

# Do it yourself, but also practice 3 E's

By Norm Hudecki  
special writer

**W**ITH THE average price of a new car at more than \$15,000, many car owners are taking more of a hands-on approach to protecting their investment.

While the convenience of quick lube and specialty service centers is becoming increasingly attractive, most folks still perform at least some maintenance or repairs on their vehicles. Research by Valvoline Inc. shows that two-thirds of the motor oil sold in the United States was bought by do-it-yourselfers.

To be successful as a do-it-yourselfer, follow the three E's: educate, equip and execute.

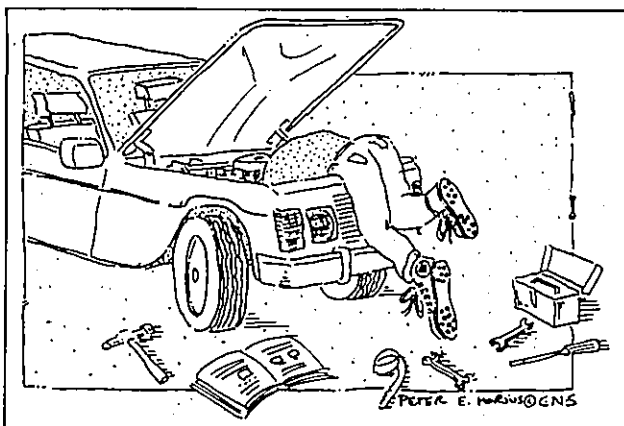
● **Educate:** Before you pop the hood and start poking around, learn about the procedures you want to perform. Your best instructional tool is probably right in the glove compartment: your owner's manual. This widely published, seldom-read book contains a wealth of information on troubleshooting, basic maintenance and recommended parts and supplies.

You might also look for seminars or classes on car care in your area. Many American Automobile Association chapters across the country sponsor car care clinics, taught by the organization's trained auto service technicians. Check the telephone book under AAA for the office nearest you. Community colleges, vocational schools and some car dealerships also offer classes for the public.

There are a number of books and guides for specific models available at bookstores. No matter how you educate yourself, make sure you know what the job entails before you start in.

Know where the parts involved are and how to reach them. Know when the engine should be running and when it should be shut off. And have an idea of how long the job should take so you can allow enough time and avoid hasty mistakes.

● **Equip:** Good auto service



requires the proper tools and supplies. After you educate yourself on what items you need for your project, set about getting the equipment you need.

An oil change is a good example. You would need a drain pan for the used oil, a wrench for the oil pan plug, a filter wrench, a funnel for putting in the new oil and a container for transporting the used oil to a collection site.

As for supplies, you would need the proper amount of new motor oil (usually 3-4 quarts) and a new oil filter.

Another consideration: Find out if your vehicle requires wrenches or sockets in metric or U.S. standard measurements.

● **Execute:** Now that you've educated and equipped yourself, it's time to execute the work. First, find a good work area. Your vehicle should be parked on level, firm ground or pavement. Try to find an area protected from the weather but well-ventilated so you avoid being overcome by fumes or engine exhaust.

Take precautions for safety while you work. If you are under the car, make sure the jack or ramp is sturdy enough and in the proper position and that your car is in "park" with the emergency brake on.

Be careful when working around the battery, electrical system, refrigerant storage tank and moving parts. Wash your hands after exposing them to fluids.

A KEY part of car maintenance and repair is practicing environmental responsibility. Learn where to dispose of old fluids, batteries, tires and other items.

And it's generally best to have a professional technician with recycling equipment handle air-conditioner recharging; refrigerants contain harmful CFCs that can be leaked into the atmosphere when the procedure is done improperly.

The final step in the execution phase is to record what you have serviced and when the next check is due. Most owner's manuals have a section for this. Such records can often be helpful if you choose to sell the vehicle as evidence of its good care and performance.

In addition to these three E's, there are a couple more to keep in mind. One is experience: The first time you try a particular job, it may take you a little longer; with experience, you will become more adept at the task.

And expertise: Don't let your ego get in the way of asking for help when you need it. If you get in a bind, seek someone with the expertise to help you finish the job.

Do-it-yourself car service can be easy, enlightening, economical and enjoyable.

Copley News Service provided this report.

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