

# If you're taken for a ride...

The Free Press will give space in future issues to spotlight car owners' complaints against unscrupulous salesman and service stations.

We welcome readers' comments and grievances, which we hope will enable us to uncover some of the more unsavoury fiddles designed to rook the car owner.

In the meantime, here is some advice that should help you avoid some of the expense and frustration caused by blind trust in your local garage.

**1** Always shop around and try to avoid the big garages. Communication between workshop and reception in big garages is often poor. The number of administrative, reception and public relations staff makes overheads high. These costs are passed on to the customer in high prices.

With piece working arrangements or management pressure for a quick turn-round of vehicles, troubles are often incorrectly diagnosed and work skimped.

**2** With servicing, check the changes laid down by the manufacturer for the service

or the hours recommended. If these charges are not in the handbook, the manufacturer's service department will tell you. Look at the maker's catalogue for prices of spares. Ask the garage for its hourly rate.

A garage purporting to have done a 'full service as per book' and which can be proved not to have done so can be prosecuted under the Trade Descriptions Act. Get in touch with your local weights and measures inspector. Whatever happens, you should be able to get some of your money back.

**3** In the case of emergency repairs, get the mechanic to commit himself as to what the trouble is. Avoid agreements like 'inspect and repair,' 'renew as necessary.'

Ask where possible to have the old parts kept for your inspection. Always get a receipt detailing work carried out and materials supplied. This can be useful in the event of a complaint later.

**4** Join one of the motoring organisations and use the services offered, like reports on a vehicle you intend to buy.

## TO A CHEAP REPAIR: £40

Mr and Mrs Heap bought a second-hand Imp. An elderly couple, they parted with a good deal of their savings.

They had trouble almost immediately with the clutch, and getting no satisfaction from the showroom where they had bought it, went to a local garage for advice.

The garage owner returned the car a couple of days later. He assured them that the hydraulics had been completely overhauled, and a new clutch fitted. It cost them £40.

After six weeks of relatively trouble-free motoring, the Imp ground to a halt once again, with all the symptoms of clutch trouble.

In despair, Mr and Mrs Heap went back to the owner of the garage, who realising their ignorance in mechanical matters, told them this was a common trouble with the Imp. He then asked for a further fee to strip down the clutch to find the cause of the problem.

At this stage, Mr and Mrs Heap became suspicious, and sought the advice of a friend, who referred them to his own garage.

A mechanic from this garage then

stripped down the clutch, or what was left of it. The clutch was worn to the rivets and in places had no lining at all.

He told them it was unlikely the clutch was new, and seemed distinctly like the original.

He then explained that it was possible to hide the symptoms of a defective clutch by a simple adjustment to the slave cylinder.

This involves checking for air in the system, bleeding off, and rectifying the stickiness in the slave cylinder piston.

The operation takes about fifteen minutes and requires no materials other than a small quantity of brake fluid.

The normal cost of diagnosis and repairs for this task is about £1.75.

## Tricks of the motor trade

At most the cost would be £3.

But not only were this couple deliberately and shamelessly misled into believing that their clutch was replaced, they were outrageously overcharged for this fictitious repair. The charge for replacing a real clutch for an Imp is about £22.

Mr and Mrs Heap are certainly not the only ones who have suffered at the hands of unscrupulous garages. Many other victims don't even know that they have been done.

## How they con mini owners

### FIDDLE No 1

Minor repairs are often made out to be major and more costly operations. One case known to us was of a mini owner who found he could select all his gears but the car would not drive.

Not having much mechanical experience, he believed that his clutch or gearbox was at fault. He paid for both to be inspected and overhauled.

What he didn't know was that all the garage had to do was to tighten the clamp on the gear lever splined selector trunnion. This operation takes a staggering total of three minutes!

### FIDDLE No 2

Even the really experienced amateur mechanic can be conned

into accepting a relatively minor repair as being a major one.

Again, with the mini gearbox, a common fiddle is to delude the customer into thinking that he requires a reconditioned gearbox.

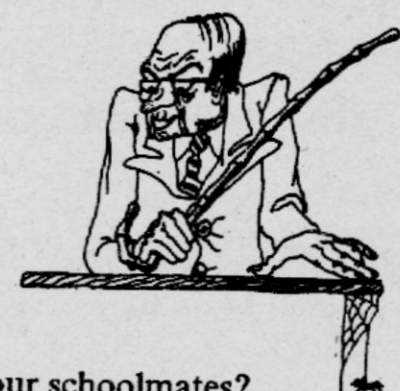
What happens is that the tab washer retaining the gears on the primary shaft loosens and allows the gears to slip forward. This gives the impression of a catastrophic collapse of most of the components in the gearbox.

Access to the tab washer can be gained through the inspection cover, avoiding the necessity to strip down the gearbox.

The cost of stripping down, inspecting and replacing the gearbox components is £48. The cost of removing the engine and gearbox inspection cover, plus the replacement of the tab washer (price 2p) is £18.

Profit by unscrupulous garages: £30.

# The Little Red Schoolbook: 3



The Little Red Schoolbook is obscene, we're told. But most people who have not read it probably have a very inaccurate idea of what it is really like. The sections which don't deal with sex or drugs (most of the book, in fact) have hardly been mentioned in the Press. So here is our third extract, re-printed to help Free Press readers make up their own minds about it.

### How to make a complaint

First and foremost, there must be a good reason for complaining. It's a serious matter for a teacher to be complained about. But you shouldn't be deterred from complaining because you're afraid, or because you can't get your parents to support you. Schools and teachers are like other institutions and people: if they're never criticised, they'll never get any better.

### Collect evidence

You must first collect evidence. This means getting examples of the things you think the teacher does badly or wrongly.

If there's no school council, or if a letter from the school council doesn't help, you should go to the headmaster yourselves. But it's a great help if your parents know about

it beforehand.

### Go to the authorities

If complaining to the headmaster doesn't help, try complaining to the parent-teacher association, if there is one for your school. Before approaching the school governors it's important to get the support of your parents. You should get them to sign the complaint as well as your classmates.

You must only complain if you can prove your complaint. This means you must have evidence. If you have the evidence, don't be put off from complaining because you're afraid or because it's too difficult.

### Punishment: what is allowed?

The best way of teaching is to use encouragement and rewards, not punishments. Psychologists discovered this a long time ago. But not all teachers and parents have discovered it yet.

Almost all schools have rules. Pupils should participate in making the school rules. Have you helped make the rules in your school? Under British common law, teachers are regarded as being *in loco parentis* to children in their charge. This means that teachers have the rights and duties of "a normal, prudent" parent. Parents, and hence teachers, are legally entitled to physically punish a child who misbehaves. They only break the law if the punishment is improper or excessive.

Corporal punishment in schools is obsolete and should be abolished. It's been abolished in British prisons and in the army and navy. It's been abolished in schools in most other Western countries. Why is it still used in most British schools?

Even an official government report (the Plowden Report on primary schools) has stated that corporal punishment is "ineffective in precisely those cases in which its use is most hotly defended" and "it should be banned". But most schools in Britain go on using corporal punishment.

### What can you do yourself?

If you get punished for something you know is wrong, that's fair enough. If you get a minor punishment for something somebody else did, it's probably not worth bothering about, as long as it doesn't happen frequently.

If you have good teachers you won't need all this information. Do remember that teachers may make mistakes without realising it themselves. Always try talking to them about it first. It's not necessary to complain every time. It's best if you can avoid having to complain.

### Pupils

#### Do you know?

Do you know that teachers influence you and that their influence affects your

judgement of your schoolmates?

Do you know that your view of your schoolmates is strongly affected, in lots of ways, by grown-ups' views?

Do you know that you are strongly influenced by things like advertising, books, comics, films, pop groups and TV?

### Remember

You are a person in your own right. In the end you're accountable only to yourself for your own actions.

You're a lot stronger if you're united - whether for something or against it.

A group needn't have just one leader at a time. Several members of the group can lead together. This is called collective leadership.

If a group decision has really been reached democratically, you should stick to it even if you disagree. You may be right to disagree and what happens as a result of the group's decision may prove you right.

Don't feel ashamed or guilty about doing things you really want to do and think are right just because your parents or teachers might disapprove. A lot of these things will be more important to you later in life than the things that are "approved of".

Be yourself.