

## How to Gyp the TV Repairman

By **ART MARGOLIS** EVERY few years a rash of exposé articles appears in magazines telling how TV repairmen gyp the public. This is one of those times. I am a TV repairman and have been for 20 years. When I do house calls later today I'll be on my guard. For these exposés seem to stimulate some customers to revenge. Let me tell you about some of the sneaky methods they've come up with in a few cases from the last month or two.

"The on/off switch on my color TV is broken," a woman told me on the phone recently. "We know because my husband shorted it out and the TV is working. The only way we can turn it off is to pull the plug out of the wall."

Sounded logical. I asked her for the model number and told her I'd be there in about an hour. The parts house is only a few miles out of the way. I whistled when the counterman told me the price of the switch. It was his last one; he must have had a run on them.

As I pulled into the customer's neighborhood a friend of mine from another TV company was directly ahead of me. He waved. He must have had a call nearby. I made a left turn and he made a right. When I reached the correct address there were two other TV trucks in front of the house. One of the guys must have been inside. The other was standing in the doorway gesticulating wildly. Then, from the other end of the block, came my friend.

It was a race case. She had called four companies and the first one there won. (No wonder there had been a run on that on/off switch.) And not even a service charge for the rest of us to cover the cost of the fool switch!

Calculating a service charge for a house call is easy. You take into consideration the salary of the dispatcher who receives and routes the call to a serviceman, the truck expense, driving time, general overhead, the serviceman's pay for the time in the house and, I hope, a fair profit. It's normal routine to collect our minimum fee on every house call.

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The customer obligates himself for the service charge when he places a service request and a man walks in his front door. But some people try to duck the charge. Take, for example, a call I made on an unsmiling blonde set-owner.

I looked over the TV. The tubes were lighting and the pilot light was on. But there was no sound or brightness. I moved the TV away from the wall and then I made my mistake. Instead of first taking off the back I began by resetting the circuit breaker. The sound and picture came back on.

"What did you do?" she hollered.

I showed her the little red button and how it is reset by pressing it. She shouldered me away from behind the TV and fingered the button. Then she shoved the TV back against the wall.

"I'm not finished yet," I said. Circuit breakers just don't open all by themselves. Nine times out of ten it's because of some kind of trouble.

"Oh yes you are," she snarled. "I'm not paying you any service charge for pressing a button." And she pointed to the door. Just then a large man in an undershirt walked in from the other room. Something told me I wasn't going to get anywhere arguing so I packed up to leave. As I started the truck she came running out. "Hey fellow," she called sweetly, "it went dead again." But I kept right on going.

In roughly one out of every five calls a TV technician must take the set back to the shop. An auto mechanic can change tires, batteries and spark plugs on the spot but not take time for a ring job. Likewise, a TV repairman can change tubes, fuses and other components in the house but must remove the TV to his bench for more complex work. Some unscrupulous customers see this as an opportunity to make money.

I did one repair job for a man who sounded like a side-show barker. The set was a 21-in. three-way color console and there was no brightness. Minor repair measures didn't work and I received permission to pull the chassis and take it to my shop. I left the picture tube in the cabinet with the radio and phonograph that are the other two parts of the three-way system.

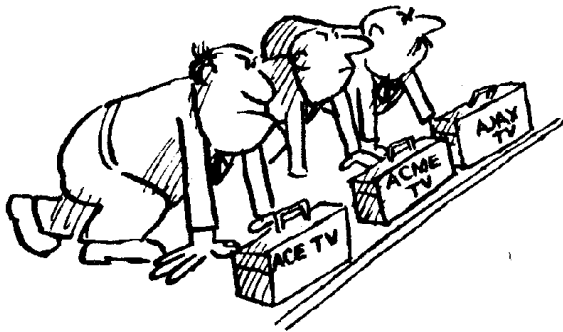
On the bench, I found a defective flyback transformer. I installed a new one and returned the chassis the next day. It performed beautifully in the console and I handed the gent the bill. He examined it without complaint but insisted that I stick around to check out the TV.

"Sit down and watch the ball game. Don't be in such a hurry. Haste makes waste." I sighed and sat down. After five minutes of faultless black-and-white, it happened. The screen slowly turned light shades of green-and-white.

He jumped up. "See! The TV *isn't* working right." I reached around in back and turned the green control down a hair. That did it. I sat down again. As the ball game went on the screen gradually developed pinkish tones. He said indignantly, "You don't call *that* right, do you?"

My heart sank. He had a bad color picture tube. I sure was glad I had left the picture tube in the house. I tried to break the news gently. "That changing color is due to movement of the shadow mask." You need a new picture tube. It's been that way a long time hasn't it?"

"What are you talking about?" he snarled. "If there is any trouble in that TV you caused it!" My attempts to explain that I didn't touch his tube and that



this trouble only could occur over months and months did nothing but make him still angrier. He showed me the door without paying the \$50 repair bill. I didn't receive his check till he was served a summons from our small-claims court a few months later.

I guarantee my repair jobs according to normal industry practice—90-day warranty on any new parts we install. I also supply any labor that is needed to locate and replace these parts should they go bad. The only exception is a one-year warranty on picture tubes. Since there are over 2,000 parts and connections in the average TV set it's economically impossible to extend guarantee any further although we often do more than the guarantee calls for in order to clear up a misunderstanding. Sometimes, however, people want a bit more than we can supply.

A nice looking young couple brought a late-model 19-in. portable into the store for repair one morning. I examined it on the service counter and found it was dead. I took off the back, ran some quick checks and discovered the heater resistor, a large object resembling a dog bone, had burnt open. It was an orange one with a flocked finish. I soldered in a new one in shiny sky blue. The TV came on. I wrote up a bill. They paid it and were on their way. But about five minutes before closing that evening they were back again with the same complaint. From the back of the store I could hear them talking to the night man.

They both looked up startled as I walked up to the service counter. Then they gave me a big hello. I took over from the night man and found that they were

right—the set behaved just as it had that morning.

Perplexed, I removed the back of the TV and went searching for the blue heater resistor I had installed. It was gone! In its place was the orange flocked job I had removed. I began rooting through the trash can. Near the bottom was another flocked resistor. I pulled it out and held it up. The customers both flushed and stood there, trying to think of something to say.

She regained her composure first. "Oh my goodness," she exclaimed, fluttering her eyes, "do you know what must have happened, dear? We mixed up the two TVs. We have two portables exactly alike. They must have broken down together."

As it turned out this one had a bad tube. It's common in multiple-TV households for the owners to wait until all their TVs have conked out before they call for service. When identical sets failed from what appeared to be the identical complaints these folks saw a chance to chisel.

Fortunately most people are great to deal with and make a guy feel like a hero when he puts the picture back in their tubes.

