

Public Submission to the ACCC Market Study into New Car Retailing

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To whom it may concern:

With regard to the nature and scope of existing barriers to accessing repair and service information and car parts in post-sale markets in Australia, I would like to emphatically stress that the situation in Australia is far more restricted than in the U.S.A. and Europe. I struggle with this 'backwater hicktown' attitude that manufacturers give to Australia and design their own restrictions that reduce competition in the automotive repair industry of this country proving detrimental to consumers. When a consumer purchases a vehicle, what right does he/she have to have this vehicle serviced or repaired competently at a business of their choice? Who owns the rights to the service and repair information to allow this to happen? It would seem consumers are oblivious/not informed of their rights and limitations of ownership at purchase. The vehicle bought and paid for has a component (serviceability) retained by the manufacturer and dealer that provides consumer detriment via removal of competition.

Vehicles today are built on 'world platforms'. Technology is increasing at an incredible rate, we do not have the time available to create information sharing systems and processes applicable to each country/manufacturer/technology. Rather, accessing repair and service information and parts policy should be written on the same 'world platform' basis.

I have born witness to the explosion of technology in vehicles and while initially concerned, have seen the industry cope and thrive given these technological challenges... but only when given the information required, or in some situations reverse engineering in order to solve problems. While coping to this point, this explosion of technology driven powertrains and safety systems etc. require technicians with capability for safe repair. Training is critical in this day and age and can only be provided when trainers have access to information on technical systems and procedures in order to develop training modules.

Given information, parts access and training our independent service and repair industry will remain capable and competitive into the future.

My business was bought from my father and may well be passed to my son. It is a small business consistently employing 8-10 people, supporting those families, paying taxes and contributing to the community for decades. I invest in equipment, training and staff welfare. Given opportunity I would hope to provide competition in this industry into the future.

Some issues causing harm to business and customers will be relating to security. One classic example is the replacement of an indicator switch on an LH model Holden Astra which requires initialisation after replacement. It requires us to either decline the job, sublet the job to the dealer or sublet the job to our auto electrician who accesses the AC Delco website in the USA (he has purchased a subscription) to obtain code applicable to car. This code is not available to the independent trade via Holden. Another was a BCM (Body Control Model) module purchased from our local Ford dealer for a BA model Falcon that required an initialisation code that would not be given to us from said dealer

despite a commercial relationship spanning decades. The code was obtained from a remanufacturer of these components which was essentially a 'hack' code. Our preference would be to use manufacturer coding for warranty and functionality issues. Service information relating to fluid capacities (vehicles now without dipsticks) and refill procedures, service reminder messages that require a procedure or tool to remove, cloud based service records not accessible other than through dealer network and many other stealthy means to deprive the independent industry of the ability to service the consumers vehicle abound. The heads of agreement or code has created some relevant access through portals but most information is lacking, short of manufacturers,(we allow 72 manufacturers to sell vehicles in Australia) and seen as a poor response to the issue.

An important issue is the access to Technical Service Bulletins (TSB) that relate to issue management from manufacturer and the need for the independent trade to be aware of these and 'soft recalls' performed on vehicles serviced at dealers workshops but without customers prior knowledge that can affect safety, performance, emissions etc.

I hope that this small snapshot of a large issue can shed some light and enforce change!

Regards

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