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December 9, 2016

My name is Brendan Sorensen and I am a second generation owner/manager in my family’s mechanical workshop – Steve Sorensen Mechanical, in Browns Plains, Queensland.  With the advancements in modern vehicles, we really go above and beyond, spending countless hours researching to try and stay on top of vehicle technology, but we are at a severe disadvantage to technicians in other countries through the intentional lack of support and sometimes downright bully tactics from Australian sold vehicle manufacturers.  These tactics result in inefficient use of time for us and ultimately rising prices for our customers.

We have had multiple problems in several areas -

1. Customers will often come in with new cars seeking our professional maintenance services only for us to be the first to inform them of the unfair terms they have signed up to with their dealer specific extended warranties.  Often due to poor explanation of the fine print at the dealership, all our hard work of explaining their rights of choice of repairer is undone when we find they have been bullied into signing an extended warranty which offers very little benefit over their standard consumer rights, but does lock them into a forced maintenance program, often overpriced, and often at the specific dealership where they purchased the car, which for some customers can be in another city.

2. Online service history reporting (electronic logbooks) have caused some concern for our customers. We essentially have to pay a fee to some car manufacturers to log into their portal to simply report our correct servicing of the car and enable the customer to  maintain their warranty and resale value, since no official record keeping book is provided with the car as it used to be. This cost is passed on to the customer and many agree the fee is not value for money simply to keep correct vehicle maintenance records. I fear that manufacturers can use this as a tool against us, with the aftermarket being forced to increase prices to accommodate multiple logins whilst the dealer utilities this basic service at a lower cost.

3.  A very common occurrence these days is time and money spent by customers for us to conduct correct diagnostic practices in an attempt to address a driveability concern, warning light or fault code, only to find after all components and systems test correctly that the problem is actually in the software of the vehicle, essentially an inherent fault in the code of the cars software.  These problems can be literally impossible to diagnose unless insider information is given, hence the creation of Technical Service Bulletins (TSB's) - documents circulated within dealerships with fixes to common, yet often very complicated, problems with vehicles.  I find that Australian dealers are far more secretive with these TSB's than our American counterparts, forcing me to often have to 'backdoor' information by digging through American based data, matching up American counterparts to our problem vehicle and finding a TSB that ultimately leads to a solution.  I would like to see more transparency in this area, to avoid customers spending money chasing inherent design flaws in vehicles that cannot be effectively tested, as the fault lies in the software itself.

An example -

The customers only complaint is that the 'Engine Malfunction Warning' light is on, the vehicle otherwise performs perfectly. A logged fault code 'P2096 Post Catalyst Fuel Trim System Too Lean Bank 1' is the cause of the warning light. All testing of the system shows correct operation of all components related, the fault code triggering the warning light is due to a design flaw in the way the manufacturers software is carrying out the test for this fault code. A software update is required to change the parameters of the P2096

Thank you

*Brendan Sorensen*

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