

This doctor is always on call for your car

by Mark_Maynard

The amber glow of the "Check Engine" warning light can send many rational drivers into a state of "Now what!" frustration.

That dreaded telltale can mean any number of problems, great and small, and it speaks a computer language with which many are unfamiliar.

CAR DOCTOR - When it's time to discuss a car problem, call on the CarMD, a handheld electronic device that acts as doctor and translator to solve problems with newer vehicles equipped with an OBD2 Data Link Connector. CNS Photo. But when it is time to discuss a car problem with the service manager, call on the CarMD. This hand-held electronic device acts as doctor and translator to solve problems with newer vehicles equipped with an OBD2 Data Link Connector.

Plug CarMD into the connector - often on the driver's left under the instrument panel - turn on the ignition and wait a minute or two as the tester collects the vehicle's information. The data can be downloaded to the home computer or laptop - but PC only, not MacIntosh. User-friendly reports are accessed via the CarMD Web site, www.carmd.com.

The device helps identify the most likely problem and what needs to be done to correct it, even if it is just a loose gas cap. Color-coded LEDs - green, yellow or red - indicate whether all systems are running normally.

And even when a computer isn't available to process information, there is a call center staff of ASE-certified technicians and master technicians to answer questions.

The pocket-size tester is also handy when shopping for newer, used cars. Plug it in and download a history of details. The system also works as a pre-smog test to determine whether the engine will pass muster or use it as a quick check before a road test. Better to find out at home of a potential problem than 125 miles down the road.

The CarMD kit - \$90 - includes the hand-held tester, a Quick Reference User's Guide, demonstration video, USB cable with CD software to link the tester to a Windows-based PC and access to an online database via www.carmd.com. It can be ordered from the Web site or by calling 888-692-2763.

The Web site has other useful materials, such as a printable checklist for examining a used car.

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