

Women changing 'tradition,' at home in auto industry

By PATRICIA BEACH SMITH
If you're talking cars, it's traditionally been a man's world, but times are changing.

Two area women are making practical inroads into that previously closed world of automobiles.

They deal with the industry on opposite ends of the dip stick. Julie Chandler, of Birmingham, writes about driving from a consumer standpoint in her Woman's Day Magazine column "Woman Behind the Wheel." Gail Gray tackles consumer problems as a service write-up person at a Southfield auto dealership.

Gail Gray's biggest problem is translation.

"WHEN A customer says 'the car sounds like an eggbeater,' I have to be able to interpret what is wrong," she said.

"Customers who aren't mechanically minded have a little trouble explaining," she laughed.

Mrs. Gray has worked for Roger Penske, Chevrolet, Southfield, almost since the dealership opened three years ago. Her first job with

the company was writing warranty claims for the service department.

But she said all she ever wanted to do was work in the service department with customers. As switchboard operator, she was able to communicate with customers but never saw them.

SINCE SHE joined the service write-up staff three months ago, her service department boss Walt Czarnecki said he's gotten nothing but good reports about her.

Her "casual manner" is one of interest and sympathy while maintaining a businesslike pose in her neat red white and blue pantsuit-uniform.

Some of this manner comes naturally, but some of it was learned at the General Motors Service Advisor School at the GM Training Center in Warren where she took a four-day course.

"But most of the learning is on the job where you can't help but learn while you're doing. The men, both the other service write-up men and the mechanics, are very helpful," she said.

"THEY ARE glad to explain what might be wrong with a car in different situations. They want me to learn so I can be as good at my job as possible," she said.

She said she hasn't seen any prejudice for or against her since she started her new job.

"Men don't ask to see a man if I approach them. I haven't had any of that, but the women don't flock to me either, so it's even," she said.

Mrs. Gray's personal interest in

cars includes doing her own simple mechanical work including changing the spark plugs, oil and filters.

"I like cars, but I have a lot to learn," she said.

She can learn at home as a result of one of the fringe benefits of her job.

She met her husband while working at the dealership and he should be a good teacher. He's one of Penske's service technicians.

THE AUTO INDUSTRY is no new thing to native Detroiters Julie Jennings Candler. And her association with the industry isn't particularly new either.

But just like the ad that says "You're not getting older, you're getting better," she is celebrating her 10th anniversary writing "Woman at the Wheel" for Woman's Day magazine.

In her column she answers broadly the specific questions readers ask in the hundreds of letters the magazine gets each week.

The most-asked question concerns driving with children. "Is this child restraint system better than that one?" How do I keep my child happy in the car? and others are typical, Ms. Candler said.

"One of the funniest questions I ever got was from a person who wanted to know where to get restraints for dogs," she said.

Her answer was they are available at pet stores.

"But most vets recommend cages or harnesses," she said.

ANOTHER CATEGORY of interest concerns how not to get gapped on auto repairs.

She is more than a columnist, however, as she was recently appointed to the National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council by U. S. Secretary of Transportation Claude Brinegar.

There are 22 members on the committee who represent the automotive industry and the public. Ms. Candler is one of two women on the committee. The other is Marcie Pattison of San Francisco.

Ms. Candler was the person who

wrote the resolution presented to Congress to defer any further action on the airbag legislation.

"At our meeting in Boston recently we concluded that after so many months of study and highway testing, the airbag is not reliable enough."

"Also, there is the likelihood of public resistance to the airbag, particularly in light of the interlock controversy. More than that is the cost of making the airbags mandatory," Ms. Candler said.

HER WORK in car safety was recently recognized by the Journalism Safety Awards Contest. She won the prize which is a \$1,000 scholarship given to the college of her choice.

She won the award for an article she did in September 1973 called "New Ways to Keep Children Safe in the Car."

How often does a person who knows the ins and outs of cars, change cars?

"Not very often, but when I do, I always change brands—and I never get deals on cars as people might think," she said.

"I learn a lot about buying a new car and can empathize with my readers better if I go out just like they do to buy a car," she said.

She said that until recently no one understood the importance of women drivers. "More than half the drivers are women," she said.

SHE ALSO said women aren't the only ones who don't understand cars.

"They are so complicated any more that it's impossible to know all about them. I have participated in several of the powder puff mechanics courses, but I rarely can spend the time making repairs myself. Knowing is good, though, it helps keep you from getting gapped," she said.

Other suggestions for staving

ahead in car repairs are: "When planning to travel out of state, try to get your car checked ahead of time so you don't find yourself in a compromising situation."

"And never go into a place and just say 'Check it over,'" she advised.

She said she had a dream car designed for part of her Woman's Day speaking engagements. "For the married woman it included a computer chef to cook goodies for the kids, has a TV for them in the backseat, flashes 'Eat Your Food' messages and has a treadmill for the dog in the rear of the car."

"The single gal's car has a car catcher on the front to catch eligible men," she laughed.

Despite this touch of humor, Ms. Candler takes her task seriously and said that every letter that comes to Woman's Day is answered. To gather information for the column is easy, she said.

"Over the years I have built many contacts and I seem to be on thousands of mailing lists."

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