

Easy Work For Auto Buffs

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Easy Work For Auto Buffs

If you're a tinkerer with a yen for fixing cars, you can easily turn your love of tinkering into a profitable sideline by offering your talents to less knowledgeable car owners. You can do this in one of several ways. You can do fast fix-up work for people trying to sell their cars, be a specialist on specific models of cars, do mobile tune-ups or start a backyard car lot.

If you do this work for fun anyway, you'll find this is a most rewarding way to spend your free hours, and if you can diversify, advertise well and build up a good clientele, you can operate a car-services business out of your own home and make a good living wage.

Tidy-Car (TM) has turned the first idea into a highly successful franchise operation. It's not difficult to understand why. Armed with only a powerful vacuum, a few polymer coating compounds, cleaning compounds and a few gallons of hot wax, you can add up to 10 to 30 percent to the selling price of the average used car by just making it look better. Any car dealer will tell you that.

The service must be advertised, and the best place is next to used car ads in newspapers and buy-and-sell magazines. A small display ad will do the job, and stress the increased sale value worth more than the cost of the job to get people's greed rising. Keep in mind that this is a business like any other, and in all cases you will have to abide by tax laws and report your income. In fact, the worst thing you can do is NOT report income from a business that didn't do well. A tax audit may arbitrarily decide that you made much more than you claim, and unless you've got books to prove otherwise, you'll have to pay taxes on that figure.

Items to keep on hand are: polymer fills such as Armor-All and Blue Poly for upgrading plastic and paint; spray upholstery shampoo, the best you can get tire cleaning compound, and engine shampoo. Another handy item might be a pressure nozzle for common garden hose that will convert it into a high-power sprayer for underbody cleaning.

An old flannel sheet can't be beaten for buffing and polishing, and denim fabric is good for shining wheels and tires. You can make a lot of compounds you need yourself.

Your primary concerns should be paint and the interior, so don't skimp that area, because the better they look, the more the seller gets for his car and better he makes you sound when he tells others about your work. The polymer films that coat paint in a durable, high gloss shine are truly amazing products and

the time it takes to apply them is more than worth the results. They also require very little upkeep which is another good selling point.

When shining up plastic surfaces with Armor-All or Blue Poly, never use more than one application. They tend to be a little greasy for a few days until they react chemically with the plastic and show the buyer a little too much effort gone into restoring the car.

A little hint after shampooing the engine, a job you probably shouldn't try alone the first time, is to sprinkle a teaspoonsful of house dust over the engine so it doesn't look deliberate. The key is to give the image that the car has been well maintained over a long period of time, not spit-shined for inspection. Deliver this message to your customer as well so he understands the procedures you use.

While you're at it, try to sell your client on the value of a full tuneup at the same time. Top performance is expected by the buyer, and an honest explanation that this is the way the car runs normally will not cut it at the time of sale.

Budget any minor repairs such as muffler work, new shocks or brake bleeding that you think might add to the value of the car, but don't be pushy.

Calculate your time at a rate not quite what the Tidy-Car people charge and try to offer more personalized service. This will lead to repeat customers and those all-important referrals.

Some people have specific models of cars on which they can work miracles. The Beetle genius is probably the best-known, but there are many who work on Camaros, Corvettes, and certain popular Japanese makes.

If you are one of these people, you can probably do better work than a mechanic in less time, charge less for it, and build a steady clientele. If you are not a licensed mechanic, you cannot advertise that you are, and when you figure your costs, add a little bit for the follow-up work you'll have to do. It's better to satisfy an angry customer than turn them away and it's easier to reconcile in your own mind when you figure you've already been paid for the extra service.

When you advertise your service, keep your prices reasonable compared to a regular mechanic. Tell your customer in your advertising that you are an expert in one specific make and model and probably better than a corner mechanic, and that you provide custom service without cutting corners.

An excellent way to advertise is to place small leaflets on the

windshields of cars you specialize in. People are always looking for reliable mechanic they can use for regular service and your leaflets will often be tacked on bulletin boards for handy access when service is needed.

Mobile tuneups are getting to be bigger all the time. Many people would rather pay a few bucks extra to have the work done in the office parking lot than take the car in and blow time and energy picking it up later. Most newer cars really should be connected to a scope for best analysis and most accurate timing.

You can do the most of the necessary regular maintenance, including timing advance, plug changes, brake adjustments, wheel rotation, oil change, air filter, gas filter and other simple tasks with few tools. Carry everything you need in your own vehicle. Advertise your service, charge a fair price, and ask in advance about any special parts the customer might want. Once you've established a regular customer list and start getting referrals, you can easily turn it into a well-paying full-time work.

Curbers or parkers, people who buy junkers or get cars cheap from owners in need of fast cash, have bad reputations. You can still make a few dollars this way if you pick up the tight type of vehicle. But you must be very careful that you don't invest too heavily in getting your stock that you have to sell at a loss to pay the rent. Of all businesses, this is the most risky, but it also offers the best return on time and energy.

As with the specialist, the parker would do well to handle one specific make and model of car, and make no bones with your customer about the fact that you sell for a profit. You can buy a lot of junkers this way and cannibalize them for needed parts on other cars at low cost, and enhance the value of a car about to die to the point where you can sell it at substantial profit.

Many buy-and-sell publications have huge used car sections, making them ideal markets to advertise your business. Be aware of laws governing car sales in your area and determine ahead of time whether you can store cars for sale on your property.