

Facing the future



Frank Massey, Autoinform

Frank Massey is looking to the future for the Independent garage. Here he outlines the changes that he believes will have the biggest impact on vehicle repair and maintenance. He addresses the complacency in some areas of the aftermarket and explains why it's time for the sector as a whole, to wake up and ensure that Independents keep up with the technical evolution.

I have had a few weeks to reflect on an incredible Autoinform Live technical weekend in Cork. My first thoughts: thanks and appreciation must go to the guest presenters, delegates, and contributing organisations which made this event possible. Thanks also to our host, J&S Automotive, who provided the most impressive quality support and warm welcome.

I have been involved in the motor industry for well over 50 years, with around 35 years providing training. I have, and still, travel the globe meeting and sharing knowledge. Please note the sharing expression, as I feel privileged to have met so many dedicated technicians from a variety of backgrounds. Over the years I have witnessed great change in attitude and commitment from independent technicians and garage owners. I have also noted a big discrepancy in commitment from some UK independents which contrasts with our overseas counterparts. There is, I believe, a complacency in attitude to future challenges.

One recent illustration comes to mind: while in Australia last October, an individual from Perth heard, on the kangaroo vine, that a series of seminars were taking place in Sydney. He closed his business on Wednesday night, with 24 hrs notice, booked an 8 hour flight/journey and joined the event on Saturday and Sunday. A little closer to home, I have had cancellations from delegates unwilling to travel 10-15 miles due to unforeseen last minute changes. I hope they are reading this!

So where does this leave our industry, and what are the immediate threats and challenges? Ignorance, arrogance, complacency, and the biggest of all, technical & political evolution. I don't share the euphoria of hybrid, battery, or autonomous vehicles, but I do, however, accept the impact it will have in the short lived near future.

In my opinion, two evolutionary changes will have a long lasting influence: hydrogen cell technology and cradle to grave vehicle utilisation.

“Complex vehicle systems require a comprehensive, sound knowledge and infrastructure”



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Why own a vehicle when, for a relatively small affordable rental, you could use and return the vehicle in exchange for a new model after two years? No depreciation, no maintenance, no trade

in. As for the other aforementioned technologies, less wear, less maintenance, less reliance on the independent garage sector.

Back to boots on the ground. The technical evolution has quite literally been breath taking. This has, in the short term, presented

incredible opportunity for aggressive technical-minded business owners and technicians. With opportunity comes challenge, investment & training. Complex vehicle systems require a comprehensive, sound knowledge and infrastructure, to provide a competitive service against the dealership network. Many garages are currently servicing and repairing systems without adequate knowledge or technical hardware, to comply with original build spec requirements.

Please do not take that comment as a cheap swipe without redress, but a genuine helpful comment in realisation of how much this industry has changed. In comparison with other less technical trades that are controlled by rigorous legal legislation, we have been left to our own devices so far.

My presentation at the Autoinform Live focused on using available technology to combat the ever increasing difficulties in confident systems diagnosis. In particular, I focused on engine efficiency, pumping losses, and very accurate assessment of valve piston relationship, using a pressure transducer while the engine is running. I then expanded on cylinder balance using g vibration analysis.

Like the dinosaurs before us, there is an extinction zone out there. The asteroid will hit our industry sooner than you might like or think. If you have a 10 mile radius training mindset, then you really do need to lift your focus to the horizon, or possibly to those businesses that are succeeding in your area.

If you are one of those success stories, then you already know me and are a member of Autoinform Live events, or similar ones.