any other problems before doing any work.

• Ask if the mechanic guarantees his work in writing or what his policy is regarding repairs that need attention later if not done properly.

• Look at the mechanic's shop. Is he certified by the Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE)? What kind of equipment does he have? Does he seem to have a lot of business? Does it seem to be an orderly shop? If not, this may be an indication of the type of work he does.

• When discussing what needs to be done, be sure to explain when you last had everything checked. If you haven't had your belts, filters or spark plugs

checked in a while, this may be a good time to have it done.

Preventive maintenance is the best way to keep your car running smoothly and properly. Also, by keeping a log of repairs (plus oil and filter changes), you'll know what needs to be done and when.

"Most auto repair professionals are honest and most car owners are willing to pay a reasonable price for good repairs," concludes Bowman. "The difficulties between the two groups often are caused by poor communications."

"Smart consumers avoid problems and save money—simply by talking with their mechanic, making sure both parties understand each other and getting written estimates before any repairs are done."



**LINE OF COMMUNICATION:** A leading car care expert says that needless repairs and expense could be prevented if car owners and mechanics took the time to talk with—and listen to—each other.

## Grim results when you fill to brim

Do you try to "fill 'er up" to even money at the gas pump, causing the automatic nozzle to shut off several times before you're satisfied the tank is full? Break the habit, urges Car Care Council.

Overfilling can waste fuel and cause engine problems as well. Further, it pollutes the air.

The reason for all this, says the Council, is that raw gasoline at the top of the tank enters a tube leading to a vapor recovery container under the hood.

The charcoal filled canister is supposed to send gas vapors to the engine where they are burned off, but the raw gas presents a problem. It creates an over-rich mixture and causes poor combustion in the engine.

The results are poor gas mileage, rough running and possibly hard starting. You also may notice a gas odor in the car.

Unburned hydrocarbons from auto exhaust, a major cause of air pollution, have been reduced by 96 percent since 1960. The biggest source of trouble from

the tail pipe now is due to maintenance neglect: A dirty air filter, worn spark plugs, incorrect timing or general lack of tune-up.

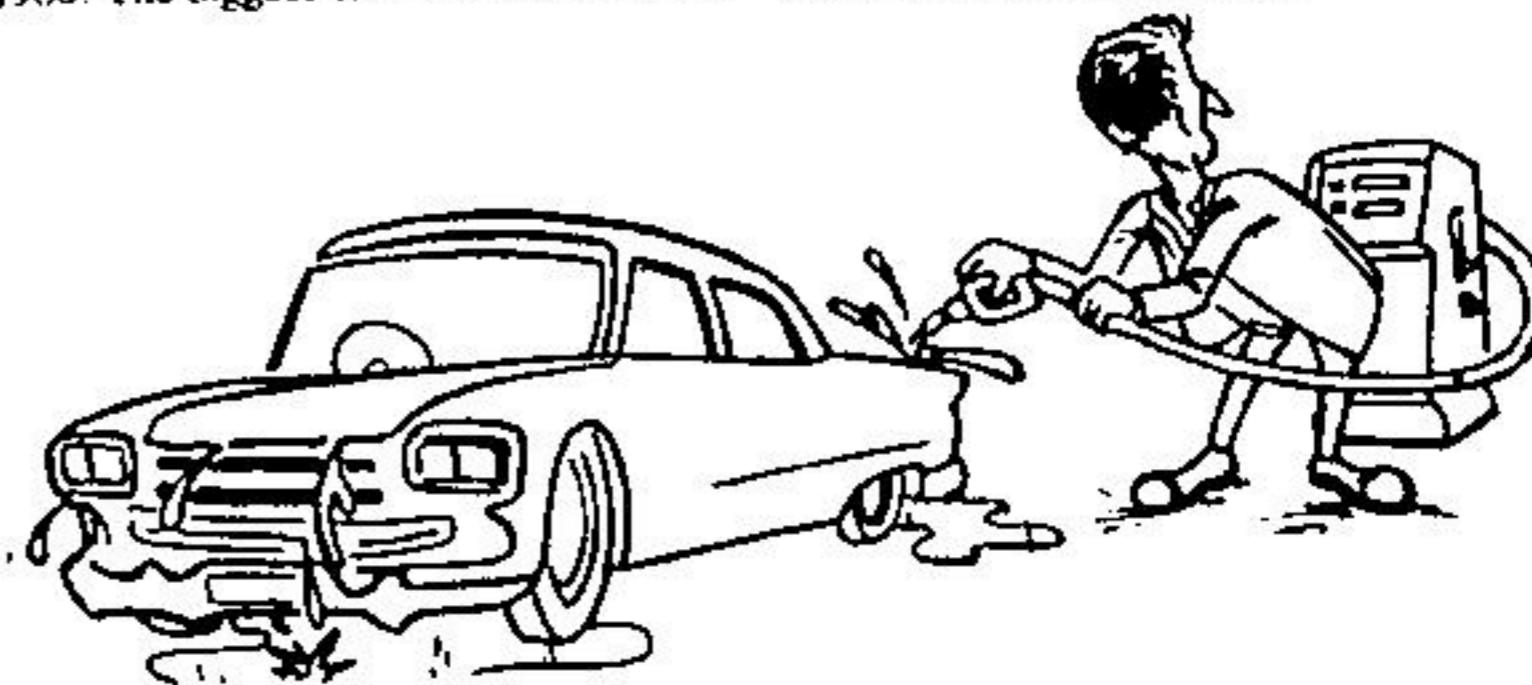
But other sources of hydrocarbon vapors, such as fuel evaporation when filling the vehicle, continue to plague us.

Corrective measures are being taken. In some states, for example, service stations must have special nozzles and hoses to capture these vapors and return them to the underground tanks. This is an expensive proposition, but effective.

There's talk of incorporating sealed systems on future vehicles, whereby the vapors cannot escape during the refueling process.

For now, however, vigilance is the answer.

And, of course, it is important to keep the engine in good mechanical condition. An added caution for motorists with respiratory ailments: Avoid gasoline fumes. They are especially irritating to sensitive lungs. Spend the little bit extra for full service, concludes Car Care Council.



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