

## Appliances vs. Modern Cars

By Doug McGregor

I'm puzzled by some of the workings of the modern world. When I was a kid (just a few years ago ;- ) home appliances lasted forever but cars wore out and/or rusted out pretty regularly. The Volvo commercials of some time ago boasted their cars lasted an average of 11 years in Sweden. That was well past the expectancy of most cars at that time here.

However I now drive a car that's into it's 16th year. While in 10 years, we are on our second oven, second dryer, second water heater, and countless toasters and kettles. And none of these are cheap!! Don't even get me started on cell phones!

This is upside down!

The fact that we, as consumers, have the odds stacked against us in terms of appliances "prematurely" wearing out or becoming obsolete shouldn't be a surprise. We're up against two things.

1) Advancement of Technology. There is an observation in electronics called Moore's law which notes that the power of electronics doubles every year or so. So, if you have something electronic in your possession, obsolescence is pretty much a sure thing in short order.

2) Corporate Greed. In 1925 the light bulb manufacturers of the day discovered their products were lasting too long! They entered into the Phoebus cartel to limit the lifetime of their bulbs so consumers would be forced to buy more. While this type of cartel is illegal these days, there is plenty of evidence that this kind of mentality still exists.

So I'm not at all upset how long cars last. They not only last longer but they are way more reliable than my first cars. It's just a shame that they cost so much to repair. However, like inkjet printers and their priceless inks I think that's where the car industry has deliberately driven their business. The dealerships certainly make more money out of the servicing than they do the original sale.

But it's the appliances that really bug me. Replacing them is getting increasingly expensive not to mention wasteful. Like many people, I know how to wield a screwdriver and I know which end of a soldering iron to hold onto, but I can't repair most units these days.

So where is this headed? Well, one thing of note is the burgeoning "right to repair" movement. Have a look around the web and you'll see a number of initiatives in this vein. Some of it comes from frustrated farmers who could no longer repair their own farm equipment. They couldn't get the tools (many of them computerized) to diagnose and fix their tractors etc. This means a lot of downtime and unnecessary expense. In fact the situation was even worse as they were legally prevented from doing so because of the T's and C's in their purchase agreements. *Ahhh ... the dreaded fine print!* Some legislatures in the United States are working on improving this situation.

Who's going to win? It's anybody's guess, but big money is at stake. I hope it's the consumer and the environment.

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