

From Our Perspective: Talking To The Shoe

Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
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A couple of weeks ago, I embarked on my monthly pilgrimage to the local big-box-store alley. The reason: to be voluntarily seduced into surrendering my wallet in exchange for all manner of items I didn't know I needed.

To ensure maximum efficiency, each store is checked out diligently in a pre-determined route so that I don't miss any new item(s). First stop: the automotive and tools section. Second stop: the gadget and computer section. Third stop: the book section. (Get my drift?) Finally, if I have to pick up anything on the "official shopping list," so be it! Looking around, I see I'm not the only lost soul taking a similar ritualistic approach to buying "stuff."

On this most recent occasion, I was excited to see a new addition to the tools section in the form of a digital flexible inspection camera probe for the paltry sum of \$125. That's almost a third of what I paid for mine last year!

Most maintainers are old enough to remember the 1960s and '70s program *Get Smart*. In it, Don Adams played the idiot spymaster Maxwell Smart, who relied on a plethora of futuristic gadgets to stay ahead of his enemies—*who can forget the shoe phone?* Adams went on to provide the voice for a similar cartoon character known as "Inspector Gadget" in the '80s and '90s. Again, gadgets were the name of the game.

We are a society that grew up with the promise of living with futuristic neat gadgets designed to make our lives easier. The dreamers, designers and engineers since the 1960s have worked hard to realize most of those television fantasies and so much more, as evidenced by spacecraft, smart appliances, digital cameras, smart phones, music devices and wireless connectivity, to name a few! This trend has also been strong in the maintenance arena, where we now find cool gadgets, devices and gizmos that were virtually unaffordable 20 years ago, but can now be purchased on any regular operating budget—for every maintainer, in some cases!

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I purchased my digital inspection camera to enhance my hobby of restoring old cars and motorcycles, and use it to perform non-intrusive internal inspections of gearboxes to check gear-teeth condition and, through the spark-plug hole, to inspect piston and bore condition. I now classify it as an invaluable tool that sits alongside my smartphone with Internet access and built-in digital still and movie camera for recording before and after events of concern; my electronic infrared thermometer (now available for between \$50 and \$75); and my handheld infrared thermographic camera system for checking bearing temperatures, heat exchange and oil-cooler input/output temperatures.

Amazingly, that last technology cost upwards of \$100,000 two decades ago—*today, outfitted with many more features than the original models, it can be had for less than \$1000!* The list goes on and on, including computerization and advanced diagnostics that can give us sophisticated oil-analysis capability for less than \$20 per sample. I bet you can add several examples of your own.

Technology is ever-moving and omnipresent. At prices like those noted here, every maintenance department can afford to “Get Smart” and arm its lubrication department with some “Inspector Gadget” state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment for what amounts to—*in most cases*—less than the cost of a single bearing failure. It might even inspire us to best practice. Go ahead and “talk to the shoe, 99!” Good Luck!

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