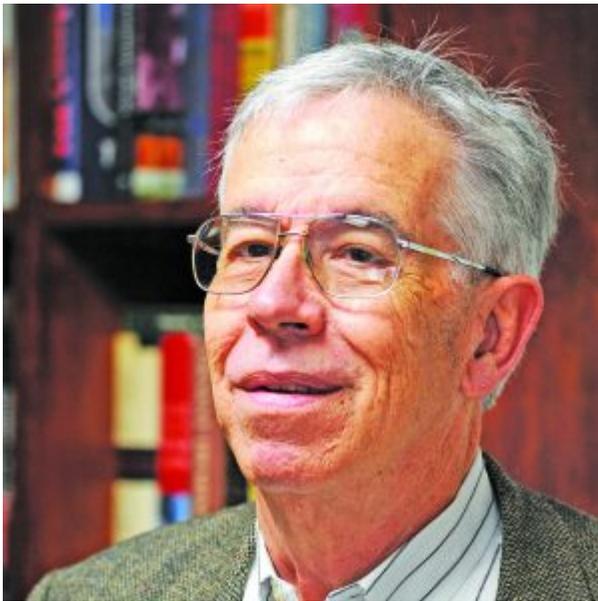


Skilled auto mechanics are close to rocket scientists



By Doane Yawger

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Auto mechanics are amazing people. I am awed by the knowledge and skills mechanics have in making our cars run right.

Cars have always been intricate and sophisticated creations. Even the primitive Ford Model T, which is more than 100 years old, is a vast array of parts and pieces. Just look at an “exploded” view of a Model T in a vintage repair manual and you’ll get the idea.

In the intervening century, our cars and trucks have become even more elaborate. Factor in the presence of computers in most modern vehicles and the intricacy level becomes even more mind-boggling. One tiny computer chip that costs hundreds of dollars can disable a car.

I must admit I am not the least bit mechanically inclined. I wouldn’t dare attempt much more than filling the car up with gas. Anything more than that could do lasting harm.

An auto mechanic needs to know what all the parts and pieces are in the engines or transmissions they are working on and what their function is. They need to know how each part goes in and comes out and what signs these parts exhibit when they go bad.

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Some of the training in “mechanichood” comes from classes at schools or technical institutes, reading the motor manuals or from observing seasoned mechanics doing their work. Some of it may be from learning as they go.

A mechanic has to have the gift of working with his or her hands and being able to think things through.

This mechanical knowledge must cover electrical elements, how two parts are joined together and the proper way to take them apart and put them back together.

Then you factor in all the supporting pieces of a car, like its suspension, fuel, battery and charging systems, linkage, and lubrication. It’s almost rocket science!

Mechanics also must be able to examine a certain part and know that it’s bad. Years ago I looked at a used wheel bearing but had absolutely no idea that it was damaged beyond repair by heat.

These days there are diagnostic systems that can determine what’s wrong with our computerized cars. As inanimate objects, cars can’t tell you that they need a valve job or the carburetor is plugged with gunk. But diagnostic machines can instantly determine the offending part or system.

So my hat’s off to skilled mechanics. They also have to know what kind of tools they will need to perform their repairs and how to properly use them. Using too much force to remove a stubborn bolt or nut could be counterproductive. Mechanics learn where to find the parts they need, what they are likely to cost and how long it takes to do certain jobs.

There will always be a place for skilled mechanics in our society. They should be highly esteemed for their ability to make our world run smoothly.

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Doane Yawger of Merced is a semi-retired newspaper reporter and editor who continues to write for publications including the Merced County Times. As the author of the Motor Musings column, Doane Yawger provides readers with an inside perspective on everything automotive.

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