

Under the Hood



The newsletter of CATHERINE'S Auto Repair & Service

Piedmont Location

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FALL 2003

We're
Celebrating our
Third Anniversary!



catherine's corner

I need your help!

As October marks the third anniversary of the opening of Catherine's Auto Repair, I find myself reflecting on what we are doing right as well as what could be improved. For the first year and eight months of being in business, I made sure that I personally dealt with every single customer. I had a good grasp on our strengths and weaknesses. But common sense and business basics eventually prevailed over my reluctance to let go, and I finally hired my first service advisor, Rufus Hunley (featured on p. 2). As we have continued to grow, my involvement with our customers has become more indirect, though still active – reading every invoice to stay on top of what's happening, listening to Kim about the feedback from her follow-up calls, studying the trends of repeat business and customer referrals. But the only way I really know how we're doing is to hear it from you. Although the e-mails and phone calls I receive from happy customers truly make my day, it is also important to me to learn whenever we have fallen short of our mission statement. So here is how you can help – if you ever believe we have not lived up to our standards, please call or e-mail me. **We really want to get it right!**



Photo by Fred Bennett

Catherine

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Our Mission:

To provide high quality auto repair with integrity, honesty, and excellent customer service, all at a fair price and with a personal touch!

What's the Deal with the Dealer?

There are many common misconceptions about the dealer: you have to take your car to the dealer for everything while it's under warranty; only the dealer can perform scheduled services and/or extended warranty repairs; a recall is just a way for the dealer to get you back into their shop so they can sell you more work. We hear variations on these beliefs daily. Hopefully the following will help dispel these myths and explain the meaning of warranties, services, and recalls, as well as clarify the "who's who" of the automotive industry.

The manufacturer, often referred to as "the factory," is the maker of the vehicle. They are the ones who provide the warranty on a new car. The dealer is an authorized seller and service provider for the manufacturer, though owned and operated independently of them. When something breaks on your new car that is covered under the factory warranty, you must take it to an authorized dealer if you want the work done for free. The dealer however is not the one absorbing the costs of this repair; the manufacturer will reimburse the dealer for their parts and labor on the job.

So obviously it will save you money to take your car back to the dealer for warranty work. But what about "customer-pay" jobs, such as brakes or services? Although both the dealer and manufacturer may try to convince you that your warranty will be void if you take your car anywhere other than the dealer during the warranty period, this simply is not true. Never having changed your oil for 30,000 miles, for example, may nullify your warranty if your engine goes bad; but providing receipts as proof of having had the oil changed regularly will keep that warranty in force regardless of where the maintenance was performed.

Even after the warranty period has expired, many people remain confused in thinking that the dealer is the only place that can perform their scheduled services. The manufacturer creates the maintenance schedule, based on the preventive services they believe will help keep your vehicle in top shape (please read "I Just Need a Tune-Up" for more information on preventive maintenance). This schedule is then accessible to both dealers and independent shops for servicing customer's vehicles. If it's time for your 60,000-mile checkup, don't be fooled by the official service booklet with blank spaces for the dealer stamp. These services are relatively basic and can be easily completed by any reputable auto repair facility.

Continued on Page 2

What's the Deal with the Dealer?

Continued from Page 1

Extended warranties are different from factory warranties and are rarely covered by the manufacturer, unless specifically bought through them. Extended warranties work more like insurance – you buy the warranty from a company who then pays for the covered repair work when needed. A few companies out there require you to patronize the dealer when having the work done, but mostly you are free to take your vehicle to any repair shop that chooses to participate in extended warranty programs.

Factory recalls are similar to factory warranties in that you may have the repair work done for free at the dealership, which will again be reimbursed by the manufacturer. A recall is issued by the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) when, after investigating enough consumer complaints, they determine that the manufacturer is responsible for a safety related defect on a particular vehicle. The manufacturer is required to send out notices to the registered owners of vehicles fitting the year, make, model, and production date that was found to be defective.

Make your next appointment online at
www.catherinesautorepair.com

Sometimes you may misplace or ignore a recall notice that was mailed to you, or maybe you moved and never received it at all. What can be done then? Go to www.nhtsa.gov to find out the recalls that exist for your car. If you bought the car used and are uncertain if the recalls for your vehicle have been performed, you may call the dealer and give them your VIN (vehicle identification number). Their database should be able to tell you which recalls, if any, have been completed on your vehicle. Since the recalls are for safety related items, it is a good idea to go ahead and have them taken care of.

The NHTSA website can also be helpful for you in making sure that you don't pay for repairs that you could be having done at no charge. We have an astute customer who recently had a defective alternator in his 1997 Nissan Maxima. After hearing the cost of this repair, he did some research and found that there was a recall for this exact problem; unfortunately the production date of his vehicle did not meet the criteria for this recall. But this information proved helpful a few weeks ago when we had another customer with a malfunctioning alternator in a '97 Maxima. He was not aware of the recall, but was ecstatic when we called the dealer with his VIN, and found out he was eligible for this free repair.

We do our best to stay informed on major and recent recalls, but there are so many it is virtually impossible to be aware of them all. Even most service advisors at the dealer won't know all of their recalls off the top of their heads. So that's when it's best for you to take control of your situation by periodically looking up your vehicle on the NHTSA website. Most of the time, the repairs you need to have done won't be listed as a recall. But for that one occasion when you find an expensive repair listed as a recall for your particular vehicle, it will feel a little bit like winning the lottery!

employee Spotlight

Rufus Hunley is a Master ASE certified technician who is currently the service manager at our Northside shop. Born and raised in Atlanta, he attended both North Fulton High School and Morehouse College. His career started with serving three years in the Army, including a stint in the Gulf War, and three years in the Reserves. His interest in cars, computers, and technology prompted him to take some automotive courses and then to complete a Honda training program. (Yes, he is still driving a 1991 Honda Accord with more than 300,000 miles on it!) He worked for several years as a Honda Master Tech, service advisor, and manager before joining Catherine's in June 2002. His dedication and hard work made him the obvious choice to take over as manager when the second shop opened last March.



When Rufus is not at work, he enjoys spending time with his family. He has a wife, Natasha; sons, Rufus and Jacob; and a daughter, Shatavia. And as if that's not enough to keep him busy, he still makes it a priority to stay involved in the community. He volunteers as a part-time sheriff's deputy for Fulton County, and he is active with his local chapter of Masons. We feel privileged to have Rufus as part of our team!



Rufus' three children, Shatavia, Rufus and Jacob, enjoying ice cream at our Employee Summer Pool Party.

**Annual Maintenance
Package
\$99**

*Includes up to 4 oil changes
2 tire rotations and balancing
1 alignment (over \$200 value)*

Valid for 1 year from purchase

shop talk

AAA October Car Care Event

We enjoyed participating in AAA's Car Care Event last month. Technicians from AAA Approved Auto Repair shops (including us!) conducted FREE maintenance and safety inspections on any and all vehicles that stopped by. This included checking fluids, lights, belts, hoses, and tires, as well as a free test of the car's battery and electrical system. It was a busy day and a huge success. We hope to help host a similar event with AAA next spring.



Holiday Closings

We will be closed at both shops on Thursday, November 27, and Friday, November 28, and closed for the weekend as always.

We will close at the Northside location Wednesday, December 24, around lunchtime and will re-open Monday, January 5, at 7 a.m. If you need assistance during that time, please call the Piedmont shop at 404-875-7212.

The Piedmont location will be closed December 24 (half-day), December 25, and January 1, and will be open with reduced staff on the other business days in between.

We wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season!

car care class

Back by popular demand, we are offering another Women-Only Car Care Class.

Have you ever felt helpless when your battery was dead or if you had a flat tire? Have you always wanted to take the mystery out of lifting your car's hood and having a look around? Have you wanted to feel more empowered when discussing your car with a repair shop? Well then, come join us!!

The upcoming class will be held on Saturday, November 22, from 9 a.m. until noon, at the Northside Drive location. There is no charge for this class, and breakfast will be provided. We recommend that you wear comfortable clothes that you don't mind getting dirty. Please call 404-875-7212 to sign up as space is limited. For more information, go to our website, www.catherinesautorepair.com.

"I Just Need a Tune-Up"

We hear this phrase all the time from customers – "tune-up" – and often use it ourselves as well. The term originated back in the days when you could actually "tune" an engine by adjusting the carburetor, idle, and timing. Some customers request tune-



Good



Worn



Heavy deposits

ups now because their cars are running bad, and they understandably think the engine just needs to be "tuned" back to factory specifications. However, with current technology, the majority of cars driven on the road today have fuel injectors instead of carburetors, and computer controlled idle and timing so that adjustments cannot be made.

Another common meaning for a tune-up nowadays can include replacing spark plugs and other ignition system components such as spark plug wires, distributor cap, and rotor (although those last two parts are slowly becoming obsolete as well, superseded by the more advanced distributorless ignition systems). But spark plugs usually only need to be replaced every 30,000 miles at the most, and the frequently used platinum spark plugs are engineered to last between 60,000 and 100,000 miles.

Often I think when customers say they need a tune-up because they haven't had one in a while, they are referring to their regularly scheduled services of preventive maintenance. Everyone knows they need them, but they don't necessarily know why, and they certainly don't know what or when. Kind of like going to the dentist or doctor, it's just something you know you're supposed to do but is easy to procrastinate, especially if you're not actually experiencing any problems.

We must remember that preventive maintenance is just that – preventive, an attempt to prevent problems before they arise. Neglected fluids can cause premature wear of parts; a clogged PCV valve (positive crankcase ventilation) can result in an oil leak elsewhere; a broken timing belt can ruin an engine. Most automotive experts believe that regular maintenance and service on your vehicle is the most important thing you can do to reduce breakdowns and prolong the life of your car.

Once you are convinced of the importance of keeping up with your services, or "tune-ups", next you need to know what should be done and when. The recommendations for each car will be different according to the manufacturer's service intervals, your driving habits, your long-term goal with the vehicle, and – let's be realistic – your budget. We would be happy to sit down with you and evaluate past records to ensure that you are up-to-date with your maintenance, and then create a program in our computer for your future service schedule. This will also help guard against duplicating services unnecessarily (e.g. you have a major service performed at the dealer, then six months later a quick lube facility recommends a coolant flush with your oil change; you can't remember when you last had one done, so you tell them to go ahead). We are beginning a service reminder program for those who would like a friendly nudge when the next maintenance interval or oil change is due. Please let us know if you would like to participate.

car quiz

Q: What is the correct amount of air pressure for your tires?

- a. it is listed on the inside frame of the driver's door
- b. it is imprinted on the sidewall of the tire
- c. 32 pounds per square inch (psi)
- d. 30 psi in winter, 34 psi in summer

A: Many people believe the number shown on the outside of the tire to be the correct answer, but that is actually the maximum pressure allowed. In other words, you really don't want your tires quite that full of air! 32 psi may be the answer for many tires, but certainly not all of them, so don't just assume it to be applicable to your car. And although (d) raises an important point about the difference in air pressure when hot vs. cold, this one-size-fits-all kind of answer for tire pressure still doesn't work. (Incidentally, the most accurate way to measure tire pressure is in the morning when the tires are cold, before having been driven.) The correct answer is (a) – you should be able to find the recommended tire pressure for both front and rear tires listed on the driver's door jamb. (If it's not there, check your glove compartment door or owner's manual.) This pressure has been determined to provide the optimal combination of performance, handling, and gas mileage for your vehicle.

tech tip

Prepare for winter's slippery roads by checking your tires' pressures and tread (see the Car Quiz for more info on checking tire pressures). How do you know when it's time for new tires? Although the most accurate way to measure remaining tire tread is with a tread depth gauge (3/32 inch is recommended replacement, 1/16 inch is the minimum tread allowed by law), there is another simple method you can easily carry out at home. Take a penny and insert it upside-down into the tread, with Lincoln's head pointing downward into the tread groove. If his entire head is showing above the tread, that tire needs to be replaced. Be sure and measure the tread in three places across the tire – the outside edge, the center, and the inside edge. If the tread is too low in any of these spots, the tire is unsafe and needs to be replaced. Uneven wear across the tire usually indicates either improper tire inflation or misaligned wheels.



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Respect for You and Your Car

CATHERINE'S
Automotive
Repair &
Service



1916 Piedmont Circle, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30324

10% OFF SPECIAL

10% off any preventive maintenance or scheduled service. Good through December 31, 2003.