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Industry News

Here's Your \$39 Brake Job

Do you want to damage this industry?

By Brian Cruickshank, AAP
editor

Promote repair jobs well below their real-world cost.

When does a \$39 brake job hurt this industry? It damages the industry's reputation every time a brake job doesn't cost \$39.

How much does it cost to fix a dragging caliper on a 2000 Mustang? If you believe some of the advertising that continues around the country, it should only cost \$39.

But those of us in the industry know better, right? Considering I work with a bunch of pretty experienced aftermarket professionals, I asked that same question around the office and got answers in the \$350 range. The actual price charged by a national service chain on a repair bill that crossed my desk: \$912.03.

Of course, I will concede that there are circumstances that might push an R.O. into the upper strata of cost: unique repair situations, elusive electronics diagnostics, hard-to-find parts, etc. However, here we're talking about a dragging caliper on a Ford.

So where did all the money go? As I analyze the copy of the work order, the numbers show exactly where the gouging — I mean price adjustments — occurred.

For this 2000 non-GT, non-Cobra Mustang, the following work was performed: replacement of two loaded rear calipers, brake fluid exchange and replacement of two rear rotors. This is exactly what you'd expect to be done for a car with a dragging caliper.

The labor, which totaled \$164.20, seems to be fine and shows that there was no long, drawn-out diagnostics going

on. Labor was \$125 on the calipers, \$17 on the rotors and \$22 on the fluid. The parts total? A whopping \$655.

It's pretty apparent that this shop was gouging its customer on parts. For example, the shop charged \$420.82 for a set of loaded (non-ceramic) calipers. Based on calls I made to several jobber stores in the shop's area, the best installer price on a set of good-quality loaded rear calipers (ceramics even) should be around \$150. These calipers were then marked up \$270!

Thankfully, the customer declined to "upgrade" to ceramic pads, the price for which is also noted on the bill. The quoted price on a set of installed rear ceramics? \$235.32.

About a year ago, I was lamenting the state of pricing in the field. I wondered why one store would sell the same parts at wildly different prices. I wondered how the industry could get better at pricing at the jobber, installer and customer levels. Now I'm starting to realize that, in the minds of consumers, it doesn't really matter. When the industry touts its ability to fix problems at low-ball prices, it sets consumers up for extreme disappointment. In this particular case, \$912 is a long, long way from \$39.

Even though those of us in the industry know a brake job can't be done for \$39, the majority of consumers don't know that. All they know is, once again, they're getting screwed by the auto repair business. That's a sentiment none of us wants. 🌐

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