

Black & Decker SmartScan**By Dan Pierce**

partmangr@hotmail.com

The Black and Decker SmartScan, auto diagnostic tool, can help you self diagnose your 1995 or newer vehicle. It will work on all 1995 or newer foreign or domestic vehicle's sold in the US because they are all equipped with the OBD 2 (on board diagnostic 2nd generation) system.

This unit has a nice rubberized outer edge that looks durable and feels comfortable. It appears to be a tool that will stand up to being handled with greasy hands. The unit also has a long wire that makes it easy to plug the unit into the diagnostic port under the car's dash and read its display while it is still connected to the vehicle. This is a big plus over other scanners that directly plug into the vehicle port and can't be read until you disconnect them.

I tested the unit on a customer's vehicle that had a check engine light indicating a problem. As soon as I plugged the SmartScan in the screen lit up, making it easy to read the display.

The unit provided me with 2 diagnostic trouble codes and it also displayed a small arrow pointing to an on screen color chart. The arrow can point to green, yellow, orange, or red which tells the relative seriousness of the problem.

To interpret a displayed code you have to look it up in the instruction manual. It is a shame that the critical pages are not laminated to protect

them from greasy hands or the weather. I would hope that future models of the SmartScan would provide the actual code definition right on the display. If this manual becomes unreadable, you can find what each automotive code actually means through an Internet search.

The tested vehicle showed a P0128 and a P0304 problem. Since the arrow was pointing to yellow it was clear that the



problem was reasonably serious. The P0128 represented a failing thermostat and the P0304 a misfire on cylinder # 4. The important point to be made is their SmartScan did provide the needed direction for repairing this vehicle.

After the diagnostic was complete I hit the reset button on the tool. This operation cleared the diagnostic information from the vehicle's computer causing the check engine light to go out even though the vehicle wasn't yet repaired. Of course if the car isn't repaired, the check engine light will most likely quickly

reappear. Not fixing problems that cause the check engine light to go on in the first place can cause excessive emissions, bad fuel mileage and possible damage to the engine and/or the transmission. You should consult a repair shop before clearing diagnostic information that may assist them in repairing your vehicle.

The savvy home auto mechanic will find the SmartScan an excellent addition to their tool box. It is built sturdier than most other models I tested. The original packaging is eye catching but it doesn't include a protective case to house the unit.

If you read my review of the CarMD unit you might, at this point, want me to compare the two products. The Black and Decker is the better machine. However, the support you get with the CarMD is extremely helpful for the newbie mechanic. For the Hard core backyard mechanic the B&D is the better machine. They both do the same thing but the B&D is more comfortable to use and it is easier to see the codes that it finds because of the long cord and backlit screen. I also believe that the B&D unit will hold up better to abuse than the CarMD.

Dan has been in the automotive industry for over 20 years. He has a bachelors in Marketing and Management and is currently working at a dealership in mid Michigan. He has built many project vehicles and engines and is currently rebuilding a 1966 VW Beetle.