

Car Repair Prices: Are Manufacturers to Blame for Excessive Auto Repair Costs?

Article by: Theodore Olson

In the ongoing effort to shed light on excessive car repair prices, we can't discount the manufacturer's role. During a spirited discussion in an automotive forum, the comments below from Ray Fast highlight the role the manufacturer plays in taking money from the repair customer's wallet.

The discussion revolves around the difficulty of replacing an alternator in an Acura. The Acura, like all front wheel drive vehicles, has a transverse mounted engine. Transverse engines are the ones mounted sideways. Because of this "sideways" design, the alternator is mounted low and behind the engine, making it difficult to remove and replace on the year and model we discussed.

Front wheel drive has some good features, but is it better than its rear-wheel drive predecessor? Front wheel drive has created a host of additional repairs, none of which were necessary in years past. These repairs have been costing you, the service customer, a fortune.

Ray writes:

The shift to transverse engines and front wheel drive was a major marketing coup for the automobile industry. Vehicle manufacturers managed to dupe the market at large into believing that the new standard was somehow better than the previous convention of rear wheel drive.

[In reality] vehicles with transverse mounted engines and front wheel traction systems are less reliable mechanically, less stable, and less efficient than their traditional counterparts.

Advanced technology has compensated for these downfalls considerably; however, vehicles with traditional power and traction systems using similar technology are more reliable, safer, and more efficient. This is why high performance vehicles that are designed for applications requiring maximum stability "still" utilize inline engines and rear traction systems.

*The answer to the question [Why is the alternator in such hard to reach place] lies in this fact: cars with transverse engines and front wheel drive are **much less expensive to build**.*

By assembling the power plant and traction system as a complete module, then dropping the whole thing as one unit into the car, automobile manufacturers save gobs of money. The fact that the vehicles are considerably less serviceable (for instance, certain components are virtually impossible to access without removing the engine and transmission) is obviously of little, if any, concern to the manufacturer.

For that reason, anyone shopping for a new or used automobile should carefully evaluate the design, arrangement, and complexity of a potential purchase with regard to serviceability. The expense of owning a car is not confined to the sticker price. If you drive it, you're eventually going to need to fix it.

Ray's comments speak to the rising costs of car repair. Gone are the days of actually "fixing" cars. Now we frequently spend extra time throwing hard-to-reach, expensive parts in them.

Importantly, we need to remember that manufacturers have two primary objectives: **selling cars and selling parts**. How long it takes, how much it costs you, or how frustrated one gets removing and replacing components, means very little to the manufacturer. It doesn't affect their bottom line.

Fortunately, most manufacturers have moved away from "low-mounted" alternators (such as the Acura in our discussion) as the elements: rain, snow, dirt cause them to fail prematurely. However, the remaining cons of front wheel drive and a whole plethora of new manufacturer technological breakthroughs will continue to cost the service customer significantly in repairs.

(Comments from Ray Fast reprinted with permission from the author)-Ted Olson
Making sense of Auto Repair Prices

Ted holds extensive certifications from Mercedes-Benz, Toyota, General Motors, and ASE. Over a twenty-year period in the automotive service industry, he has served as a technician, shop foreman, shop manager, shop owner, service advisor, service manager, and service industry consultant. He is the author of eight books and numerous articles on the automotive service industry.

Other Works by Ted Olson Include: ARREST the Automotive Service Industry! Maintenance Myths: A Step-by-Step Guide to STOP Getting Ripped Off! Auto Repair: The Shocking Truth About Who's Ripping You Off and Why! Automotive Service Pricing Strategies—a fair pricing guide for service centers Being the Best—a comprehensive customer

service handbook for service advisors Service Center Personnel—an auto repair informational for general service staff
Service Mission Statement—a philosophical proposal to improve customer service