

Ken Newton,  
CEO, VASA

## Under the Southern Cross

# Old habits will only send you broke

**W**henver an argument erupts on the question of hourly rates and the charges made by tradespeople, the humble, but indispensable plumber is nine times out of ten toted as the benchmark of charge-out.

In Australia, plumbers have this reputation, real or imaginary, of being the most expensive tradesperson in town. Why the plumber I'll never know. Perhaps a blocked toilet or a flooded kitchen elevates pipework to the status of national emergency, which means any amount of money demanded by the plumber seems reasonable.

We're not saying that plumbers are any less skilled than the average air conditioning or auto electrical technician, but when you do a comparison, you find that a/c workshops are generally reluctant to charge out the full amount of diagnostic time or expertise.

So what's the difference between a blocked loo and an aircon blowing hot at the height of summer? I submit that

both are desperate situations.

More and more workshops are complaining that the cost of just keeping up is beginning to outstrip their income. Far too many workshops, who believe they are in a competitive market (the true professionals really aren't, but they sometimes don't know it), either quote too low, or cave in to the customer's demands for a good, cheap job. They don't seem to understand that "good" and "cheap" don't belong in the same sentence.

A couple of the VASA directors who run their own rather large workshops in Sydney have thrown out a big challenge to the country's workshops. "You've got to start charging for data, wiring diagrams, technical research, specialised training, specific tools – all the things you might need to resolve a tricky problem in the modern vehicle. And then you need to stop quoting hourly rates. You need to charge a fee commensurate with the knowledge you

**Arizona Mobile Air Inc.**  
Complete After Market A/C Systems & O.E.M. Quality A/C Replacement Parts

Online ordering at [www.ACKits.com](http://www.ACKits.com)

Family owned and operated for over 30 years in sunny Phoenix Arizona. Purchasing an AMA Inc. after market A/C system you can be assured that only the finest components are used during production. Systems are designed to cool in the great southwest desert with large evaporator coil and aluminum parallel flow condenser. These are just some few components which set our systems apart from the competition. All our products can be viewed on our website at [www.ackits.com](http://www.ackits.com). Nationwide wholesale distribution and dealer accounts available. We have used our manufacturing contacts to bring high quality auto a/c replacements parts to the local Phoenix market. We now offer these quality items nation wide and a staff committed to customer service.

Complete Line of O.E.M. Quality A/C Replacement Parts:  
Blower Motors . Compressors . Clutches . Condensers . Driers/Accumulators . Evaporators . Expansion Valves . Hoses/Lines . O-Ring Kits . Cabin Air Filters . Parallel Flow Condensers . A/C Fittings . and more.....

Complete Line of Mastercool and Hecat Tools and Equipment

**Mastercool**  
"World Class Quality"

**HECAT, INC**  
"The Quality Air Conditioning Experts"

Phone: 800.648.4475 • Fax: 602.233.0389  
Interactive Auto A/C Forum at [www.AutoACForum.com](http://www.AutoACForum.com)

**Fixing a car's A/C and engine cooling system is no longer child's play.**

**MACS**  
[www.macs.org](http://www.macs.org)

**MACS can train your techs on the best methods for diagnosing and repairing mobile air conditioning and engine cooling systems call (215) 631-7020 x 304 or 307**

Reader Reply No. 148



bring to the job – how long it took you to fix has nothing to do with it.”

One of the directors, Jeff Smit, is also a national automotive trainer and he's seeing a rising tide of concern among air conditioning technicians who feel they are going backwards when they thought they were building a viable business.

Jeff keeps telling them that they are underselling their expertise. These days, workshops must have at least one scan tool, preferably an oscilloscope, a range of approved equipment to evacuate refrigerants and test for leaks, plus a load of wiring diagrams and data covering an enormous range of vehicles which are found on Australian and New Zealand roads.

He has advocated that 'information' be charged as a new part number on every invoice, with a standard charge on every vehicle. Many workshops already charge a scan tool fee, so this is seen as a small extension of that concept.

The hourly rate habit is a much harder one to break. Some motorists still drift from workshop to workshop, asking "What's your hourly rate?"

Jeff's response to that is "What type of repair do you want me to do? We could be talking about a basic service, a tyre repair or a complex engine management repair."

It seems that far too many workshop owners are still in a time-warp, unsure of the value of their labour and unable to evaluate the amount of data, training, special tools and knowledge required to perform a professional diagnosis.

Jeff Smit is appealing to VASA members to throw this hourly rate thinking out the window. He wants them to start thinking in terms of the complexity of each job, and the worth to the customer of their ability to resolve complex repair issues.

Each repair should be treated separately and priced and sold accordingly.

As part of the campaign to break the old habits, VASA is also encouraging members to share more information.

No technician can know everything. Years ago most good technicians and mechanics could just about repair any vehicle that came into the workshop. Those days are well and truly over.

The path to becoming more professional can only be reached if technicians share their knowledge and experiences and stop treating their fellow members as competitors. ❁

It Can Be Done  
With  
**Johnson**®



Manufacturers of Pure Solders and Soldering Fluxes, Tinning Compounds and Radiator Repair Supplies including the finest Gasket Tapes, Radiator Paints, Fuel Tank Liner, Test Plugs and Caps, Charge Air Cooler Testers, Tab Tools, Header Clamps, Drain Cocks, Flanges, Epoxies, Overflow Tubing, Phos-Copper Rods, plus our new FloRite Dispensible Silver Brazing Pastes and Aluminum Brazing Kit.

**BrazeAl™**



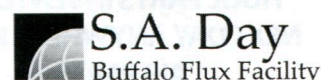
Includes 50 Rods;  
five different alloy-flux  
combinations, bare, coated  
and flux cored rods, plus two  
bottles of our DayTech paste flux.

**CAD-FREE!**  
**Our Aluminum Kit**  
**covers all brazing and**  
**hard-soldering applications!**

**JOHNSON MANUFACTURING COMPANY**



114 Lost Grove Road  
Princeton, Iowa 52768  
Telephone (563) 289-5123  
Fax (563) 289-3825  
email johnsonmfg@aol.com  
www.johnsonmfg.com



1489 Niagara Street  
Buffalo, New York 14213  
Telephone (716) 881-3030  
Fax (716) 881-4353  
email info@saday.com  
www.saday.com

Reader Reply No. 101

ACTION • May 2010

11