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Getting under the hood  
Class for women aims to cut the intimidation factor



It doesn't need to be intimidating. That's the message of a car care

By CATHY MOLITORIS  
Correspondent  
Lori Johnson wants to put women in the driver's seat. She believes women should understand the basics of car repair- from replacing windshield wipers to changing a tire. To achieve her goal, she offers a class called "Ladies, Start Your Engines." The class will be held locally at Barton's Body Shop in Mount Joy on Wednesday. Johnson, who lives in Manheim, has more than 20 years of experience in the automotive industry and has been teaching the class for more than 15 years.

She worked as a technician for a Honda dealership, has written Chilton automotive repair manuals and spent eight years at the Community College of Philadelphia in the automotive program. Today, she runs her own business, offering the class across the country.

"I used to teach a new car clinic when I worked at the dealership," she said. "I realized there was a need for people to learn basic maintenance about their vehicles and people were eager to come to a class. As the economy got worse, people wanted to learn how to save money on vehicle maintenance, so there was even more interest."

In the beginning, Johnson offered the class to both men and women, but over time, she realized something happened at every session.

"I found that the women would move to the back of the class and the men would take over," she said. "The women seemed shy about asking questions. Once I did a class just for women, they started talking and asking questions."

She said she was surprised by how women approach the class when they know it's females only.

"They usually come with prepared questions and take notes during the class," she said. "I still have to encourage them a bit to speak out, but once they give me the right answer and feel comfortable, they jump right in."

"Ladies, Start Your Engines" is a basic class that covers a wide range of introductory car-maintenance topics.

"I want women to understand the language that they will hear when they take their vehicle in for service so they don't feel like they're getting ripped off," she said. "I'm also concerned about safety for women so we start by learning how to change a tire. From there, I talk about fluids, fuses, brakes, batteries and even how to check tire pressure. It's a chance to get dirty and try things before you have to do it on your own."

This is the first time Barton's Body Shop has offered the class, which they found out about through the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce.

"We wanted to offer something beneficial to women, and help them feel more comfortable dealing with automotive businesses," said Jenny Ruhl, sales and service specialist for the shop. "This is often a male-dominated industry, however more and more women are making decisions when it comes to their households and automotive care. We also wanted to introduce our shop as being women-friendly."

She said response to the class has been great so far-and although space is limited, there is still room to sign up.

She hopes women who take the class will gain new confidence when it comes to cars.

"We hope women will take away some general knowledge they can apply themselves for their car maintenance," she said. "Most importantly, though, we want them to feel confident in making automotive decisions when necessary."

Johnson said she looks at the class as a way to empower women to understand something that's a vital part of their daily lives.

"Girls from a young age, for the most part, are taught that working on cars is for the guys," she said. "If they have a problem, they should call dad. Well, I think that every driver should have basic knowledge about their vehicle and at least feel like they can have an intelligent conversation with service personnel. As I tell my classes, it's not like there's a 'car gene' and only men have it. Anyone can learn the basics."

She hopes that participants will walk away from the class with the confidence to ask questions when they bring their car in for repairs or to ask the shop to show and explain what work needs to be done on their car.

"This class is fun, informative and empowering," she said. "I just want to pass along the knowledge I have and show them they do know a lot more about their vehicles than they think they do."

She says that when she started in the automotive industry 23 years ago, she never imagined she'd be doing this for a living, but now she can't imagine doing anything else.

"I love what I do and I think it shows in every class I teach," she said. "It still surprises me when the women clap at the end of the class like I've just given a great speech. I'm happy that in some small way I can give back and help women become savvy, confident automotive consumers."

**DETAILS**  
*Ladies, Start Your Engines*  
*Wednesday, June 8*  
*6 to 8 p.m.*  
*Barton's Body Shop*  
*970 Rear W. Main St.*  
*Mount Joy, PA 17552*  
*The class is free, but registration is required by calling 653-8654 or emailing Jenny Ruhl at [jennyruhl@bartonsbodyshop.com](mailto:jennyruhl@bartonsbodyshop.com)*

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