

## Driver's ed

By: **GRETCHEN BARRETT-HANAFY** (Tue, May/15/2007)

We've come a long way, baby! Sort of.

We research, bargain and negotiate its purchase. We rely on it daily to take our families safely to and fro, yet in light of that and in spite of all the progress we've made and independence we've gained, most women would reluctantly admit the inner workings of the average automobile remain a mystery.

After fielding car-related questions from women over the years, Scott Santos, owner of Tony & Lenny's Auto Service, located at the Lukoil station in Cinnaminson, decided to educate his female customers.

"After answering lots of their questions and realizing that many women are solely responsible for the care of the cars, the idea for the class came about," said Santos, who worked at Tony and Lenny's for 10 years before purchasing the business four years ago.

On a recent Saturday morning, Santos and several members of his staff opened the bays of his station and invited women in to learn more about their vehicles.

Seven women and two men attended the free clinic, settling into chairs set up in the station's service bays, as Santos went over some of the basics of car repair and maintenance.

"I've been working with cars since I was 16, when I worked at a gas station in Medford," he said. "And still, we're constantly learning, updating our skills."

He and the other auto technicians in the shop spend several nights each month educating themselves and keeping up with the rapidly changing technical side of the business, he said.

"We generally do one two-day class a month just to keep up on everything," said Bob Flynn of Cinnaminson, who manages the gasoline portion of the business.

Santos said the course covers everything from basic engine design and operation to information about properly maintaining the tires.

It's important to be as knowledgeable as you can about your car when speaking with a mechanic, he said. It's not that mechanics are dishonest, according to Santos, it's that many of them are incompetent. They're not necessarily trying to take advantage of people, they just don't want to admit they don't know what that funny knocking sound is, either.

He also suggested women establish a rapport with a service department or station.

"Build a relationship with them. It's very important to have a relationship with a full service shop," he said.

Another tip from Santos: Cheap isn't good and good isn't cheap — at least when it comes to car parts.

He displayed several brake parts, all from the same manufacturer, all with different levels of quality — fair, good, better and best. Know your options. Santos also demonstrated how a mechanic determines if brakes are needed. A reliable mechanic will tell you if, and when, you need to replace certain parts, such as brakes.

"A good shop will offer you a warranty," he said. "They should offer you at least a year, but it's hard to guarantee a part we don't make if the company that does (make it) doesn't stand behind it," he said.

And that annoying "check engine" light? Resist the urge to balance this month's utility bill on the dash in front of it. Have it checked out.

"You can ignore it and drive with it, Santos warned, but you'll get less fuel economy, more emissions and you stand a chance of damaging your car."

The little red light could be an indicator of several problems, but most of the time, he said, it's not an expensive fix.

"Maintenance costs a lot less than repairs," he said.

Like many women, class member Carol Wentz of Maple Shade used to rely on a man for help with her car and would like to handle it on her own.

"My son, who was helping me maintain my car, moved to North Carolina," she said. "I was concerned, being a woman, with being ripped off."

Wentz said she was particularly interested in the fact that the workshop would cover the questions one should ask at a repair shop before leaving a car for service.

"I just learned I have to change my brake fluid," she said. "I want to learn how to change a tire next."

If you find yourself with a flat tire on the road, don't change it unless you have to, Santos said. He recommends getting a AAA membership or calling a car service.

"It's a headache you don't want to deal with if you don't have to," he said. "AAA is well worth it for that one time you're stuck on the road. Every car's a little different when it comes to changing a tire. Maintain your spare tire. Take care of it and check it occasionally, (since) they can lose air."

Use caution when driving on a spare. Automobile manufacturers have compromised a bit with spare tires to save weight and space.

"(Spares are) smaller and narrower than the regular tire," he said. "Go slower than 50 miles per hour and don't go far. It's only meant to get you to the next place."

Santos also suggested several items women drivers should keep on hand in the car:

- You won't want to hike up a hill in heels, carry an old pair of sneakers, in case you have to walk any distance.
- For obvious reasons, pack jumper cables.
- In case you get stranded or the heater fails, bring a blanket or extra jacket to keep warm.
- Gloves to protect your hands and keep them clean and a flashlight are a good idea to bring along.
- And in the unlikely event you'll want to get under the car, a piece of cardboard or old blanket to lie on and keep you clean can be kept in the trunk.

Surprising many participants was the lowdown on liquids. Automobile fluids are not always as they seem.

That little green puddle under your car in the driveway is not necessarily antifreeze, according to Santos.

Different manufacturers now use different colors of antifreeze in their cars. Red, green, yellow. One auto maker uses a clear antifreeze.

"It was wonderful, excellent," Elenore Heinig of Cinnaminson, said of the class. "I definitely came away with some good information. I have a new car, a '95 Chevy with On-Star, and I'm not sure about it. He gave me a few hints," she said.

Jessica Flynn of Cinnaminson also attended the class. At 16, Flynn hopes to be driving her own car soon.

"(The class) has been really great," she said. "I want to learn more about cars and car care."

Technician Mark Platt of Riverside showed Flynn the differences in tires and rims, using his 2003 SUV as a model.

"I didn't know every car was different. I didn't know about different colors of antifreeze," Flynn said. "Hopefully, they'll do this every year."

"You want to find someone you can trust and who will show you what's wrong (with your car)," Santos said. "A good shop should know what they've done (to your car) and have it on the computer. Build a relationship with them."

**E-Mail: [GRETCHEN BARRETT-HANAFY](mailto:GRETCHEN.BARRETT-HANAFY)**

---

Article's URL:

<http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/112-05152007-1346840.html>