

Technology Today

Product Review

Car MD Can Provide a Diagnostic Check-up for Your Motor Vehicle

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The Car MD diagnostic unit is an interactive tool that is designed to help the average car owner determine the health of their motor vehicle. It can help you determine why your check engine light is on and whether the light is indicating a major or minor problem. Even though the unit's literature indicates that Car MD can help you make a purchasing decision on a used car, I would recommend that you continue to use a knowledgeable mechanic to help you determine if a used car is in good running condition.

I have been in the automotive business for around 20 years and was very interested to see how helpful this tool would be for the average car owner. In essence this product is an OBD2 (On Board Diagnostics 2nd Generation) scanner. OBD2 systems were federally mandated in 1996 and you will even find the system on some 1995 vehicles.

OBD2 was originally designed to make it easier to diagnosis vehicle emissions problems. Since most vehicle drivetrain systems effect emissions in some way, the

OBD2 system was designed to be able to generally point a technician in the right direction to diagnose most engine or transmission problems. When your car dealership or auto



repair shop uses "diagnostics" to determine a problem they are using a twofold approach. They first get the OBD2 system scanned and then have a technician use their prior knowledge and manufacturer bulletins to help them pinpoint the problem.

What works to the Car MD's benefit is that all vehicles since 1996 use the same OBD2 system codes so the unit can scan all vehicles regardless of make. The two things that really make this product stand out are its price (\$ 89.99) and the fact that you can link it to the internet. This link

essentially gives you access to the required technical guidance that will tell you what is wrong with your vehicle and how much it should cost to repair the problem. Trust me the cost of a Car MD diagnosis is very reasonable if one considers what an average diagnosis would cost at your local repair shop where they use a professional grade machine that will provide very similar coded information.

The Car MD's internet interface and program are very easy to use. The system will prompt you to give it the full vehicle identification information which is located at the lower left of your windshield. It uses this information to get the bulletin information for your vehicle. At this time the Car MD will only let you diagnose 3 different vehicles. However you may access information for these 3 vehicles as many times as you need. I have been informed that they are working on making it possible for you to purchase extra VIN access.

I used the Car MD on multiple vehicles, including a diesel, and was very impressed on how its interface worked when scanning all of them. The information given online was very accurate; in fact it was the same information that I would have gathered using our professional system.

However I found the instructions that were provided with the unit to be very vague when they tried to explain the capabilities of the scanner. I felt the company was trying too hard to oversimplify a very impressive product. While this scanner will do everything advertised it is capable of doing so much more.

Despite being told otherwise by the company; it is possible to reset the powertrain control module with this scanner. This is something you definitely don't want to do unless you are a very skilled "driveway" mechanic. If you are going to be taking your vehicle in for service after using this product you definitely don't want to delete the codes from your vehicle's computer.

If you are a skilled backyard tech and you just

replaced that pesky O2 sensor you now have a tool that you can use to reset the powertrain control module(PCM) codes so the check engine light is essentially reset. If your gas cap wasn't properly re-attached after a fill up, your check engine light is lit and your Car MD will show a p0440 code which means a large gas evaporation leak. Now it is very important I mention that the same p0440 could be referencing a hole in your gas tank or an evaporation solenoid failure so resetting codes unless you know what you are doing can be very dangerous. I found this and many other tricks this system is capable of doing by going to the website <http://www.iequus.com/downloads/manuals/93-0058.pdf> . It can be dangerous expanding Car MD's capabilities if you aren't a

skilled mechanic. But I guess what I am trying to say is that in the right hands this is a very powerful tool that you should consider adding to your backyard mechanic's toolbox.

The only downside to this product is that it doesn't come with a cable to make it truly handheld while in use on most cars. Without a cable it was screen down in some vehicles and this was annoying. As mentioned before the instructions are not the best but the company's online help section and their 1 800 phone number both hook you up to certified ASE technicians who will answer your questions.

Whether you are using this product for true diagnosis or just to get a taste of what you will be in for when you visit your trusty repair center this tool is well worth the money.

