

WANT TO DRIVE A CAR, BETTER LEARN HOW TO FIX IT: ACUTE SCARCITY OF SKILLED AUTO MECHANICS LOOMING



The time is not too far away when car drivers could find themselves stranded mid-journey, if their cars breakdown as skilled auto mechanics are increasingly becoming a rare breed. Auto dealers and repair shops are finding it hard to locate and recruit repair technicians. The future looks even bleaker than the present, inasmuch many mid-career mechanics will be nearing retirement. The younger generation does not seem to be interested in getting greased hands repairing carburetors, they'd much rather opt for something less demanding. Jonathan Hernandez is studying for an auto-repair degree from Trade Technical College, Los Angeles. He believes that if he is going to drive, he better learn how to fix his car as outside help has become inconsistent and undependable. However, he does not intend to pursue auto repair as a profession, he says, he'd much rather be a tattoo maker instead. "I can do a tattoo in three hours and make \$300," he explains Hernandez, "Tattoo money is a little easier." Rich Orbain, manager for General Motors' Service Technical College lamented that it was getting increasingly harder to attract the younger generation to this profession and it is most likely that "we're going to run short of technicians in the very near future," he said. Auto-repair instructors say the current generation has considerable mistaken belief about the profession. They would do well to realize that the profession has gone well beyond the under-the-shade-of-the-tree work, when people got their hands and clothes sullied. Fixing cars has gone high-tech and a laptop is as vital a tool as a set of wrenches. Moreover jobs are easily available and unlike many other American jobs, auto-repair jobs cannot be outsourced. The demand for auto mechanics is predicted to have grown by about 17 percent in the decade between 2010 and 2020 adding 124,800 jobs for a total of 848,200. The Bureau of Labor Statistics further reported that auto technicians earned an average of \$35,790, whereas some earned in excess of \$59,590. The type of mechanics that are most urgently required are not the ones who can change your engine oil but the top tier ones, who know about the internal mechanics of a car, who can put their education and expertise to deduce clues and identify a problem. The problem is further heightened by the numerous new technologies flooding the market, including hybrids, electrics and advanced clean-diesel engines. Most cars today have multiple microprocessors working together, each with a specific duty, whether it's locking brakes or the music system in the car. Frank Diertl, general manager of engineering services for Mercedes-Benz in the U.S. said that advanced technology in cars has brought us to the point, where we will start needing paraengineers, just as we have paralegals and paramedics. Mike Garblik, professor of automotive technology at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio said that the students are interested but are "being pulled in so many different directions. There are so many opportunities." He tells the students that the job is not what you think it is and that it has evolved far beyond its "greasy monkey" image. Today it is more dependent on computers; placement rate is 100 percent, which means a job is guaranteed to you and the money is good. Meanwhile, drivers embarking on a long journey will be well-advised to ensure that their cars are in ship-shape condition. Breakdown enroute could mean an inordinate delay.