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If you walked into your local car dealer and requested a 30,000-mile maintenance service, is it safe to assume that the dealer will follow manufacturer guidelines when servicing your car? Should the dealer â€œonlyâ€• follow manufacturer guidelines? Can they bend the guidelinesâ€¦?

Hereâ€™s a recent and very common scenario that occurred at a local Toyota dealershipâ€¦.

A service customer called the dealer to schedule the manufacturerâ€™s recommended 30,000-mile service for his 2005 4-Cylinder Camry. However, the dealer added several services NOT included in the guidelines.

The additional services included a coolant flush (drain and refill), automatic transmission service (drain and refill), and a power steering fluid change.

According to the manufacturer, the coolant does not need to be replaced until 100,000 miles. The automatic transmission fluid can last until 120,000 miles. And there is no specific maintenance interval for the power steering fluid.

Now, before we throw the dealer under the bus, which, donâ€™t get me wrong, is always a blast to do, is there any legitimacy in recommending these extra services? Are there any circumstances where one may want to consider performing a coolant or transmission service 70,000 to 90,000 miles sooner than recommended by the manufacturer of the car? If we assume that weâ€™re not driving the vehicle beyond its limits, such as racing, off-road, or a high-speed police chase, the answer is no â€“ not in this case.

There are times, however, when it is ok to venture outside manufacturer guidelines. The conditions include, but are not limited to: maintenance neglect, abuse, vehicle age, poor manufacturer design, and poor quality of fuel.

While each of the exceptions above are fun to explore, we should highlight fuel quality concerns. Poor gas quality often leads to carbon build up, which can be remedied by a professional fuel injection service. Aside from this fuel cleaning service (which no manufacturer recommends during regular maintenance), there is no service outside of the manufacturer guidelines that offers any real or lasting benefit.

So how can a dealer recommend services outside of the guidelines set by the manufacturer of the product that they sell and service?

The answer is that car dealerships (the majority anyway) are independent of the manufacturer. In other words, theyâ€™re not bound to adhere to set guidelines. In fact, many dealers create there own maintenance schedules. This creative practice is increasing as manufacturers continue to extend maintenance services, stripping dealers of there usual high and comfortable profit margins.

Interestingly, in terms of service, a manufacturer and a dealer are in opposition of one another. Manufacturerâ€™s set vehicle maintenance schedules to keep vehicles maintained according to their standards; however, one of those standards is â€œlow cost.â€• Low maintenance costs net a positive image to the manufacturer. The service center in a dealership on the other hand, wants cars to be as â€œhigh costâ€• as possible to maintain.

Despite all this, there is another possibility worth exploring in this dealer versus manufacturer scenario. Given that the client called the dealer itâ€™s likely that he spoke with an untrained and under-qualified customer service representative. The representative may have misled the client, providing outdated maintenance recommendations, as the older Toyotaâ€™s did in fact require the coolant and transmission services mentioned above.

In larger dealerships, telephones are usually answered by Call Centers. This is a group of people who know little about cars, but are generally pleasant on the phone. Call Center representatives are famous for providing misinformation and miss-reading a detailed automotive service menu, such as a 30,000-mile service on a 2005 4-Cylinder Camry. In other words, one of these representatives may have listed services which are NOT actually part of the service. This happens every day! Few noticeâ€¦who actually remembers anything after: the service includes and oil and filter change, check fluids, belts, hoses, replace the air filter, set tire pressuresâ€¦.blah, blah, blahâ€¦

The owner of the Camry was quoted $450 â€“ which - if the dealer was actually going to perform all that it stated, and the car actually needed it â€“ would actually be a good deal.

The real and fair price according to manufacturer guidelines for a 30,000-mile service on a 2005 4-Cylinder Toyota Camry is $272.03 @ $100 per hour. To see the break down of the FAIR charges, cut and paste the following URL into your browser:

http://www.repairtrust.com/auto_repair_estimate_toyota_camry_4cyl_auto_2005_30k_serv.html

The service includes the following:

Inspections:

Inspect ball joints and dust covers

Inspect brake hoses/lines

Inspect brakes, pads/discs/runout

Inspect and test traction control

Inspect CV joints and boots

Inspect coolant

Inspect automatic transmission fluid

Inspect differential fluid (A/T trans)

Inspect radiator/hoses

Inspect steering system

Inspect exhaust

Inspect fuel system/lines/hoses/gas cap/induction system

The only items that actually get or require replacement:

Engine oil and filter

Cabin filter

Air filter

Transmission fluid (manual transmissions only)

Other services:

Reset maintenance reminder light

Rotate tires

Tighten nuts and bolts on chassis

The frequency of manipulating the guidelines with extra services is astounding. And itâ€™s only one tactic of hundreds. Stretching pre-determined guidelines expands across all makes, models â€“ foreign and domestic, and occurs at dealers, local shops and franchises. It occurs because the automotive service industry has zero accountability in any tangible sense.

Thus the service customer has no true advocate, information, or resources in which to turn, that can provide sound, fair, and reasonable prices and advice. For this reason alone, rests the foundation of RepairTrust.

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