

Automotive Technician Training Program Closes Technology Gap

Engineering advances are changing auto mechanics into scientists of service. High tech electronics, fuel injection, navigation systems and now, most recently, hybrid technology have transformed automotive repair. There remain plenty of good old-fashioned low-tech repairs to be performed on the vehicles of today. Still, when it comes to the internal combustion engine, everything has changed. Replacing the old carburetion systems, with electronic ignition and fuel injection was just the forerunner of the computer processor controlled systems of today, all aimed at reducing pollution. Tomorrow's technology, the hybrid, which combines standard internal combustion with an electric motor running on a 330 volt battery pack is here today.

To keep up with these changes, the technician of today needs to be very highly trained in electricity and electronics. They need to be able to use scan tools, which interact with the computer processors to understand what the car computers are doing and what needs to be repaired. Reading this information is just one thing, interpreting it is another. Does the car have a faulty spark plug, or does the oxygen sensor need replacing, or does the brain need to be reprogrammed?

According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics the auto repair work force needs to grow by about 35,000 a year to meet increasing demand. Community college automotive departments have sought to meet some of the demand. Yet auto-repair education programs turn out only about 10,000 graduates per year. So the other 25,000 must be trained on the inside. Dealerships have classrooms where technicians brush up on the latest technology via satellite feed. Independent repair shops send their students to programs like the Automotive Technician Training Program or ATTP.

ATTP, with a core of five courses, FEET, STEPS, CAPS, FIST, and ACES, was almost lost a few years ago. It was clear that technology was in danger of passing the courses by, and New York State was faced with two choices, either update the program or eliminate all together. New York elected to eliminate the program. Believing the State had made the wrong decision, the association banded together with other training entities to update the courses and keep alive the training so badly needed by the industry. Administered under the New York State Association of Service Stations and Repair Shops, the fully updated program has been rolled out recently, and new technicians have begun preparing to face the technology of today and tomorrow.

To find out more about the program, call the association.