

Lone garage picket

Peter McEvoy bought a second hand 3.4 litre Jaguar from Kensington Car Sales. It cost him £600. The guarantee was Board of Trade approved and gave him a parts only warranty for three months — a guarantee that he was to find almost useless.

BY
JOHN GARRETT

A month after purchase, the car's engine seized as he was driving along the East Lincs Road. He towed it back to the company's garage.

As they did not have the facilities to repair the car at their own garage, they suggested that the motorist take

the car to his own garage and send on the bill for parts and some of the labour charges. The mechanic at this garage discovered the engine was almost a write-off.

This discovery led to some argument with the dealers about the cause of the damage.

McEvoy's mechanic suspected metal fatigue in the outlet valve which had caused a chain reaction leading to the engine seizing. The valve had snapped off and dropped into the cylinder, causing the inlet valve to do the same. The broken valve had scoured the cylinder wall and head, smashed its way through the piston, broken the con-rod and ended up in the sump, where it was found.

Metal fatigue

To put his theory to the test, McEvoy had an examination made by Dr Bell of the University of Liverpool Metallurgy Department. Dr Bell confirmed that the No 1 exhaust valve had metal fatigue, and said that in his opinion the valve had caused the subsequent damage.

McEvoy's solicitors then sent the report to Kensington Car Sales, who did not dispute the findings. But then came the guarantee hitch:

"The guarantee as set out does not extend... to include consequential loss arising from any defect, and all

claims in these respects are excluded."

In other words, only the defective component is replaced, not all the parts which need replacing as a result of this one fault.

The company's solicitors replied: "My clients are only bound to replace the parts that have broken by fatigue." Just the valve, not the rest of the engine.

In a case like this, a guarantee, if it includes a clause avoiding "consequential loss" is absolutely useless.

Peter McEvoy's reply was a one-man picket of Kensington Car Sales. He talked to 50 prospective buyers during one weekend and only one went in to buy a car. His action was estimated by a mechanic at a nearby garage as having prevented about six sales.

Consumer protection

Without commenting on the merits of Peter McEvoy's case, the fact that he was able to turn away 50 prospective buyers of second-hand cars is evidence of the potential power of consumer direct action.

The average motorist does not have enough knowledge of car mechanics to challenge the dealer.

In the case of a faulty product, it may be beneficial to obtain an independent diagnosis before taking the product to be repaired. In the USA this is often done with electrical repairs so that the customer can tell the repair shop what needs doing and how much it should cost rather than the other way round.



Peter McEvoy on his one-man picket outside the car dealer's.

Fiddle concealed from the customer

One of the excuses often made for the trivial fines for breaking consumer protection laws is that the guilty firms suffer in other ways — the bad publicity loses them a lot of customers. In theory, yes.

But of course that depends on the customers knowing which shops to avoid. And if the local papers keep them in the dark, shoppers won't get much help from the Weights and Measures men either, as the following episode shows:

A Free Press reader in Huyton was shocked to learn that the manager of a local supermarket had been fined for fourteen offences under the Trade Descriptions Act.

Unfortunately the Liverpool Echo, in its report of the case on May 11, somehow didn't find space to print the name and address of the offending shop.

Disturbed at the possibility that he might be a customer there, our reader phoned the Weights and Measures inspectors in Huyton to find out which shop it was.

"Who are you?" they demanded. and "Why do you want to know?"

When the reader had explained, the inspector replied that he was not at liberty to reveal information discovered in the course of his enquiries.



DON'T CALL US!

Sign in a launderette in Lawrence Road: "If 'CALL MANAGER' light is on — call assistant."

New pence leads to new profits

Rowntree Mackintosh's profits have increased 50% this year (from £6.4 million to £9.1 million) as a direct result of decimalisation.

In his annual report the company's chairman, Sir Donald Barron, attributes his firm's success to reduced consumer resistance to higher prices when buyers began to equate old and new pence.

In Free Press No 6 we showed how easy it is for confectionary companies to confuse their customers by manipulation of the size and price of their products.

The change to decimal currency meant that manufacturers could effectively increase the price of a chocolate bar from the old 6d to the new 5p with only a minor change in size.

Rowntree Mackintosh seem quite delighted with their achievement at the expense of the public.

A drop of lemon stuff

THE LATEST kitchen sink drama produced by Lever Brothers of Port Sunlight features their Sunlight washing up liquid.

Some have claimed that the container showing an enticing lemon and a drop of lemon liquid may attract those unable to read the small print, namely children.

During discussions between Lever Brothers and the Home Office a courageous civil servant

was persuaded to try and swallow some of the liquid. The result — no danger to children until they have drunk 2 fluid ounces (10 teaspoonsful). No news about what happened to the civil servant.

They also agreed that the fluid is so nauseous that no child is likely to drink enough of it to suffer serious harm.

Unfortunately children have a nasty habit of refusing to eat or

drink anything offered to them and an insistence on consuming such delicacies as weedkiller — and anything else near to hand — in vast quantities.

Officially the matter is now finished with and Sunlight liquid continues to be a successful 'launch', relying on a child's ability to distinguish between cleaning fluids and drinks — or at least to drink no more than 2 fluid ounces,

Babies - or no sex

NOT EVERYONE who attended the anti-abortion rally in Liverpool will have been able to hear a discussion broadcast that morning on Radio Merseyside, in which the rally's organisers, Malcolm Muggeridge and Leo Abse, confronted three women who argued for women's right to choose abortion.

During the discussion Muggeridge revealed that he opposes not only abortion, but the whole measure of control over our bodies which contraception can give to women.

He stated that any form of birth

control or sterilisation was retrogressive and a sign of the decadence of modern society. Women listeners might be forgiven for feeling that the choice he offered them is not a very appealing one — endless babies or abstinence from sex!

However, they were re-assured to hear from his own lips that Muggeridge does understand the problems of working class women in Liverpool... In reply to one listener who phoned in he said that he felt a trip to India to film the starving in Calcutta had given him great insight into poverty.

No matter how many times women tell them that they want and demand the right to control their own lives, both Muggeridge and Abse seem convinced that they know best. Perhaps they still hold the view that women are fickle creatures, sub-normal in intelligence, and liable to change their minds at the drop of a hairpin. In other words, quite incapable of knowing whether or not they want a child, and in pathetic need of fatherly guidance from Muggeridge & Co.

References please!

● Critics of the Liverpool Daily Post and Echo will be pleased to learn that in future their complaints are likely to go straight to the people responsible.

In a notice to reporters Mr Norman Cook (News Editor of both papers) asks that "any reference to our papers — at public meetings, council meetings and so on — should be promptly referred to me.

"I would like to have, whenever possible, a full note of what is said about us," he adds.

It is feared in some circles that reporters who carry out this instruction may be so busy noting 'references' to their papers that news coverage will deteriorate even further. And the consequence of this deterioration will be even more public 'references' to the Post and Echo which will have to be noted, making reporters so busy that news coverage....

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