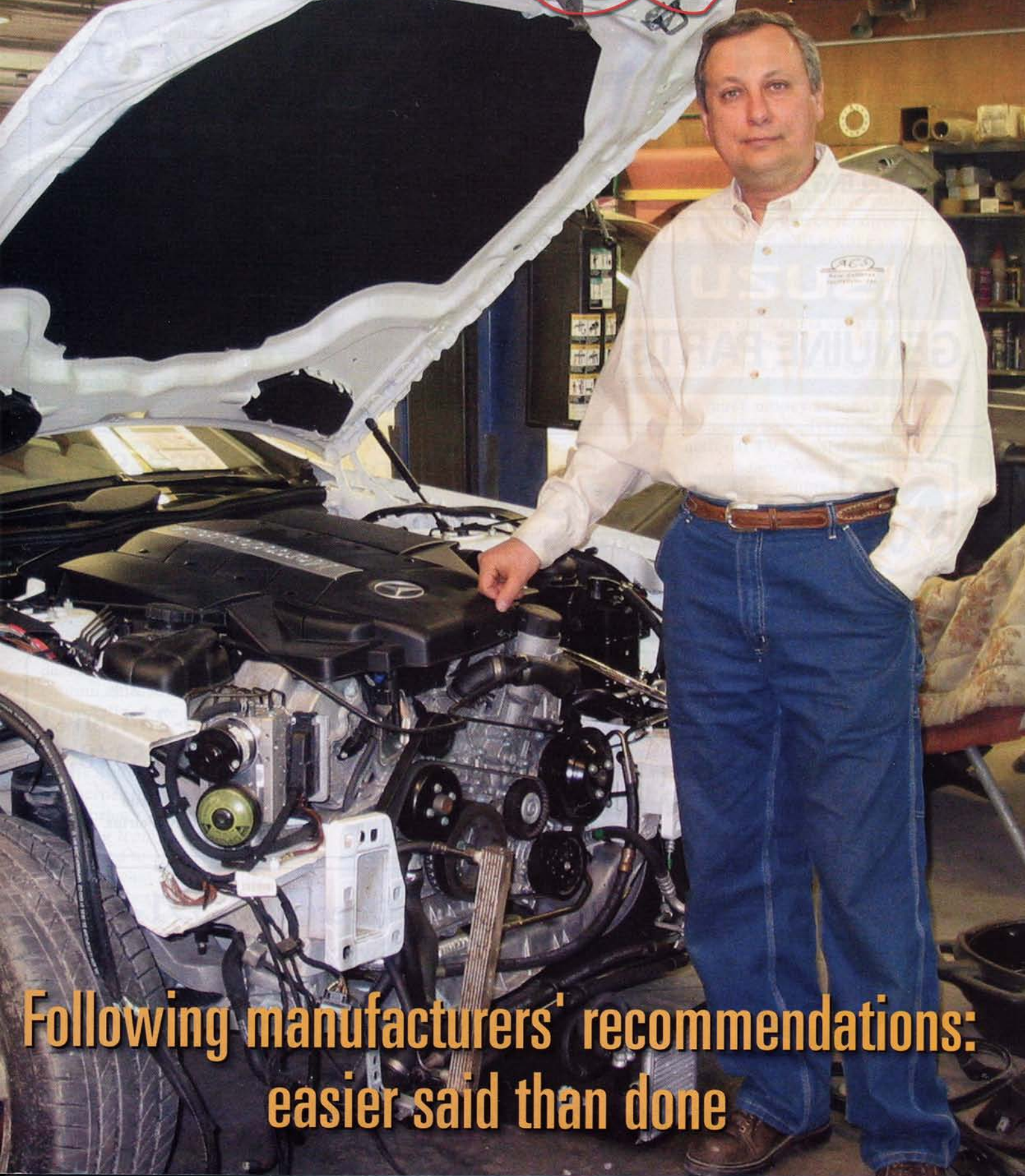


Hammer & Dolly

Volume 39, No. 4

April 2004



**Following manufacturers' recommendations:
easier said than done**

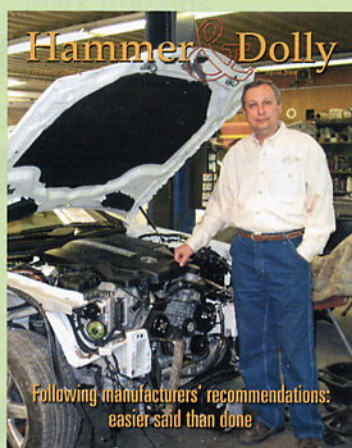
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COVER STORY 16

This month, *Hammer and Dolly* takes a look at the issue of using a dedicated fixture bench in the repair of collision damaged vehicles. Many manufacturers require the use of this equipment to repair the vehicles they manufacture; far fewer insurance companies are willing to pay for the equipment, however, saying it may not be entirely necessary. One shop owner in Reisterstown, Md., Chuck Scilipote, swears by the benches, though, for the sake of performing a proper repair for his customers. Maybe the manufacturers should make their requirements more clear to the insurers and allow the repairers to get out from the middle for once.

The cover photo of Chuck Scilipote was taken by Sheila Loftus. The cover was designed by Nick Crawford.

Hammer and Dolly/April 2004



Collision repair students in Canada who helped give a cab an artistic makeover, from left, instructor Ken Colvin, Trevor Newark, James Swain (kneeling), Mike Whyatt, Adam Estey, Courtney Jasinski, Mike Dawood, Kyle Patterson, Alyssa Russell, and Aaron Rose.

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Benching vehicles

By Sheila Loftus

In my February 2004 column, I discussed the use (or lack thereof) of dedicated fixture benches in collision repair shops. My second and third

paragraphs from the column read as follows:

"Many of the car manufacturers require a dedicated fixture bench to repair damaged vehicles. And most of the manufacturers that do so recommend a Celette, made by the French manufacturer.

"Repairers and insurers have been ignoring this requirement for years."

One collision repair shop owner who does use a dedicated fixture bench is

Chuck Scilipote of Auto Collision Specialists in Reisterstown, Md.

Scilipote, who has been in business for 23 years, works on a lot of high-end cars. He owns two Celette benches and has consistently had difficulty getting insurers to pay for the use of this required equipment.

"I've had cars sit for six months while [the insurer] figures out what to do," he said. "I feel obligated to my customers to repair it right."

Scilipote understands why other collision repairers would choose to repair vehicles without the dedicated fixture bench. "I think what people do is what they have to do to make a profit," he said. "With the jig system, it has to be right. It's easy to see whether the car's in the right place. I've had dealers tell me the cars don't have to go on a Celette. I know they're trying to conform to what the insurance companies want."

Using a dedicated fixture bench is indeed expensive. The fixtures have to be rented at \$65 a day. Shops have to pay for shipping. Scilipote estimates the cost of shipping and fixture rental at \$1500, depending on the



Chuck Scilipote studies manufacturers' directions for properly repairing a vehicle.



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length of the repair. In order to minimize costs, Scilipote tries to get the vehicle ready before he rents the fixtures.

Scilipote, 48, does repairs by the book—in other words, exactly as the manufacturer says it should be done. He buys the information from manufacturers if he has to.

When Acura called Scilipote after he'd logged on to its Web site, he was told he was only the second repair facility to have sought information.

Scilipote's repair facility sits on 11 acres in a residential neighborhood. He is grandfathered in, so he can't expand or remodel. "If I was on a main road, with a big mortgage, I'd have to conform to what the insurance companies say," he said. "I educate my customers. Sometimes they just have to pay out of pocket to bench the car."

In some cases, Scilipote said, an adjuster will cost shift on an estimate in order to pay for the fixture charge. The adjuster won't write it down, Scilipote said. This prevents a precedent being set.

In other cases, Scilipote said, State Farm will pay the customer directly and won't put it on the estimate.

In the spring of 1999, Scilipote wrote a letter to State Farm inquiring about its policy on dedicated fixture benches. He received a reply from Robert Rogers, an estimatics team manager in Columbia, Md., who wrote, "State Farm recognizes the dedicated fixture bench system in the repair of collision damaged vehicles, but not as the exclusive means for restoring a damaged unibody to factory tolerances. Your request that we pay additional labor operations presupposes that alternative systems cannot be used to achieve a safe, quality repair of unibody damage. We do not agree."

Scilipote's standard procedure is to tear down the car before he writes the blueprint for repair. He has an \$80/hour teardown rate.

"By fixing cars with a Celette, you find damage you would never have found," he said. In one repair, he said, he dropped a suspension and looked where a jig was to align; he could tell there was still more damage.

In the past, GEICO and Allstate have paid him to use the bench, al-

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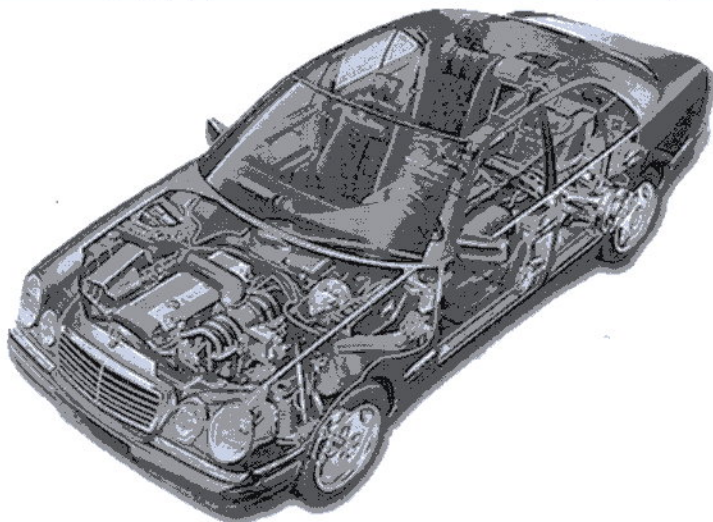
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though sometimes it was a struggle. Now Allstate isn't paying for the Celette; GEICO was paying until the end of last year.

About insurers failing to pay, Scilipote said, "They don't care. They are so powerful, they'll take the chance."

Scilipote repairs vehicles per his invoice, not according to an insurance company estimate. He is critical of direct repair programs. "My feeling is you can't work for the insurance companies and the customer and keep both their interests in mind," he said.

Scilipote employs 14 people, including two master technicians. One of the master technicians has two helpers; the other has a body technician and a mechanic working for him. All the employees are paid an hourly salary with a pay scale from \$15 to \$40 an hour.

Scilipote and his wife, Carey, who works with him, have three sons, Charles III, who works in the paint shop; Daniel, who is going to auto collision school in Houston, Texas; and Andrew, who is still in high school. **H&D**

Superior Service



Doug Sweet, body shop manager, Darcars Chrysler Jeep Dodge, Marlow Heights, MD.

Doug Sweet has been the body shop manager at Darcars Chrysler Jeep Dodge since February, and he has 20 years of experience in the collision repair industry.

There are currently 20 production employees and six office staff at the body shop at Darcars. "It's got such tremendous potential to be such a major hub for this area," he said of the body shop at Darcars Chrysler Jeep Dodge.

Doug has had a long relationship with Superior Auto Paints. "They give you all the major technical support necessary to get your job done," he said.

Doug said he likes BASF, which Superior Auto Paints distributes. "It's an excellent product," he said.

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