



What Your Mechanic Doesn't Want You to Know---Special Report

I got a question from a reader today: *Should I tell my mechanic to keep all of my old parts so I know that the parts actually got replaced?* I am sure you have all heard about asking your mechanic to give you the old parts that were replaced while working on your car, right?

About two years ago I played a joke on a customer who asked me to keep her old parts. She asked me to save the old parts--BEFORE we did any work, man nothing irks me more than a new customer who asks to have the old parts AFTER we have done the work.

Digging around in trash cans is **NOT** the best thing to have me remember you for. Anyway, back to my story. I gave this customer an air conditioning compressor and told her it was her old water pump that we replaced, and she believed me. Yes, I did tell her I was just testing her to see if she knew what it was she was looking at. I think some people just set themselves up for being taken advantage of.

Here is something I think is much more beneficial to you as a customer and to the shop doing the work. Ask your mechanic to use brand name or dealer parts whenever there is a "critical component" being replaced. Critical component? Think of it as something that will leave you stranded or could compromise safety.

Some critical components would be: water pumps, alternators, starters, fuel pumps, etc....

Some non-critical items would be: air filters, spark plugs, fluids, brake pads, etc.

Ask your mechanic to use his best judgment when determining critical items. You will probably pay more for these parts now, but in the long run you will be glad you did. Case in point. Last month a good friend of mine had the fuel pump in his Chevy Tahoe go out while he was visiting here in the Houston area. He had this fuel pump replaced 15 months prior at his usual repair shop, and he had requested that they use the dealer replacement pump.

Although his mechanic offers a 12-month free replacement warranty policy, he was not only over the time limit but also hundreds of miles away from home. He called me and asked to have his vehicle towed to my shop for repair. He showed me the invoice from his mechanic and the brand name of the pump he had told them to *write* on the invoice (**very smart**)! I have a wonderful relationship with my part supplier, and I knew that my vendor would honor the manufacture warranty for my friend. We put the old defect pump in the new box and sent it off for credit.

So you are saying to yourself...ya Austin sounds great so what! Well the punch line to the story is the pump has a retail price of \$497 **just for the part!** I billed him for the tow charge and labor only. I would have done this for anyone not just a friend of mine, this is a great way to win over a new customer, and I still made money!!! **BUT**, I would not have done it if his mechanic had replaced the pump with a cheaper product that I don't have a **good working relationship** with the local vendor for.

If I can't send it to my local supplier (we have a weekly representative that comes to our shop to handle warranty and defect claims) then I will probably not go out of my way to help you. If all I have to do is place your defect part in the new box, and place it on my warranty shelf....and still charge you labor, you bet I will help you out. Some auto parts are *region or area specific*, and might not be available in all cities. Some parts are *store specific* and can only be returned at a particular franchise.

So the small added cost of the name brand pump saved my friend lots of money in the long run. Ask your mechanic to write the name brand of the parts being replaced on your repair invoice. Also, it would be a good idea to ask if the part carries a longer warranty than your mechanic normally honors. I can think of two manufactures that will give lifetime part replacement, so all you pay your mechanic is the labor if the part breaks.

Some lifetime or extended parts are: Muffler and catalytic converters (some catalytic converters are covered for 100,000 by the manufacture--check before you replace), brake pads, shocks and struts.

What about shops that use cheaper band name parts but charge you the price of the well-known brands. I have seen shops get credit from their part supplier for defect parts that are out of the "shop warranty period," but still covered under the part manufacture warranty. The shop then billed their customer again for the part even though it was a free warranty replacement to the shop.

This is very common unfortunately, but there is a simple thing you can do to avoid it. You are going to tell your mechanic that you would like to use name brand or dealer parts whenever there is a critical component being replaced, right? But how do you know that actually happens?

Ask the mechanic to put the old part in the new box, write down the brand name on the invoice and include any additional warranty information about the part on the invoice as well. If it is a true dealer/manufacture part it will have the name of your vehicle manufacture on the box, i.e. Honda (duh).

Some items that are re-manufactured, like alternators and starters will have a "core charge" attached to them, and they will require the shop to return YOUR old part in the original box for core credit. You will NOT get your old part OR the box that the new part came in.

A "core" is your old part that is sent to the part manufacture for rebuilding. When you purchase a re-manufactured part, you are buying someone else's old rebuild part, and sending your part in for exchange. Don't think the mechanic is pulling the wool over your eyes when you ask for the old part back, and they say no! You can however BUY your old core part from them.

The shop will get money back from the core return like a deposit. That core charge was already billed into the price of the part when the mechanic purchased it, and when he returns it he gets his core charge back. He will not **MAKE** additional profit from the core return. There is a chance that the core you give the mechanic is not able to be rebuilt and if so, the core charge will **not** be refunded. How does *this* happen?

I have seen air conditioner compressors seize or lock-up completely from lack of lubrication. A seized compressor is worthless to a part rebuilder. If this happens you *might* be billed an additional amount to cover the core charge. I have also seen core charges that equal the amount of the part itself...they **REALLY** want the old part back!

There is usually nothing wrong with re-built parts like starters and alternators. I have not had much personal luck installing re-built air conditioning compressors, water pumps and brake master cylinders. There is usually a pretty substantial price savings when using re-built or re-manufactured parts.

You should tell your mechanic (before he does the work) that the reason you want quality brand name critical parts with their boxes is so you can help *him* in the event of a warranty problem. You don't want him to think you don't trust him, but you want to hold on to the box just in case there is a problem in the future.

You will probably **NOT** have that many (hopefully) critical parts replaced on your car in a year, so you should not (unless you own a Yugo or something like that) be inundated with boxes. Put the box and the part in the trunk for safe keeping in case you are on a trip or away from your regular mechanic for some reason. This tactic should keep your mechanic honest, prevent you from being over charged for inferior parts, and give you some peace of mind. In case of an out-of-town break down, you can at least tell the mechanic what is really under your hood.

I hope you have a wonderful day!

Thanks again,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Austin C Davis', with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Austin C Davis

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