

# A PATCH that yields PROFIT

**Are your counterpeople ASE certified?  
Maybe they should be.**

**By Shannon Miller**  
Contributor

**T**he National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence has long been regarded as the cornerstone for consumers to discriminate good vehicle repair and service from the not so good. But it seems ASE certification has benefits for the people who sell parts to the repair shops. The question is, who's taking advantage?

Testing for the Parts Specialist program has drawn more than 35,000 out of 100,000 automotive salespeople in the industry who would like to become ASE-certified parts specialists. Tony Molla, vice president of communications for ASE, asserts that "the value of ASE certification is manifold. Our data shows ASE certified professionals have better performance reviews, they're more productive, they get the part right the first time, tend to earn more and have greater longevity than non-ASE certified professionals."

There is a concrete benefit to those employers who have their techs ASE certified. If the data show that those who are certified tend to last longer on the job and are happier employees with higher job satisfaction, it might be worth shelling out to provide this added extra training. But what about for jobbers?

Indeed, during the course of interviewing distributors for this story, more than a few people recounted instances where their parts specialists were not certified and gave the wrong part to the customer. Jerry



Conant, president of AJS Auto Parts in Arizona, says his parts salespeople are not certified, but adds that his techs are.

"I would welcome information on the benefits of certification of jobbers," he states. Conant says he has the utmost confidence in his salespeople, and that they would likely "surpass what's required" for the certification. "Most of the counterpeople have (a good) rapport already with the techs," he adds.

Conant does, however, recount a time where the company lost a sale because the counterperson didn't provide the right information for the customer. And this is precisely the reason many feel ASE certification for counter salespeople is beneficial.

#### **'People do business with people'**

It is a natural thought process, then, that being ASE certified would help to sell more parts. After all, with that certification, there's the assumption that one is less likely to make mistakes because of extensive training.

But, according to Dennis Call, of Sanel Auto Parts in Pittsfield, N.H., ASE certification hasn't helped sell more parts. "People do business with people," states Call. "If you treat people the way they want to be treated, they'll come to you."

Mike Faley, owner of Iowa-based IWI Motor Parts, tends to agree. He says customer service sells more parts.

Having the foresight to know when to sell an item that naturally goes with another item saves the customer time and

money in extra labor fees.

"What makes the salesperson sell more parts are common sense kind of things to look for regarding related items that go with the sale," he adds. "Good techs will sell you an \$8 or \$10 hose with a water pump, but won't charge labor for the extra hose because the tech is already working on the car. This makes you look better to the customer."

But these jobbers are quick to add that the ASE certification carries credibility and conviction for those who take the time and effort to become certified.

#### **Certified counterpeople have a much easier time dealing with techs.**

Speaking in favor of certification, Faley continues: "If a person doesn't have the gumption to get certified, he doesn't have the gumption to fix the car right. When he gets certified, that means he cares. Would you rather have someone working on your car who cares, or not?"

Bob Joynt, director of training for AutoWares, is a strong proponent for ASE certification, so much so that the company pays for testing.

Additionally, all employees are paid a bonus for passing the certification the first time and given a pay increase for being certified.

"Techs would prefer to deal with ASE certified parts salespeople because they speak the same language," Joynt says. "There is a basis of understanding there;

they're using the same terms, sharing the same credentials."

Molla says ASE certification programs were "developed so that ASE technicians would have a parts specialist with which to converse. It raises the competency level of everyone involved."

Call says ASE certification helps their credibility with technicians and the general public. "Most of the customers are ASE certified also." When the technicians see the jobbers are certified as well, "they assume you're on the same level as they are," he adds. "Certified (counterpeople) have a much easier time dealing with techs. The customer feels comfortable that you know what you're doing and it lends more credibility to the jobber."

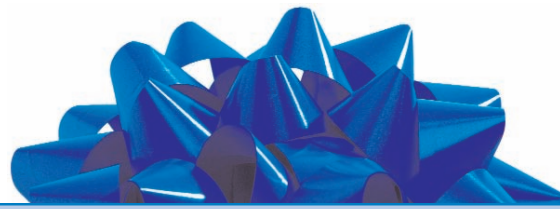
#### **Recognizing the motoring public**

"As a consumer benefit, the ASE logo is almost universally recognized as being a symbol of quality, and consumers look for this logo from technicians and react very positively from seeing the logo," Molla asserts.

Steve Marks, senior VP of marketing for the Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance, says "the ASE blue seal is a sign to the motoring public that they can feel confident that they'll be treated correctly. Our job is to educate the public about ASE certification," which, he admits, is difficult. "It's very tough. There is an industrywide push to do this, and it's good not just for our groups but for all groups. We need to raise the level of perception from the public." ■

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## Happy birthday ASE

By Tim Sramcik  
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The National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence is blowing out 35 candles on its birthday cake. The institute's grass roots efforts to educate consumers about the automotive service industry have included everything from NASCAR racing and aerobatic events to bull-riding competitions. These events also provide

ASE the chance to speak with potential service professionals and their families.

Along with all the fun, leaders say ASE will mark 2007 by continuing one of its most important efforts — recognizing individual technical excellence.

"Thirty-five isn't a magic number like 25 or 50," says Tony Molla, vice president of communications for ASE. "What prompted us to celebrate it was the opportunity to point to all of ASE's latest offerings."

Chief among these is the plethora of certification tests, technical information

and tracking features now available online at [www.ase.com](http://www.ase.com). All of these electronic features are designed to help technicians and other automotive industry professionals better prepare themselves for the certification process.

Most recently, ASE launched its TechQuiz feature that helps users determine when they're best prepared for a certification test. TechQuiz employs a series of four online self-assessment quizzes to help users evaluate their automotive technical knowledge at three ASE

levels: Fundamentals, Maintenance, and Diagnosis and Repair. The 40-question quizzes are written in the same style as actual ASE test questions and are divided into four areas: gasoline engines, drivetrains, undercar and electrical/electronic systems and heating/ventilation/air conditioning (HVAC).

Users receive a score report with details on how they performed in each area. Quizzes can be taken numerous times to gauge progress. Results are stored in a personal online portfolio for future reference.

ASE notes that the quizzes can be used for purposes other than test preparation. For example, they can help users identify areas where training is needed most.

Molla says the quizzes save users time and resources. "It's proving to be a great way to help techs know when they're ready to take a test that's going to cost them \$75," he notes.

### Location, location

Thanks to another new feature at the ASE Web site, finding a test center is little more than a mouse-click away. Users simply click on a map, type in a city and state or zip code, or enter any part of the name of the school or facility or the test center number. Once a center is located, an available link automatically maps it.

ASE also has made tests more available than ever by doubling the number of times per year they're offered.

Helping users track all this information is another new Web site feature. The myASE feature provides instant access to certification information and test scores, along with data on any outstanding balances due for current or past ASE testing fees.

Molla says all these updates are the direct results of ASE acting on suggestions from the industry. They're also part of the legacy that helped found the organization in 1972.

Before ASE's inception, the industry suffered from a serious image problem, largely due to consumer perception that the industry was rife with fraud. After giving some thought to encouraging licensing for shops, Molla says industry representatives decided that a more effective approach would involve a program that recognized technician competence — one that stressed testing and certification that is based on technical knowledge.

Instituting such a program would have two effects.

First, it would encourage industry members to receive ongoing training and reward those who did. Second, through certification, the industry could communicate its dedication to excellence and professionalism to a public that needed to hear the message. ■