

Virtual "Dash" Pinpoints Engine Problems

If your car or pickup is less than 10 years old, you can troubleshoot problems with the AutoTap OBDII Diagnostic Scanner. It lets you create a virtual dashboard of function monitors on a PDA (like a Palm Pilot) or a laptop computer.

"AutoTap lets you set up a host of graphs and displays for sensors in your power train," explains Mike Fahrion, B&B Electronics, maker of AutoTap.

He gives the Check Engine Light as an example. It comes on when an engine sensor goes out of range, but that's all the driver knows. AutoTap reveals one of several trouble codes, such as one that suggests the engine fuel mix is too lean. Then you can look at the sensor while the engine is running to gather more information.

"Other diagnostic tools stop at giving you the code," explains Fahrion. "Tell an auto parts store that the code indicates too lean a fuel mix and the first suggestion they'll give you is to replace the oxygen sensors. That can run from \$30 to several hundred dollars and might not solve the problem."

AutoTap, he says, allows you to graph the

oxygen sensor and compare it to a graph of how the sensor should look. If it's okay, then you can go on to the next possibility.

"You can go to an auto parts store and choose from a whole lineup of diagnostic tools from \$120 to \$200, and they will read the code and clear it, but not gather data," suggests Fahrion. "AutoTap starts at \$200 and runs up to \$500, depending on what features you want. It gathers real time data on about 20 different inputs like temperature, rpm, etc., as well as manufacturer's enhanced or proprietary real time data. We can do color gauges as well as graphs of the data."

Fahrion says customers range from "do-it-yourselfers" to people who simply want information before going into a shop. "If you can go in with a printout, codes, graphs and other output, it starts a different level of discussion with a mechanic," he says.

Unfortunately, Fahrion adds, "It's hard to tell somebody to buy AutoTap up front as a preventative measure. Too many customers order the tool after blowing \$300 and a weekend blindly replacing parts."

To fully utilize the scanner, the company

recommends the customer buy a diagnostic manual for the vehicle. B&B also sells online software called Sensor Guide. It tells where to find different sensors, how the engine runs and if you use the scanner, how output will look. The company's website is also loaded with documentation and articles on troubleshooting with the scanner as well as a couple of videos.

"The bulk of our sales are to people who have never used a scanner before," says Fahrion. "We have a pretty intensive user manual and lots of support material. Service manuals for a vehicle have a troubleshooting tree that gives step-by-step instructions."

Although B&B's primary business is data communications, employee interest in automobiles led to development of the scanner. It has also been adapted for use with heavy-duty diesel engines.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, B&B Electronics Mfg. Co., 707 Dayton Road, P.O. Box 1040, Ottawa, Ill. 61350 (ph 815 433-5100; fax 815 433-5105; mfahrion@bb-elec.com; www.autotap.com and www.obdii.com).



AutoTap Diagnostic Scanner lets you create a virtual dashboard of function monitors on a PDA or laptop computer.



AutoTap starts at \$200 and runs up to \$500, depending on features you want.

New Shop Tools Make Work Easier

Thanks to a special locking mechanism, the LockJaw Automatic Locking Pliers adjusts to fit thick and thin nuts with the same amount of pressure.



If you hate having to size your vise grip to fit every nut, then you'll be interested in the LockJaw Automatic Locking Pliers. Thanks to a special locking mechanism, it adjusts to fit thick and thin nuts with the same amount of pressure each time.

It's available at Ace Hardware

(www.acehardware.com) and select Home Depot stores for between \$20 and \$25.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, LockJaw, LLC, P.O. Box 285, Crystal Lake, Ill. 60039 (info@lockjawpliers.com; www.lockjawpliers.com).

The Extractor pulls nails, staples, screws and other fasteners much faster than a hammer or crowbar.

Its nose lets you grip the complete fastener and roll it out without bending it instead of jerking at an angle. Because it has serrated teeth, it can also pull out screws without stripping them.

Sells for between \$20 and \$30 online and at different retailers.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jefferson Tool, LLC, P.O. Box 31535, Charleston, S.C. 29417 (ph 843 556-0455; fax 843 556-0687; customerservice@nailextractor.com; www.nailextractor.com).



Nose on the Extractor lets you grip the complete fastener and roll it out without bending it.

Thanks to the Bionic Wrench, you can throw out many of your box end wrenches and put away the vice grip or pliers. This tool has a multi sizing hex head.

The 8-in. tool replaces six box end wrenches from 7/16 to 3/4 in. (or 10 metric sizes - 11 to 20 mm).

Sells for about \$29 plus S&H.

Dan Brown with Loggerhead Tools says a 6-in. tool to replace 12 wrenches between 1/4 in. to 1/2 in. (6 metric sizes - 7 to 12 mm) will be on the market in Jan. 2006.

In March 2006, the company will introduce a 10-in. tool which covers 8 sizes between 3/4 in. to 1 1/4 in. (10 metric sizes - 19 to 30 mm) wrenches.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Loggerhead Tools LLC, 208 South LaSalle St., Suite 189, Chicago, Ill.



Bionic Wrench comes with a multisizing hex head.



Tool replaces a whole set of box end wrenches.

60604 (ph 888 564-4374 or 312 419-1091; fax 312 251-5154; www.loggerheadtools.com).

Multi Oil Wrench fits oil pan plugs for up to 95 percent of all cars, light trucks and other motors.



Forget about finding the right socket or open-end wrench the next time you change oil. The Multi Oil Wrench fits oil pan plugs for up to 95 percent of all domestic and import cars, light trucks and other motors.

Although the 8-in-1 wrench was designed with the service mechanic in mind, it makes a handy addition to any toolbox. A rotating head on each end of the wrench has four mounted sockets for a total of 8 different sizes. The rotating socket heads allow the wrench access to spots hard to reach with standard wrenches.

The Multi Oil Wrench is made from drop forged steel and priced at \$34.55. It comes with a lifetime warranty. Distributor Innovative Products of America (IPA) promises to repair or replace any wrench that fails because of workmanship or material within 24 hours.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Peter Vinci, IPA, P.O. Box 266, Mt. Tremper, N.Y. 12457 (ph 845 688-2300 or 888 786-7899; fax 845 688-2400; peter@ipatools.com; www.ipatools.com).

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