

Automotive aftermarket guidelines: Beneficial to consumers?

Consumers have welcomed the recently published Guidelines for Competition in the South African Automotive Aftermarket Industry believing that motoring costs will be slashed. The automotive industry, on the other hand, slammed the guidelines, citing various concerns from safety to the impact on the economy.



Riaz Haffejee, CEO of Sumitomo Rubber SA (Sumitomo Dunlop)

According to Riaz Haffejee, CEO of Sumitomo Rubber SA (Sumitomo Dunlop), the reality of the situation is somewhat in between.

"Can these guidelines be beneficial to motorists? Yes indeed. They do have that potential. However, should these guidelines be implemented, the process will need to be carefully planned and executed," he warns.

Haffejee cautions against the widespread consumer enthusiasm at the publication of the guidelines.

"Modern cars require expensive diagnostic equipment and trained technicians for servicing. The guidelines do stipulate that original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) must provide equipment or training to 'Independent Service Providers' 1. at a reasonable cost that may not exceed that imposed on employees of 'Approved Service Providers' 2. But this equipment is expensive and independent service providers are only likely to invest if they believe that they can generate reasonable

returns," he says.



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On a positive note, Haffejee points out that the guidelines do place the motorist in the driver's seat when it comes to purchasing power. "It is important for consumers to have freedom of choice when it comes to the maintenance of their car and the new guidelines will allow for this to happen," he says.

However, it's far from just plain sailing on this front.

"What happens if the motorist fits sub-standard brakes to his or her vehicle – and ends up seriously injuring someone?" Haffejee asks.

This question applies to many different parts of a vehicle.

"The lights, windscreen wipers, suspension and tyres are also safety-critical components. Vehicle manufacturers design, engineer and build cars very carefully for a reason. Consumers have a responsibility to maintain their vehicles to a standard and all components and serviceable items need to be replaced within specification," he says.

Looking specifically at tyres, Haffejee says it is vitally important to ensure that the specifications of the tyre match the manufacturer's requirements.

"This pertains to tyre size, load index and speed rating. Buying and fitting cheaper tyres must not mean a compromised safety or performance result, which is clearly not the aim of the guidelines.



MAINTENANCE

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The onus will be on retailers of parts and components – anything and everything from windscreen wipers to tyres – to give sound and responsible advice. "For tyre retailers and manufacturers, there is a greater responsibility to deliver the correct advice and to educate consumers on the best replacement option, without compromising technical attributes of the vehicle. Consumer safety needs to remain the primary concern of the retailer," Haffejee says.

OEMs will have to widen their training nets in order to guarantee this level of service. Before the publication of the guidelines OEMs focused on training its Approved Service Providers. That was a more manageable task. The practicalities associated with training thousands more service providers will be challenging.

Sumitomo Dunlop will focus on ensuring that its franchises can provide such a service, Haffejee says "As a company, we are going to continue to ensure that our franchisees can provide the best advice whilst widening the pool of options for consumers. In this way, consumers will be able to make informed decisions when replacing tyres."

The Commission has invited automotive industry participants, regulators, consumers and other interested parties to submit their comments by 16 March on the draft guidelines. Following this, the commission will publish the final guidelines.