

Wheels: Bob D. writes, "As I was reading your column about technician pay in a recent column, I wondered if you could explain why a computer diagnosis of a check engine light would cost \$70 to \$80. Surely it doesn't take more than a couple minutes to hook a car up to a computer. Maybe you know if parts stores sell a simple-minded diagnostic "computer" for shade-tree mechanics?"

P.S. Thanks for your reply to an earlier question about my RAV-4 being slow to shift into high gear on cold days.

Halderman: In a previous column, I did mention that diagnosis is charged differently from service operations. It is one thing to read codes (free at some parts stores by the way) and another to have the scan data interpreted and the root cause determined. Many problems are very hard to find. For example, one that beat me up was a restricted exhaust on one cylinder bank only. I had to look at fuel trim numbers under load to catch them being out of range and finally nailed it down to a clogged converter.

Many problems can take days to figure out and most shops don't charge for all of the time they have invested plus the cost of the equipment. It costs over \$2,500 a year to keep test equipment up to date and about the same to keep access to service information. All of the companies charge for their information. If you want access to online information for just one day for one vehicle, vehicle manufacturers will charge about \$20. This charge is often added to the bill as the shop had to pay that to get the detailed information about your vehicle to fix it right.

I hope this explanation helps.

