

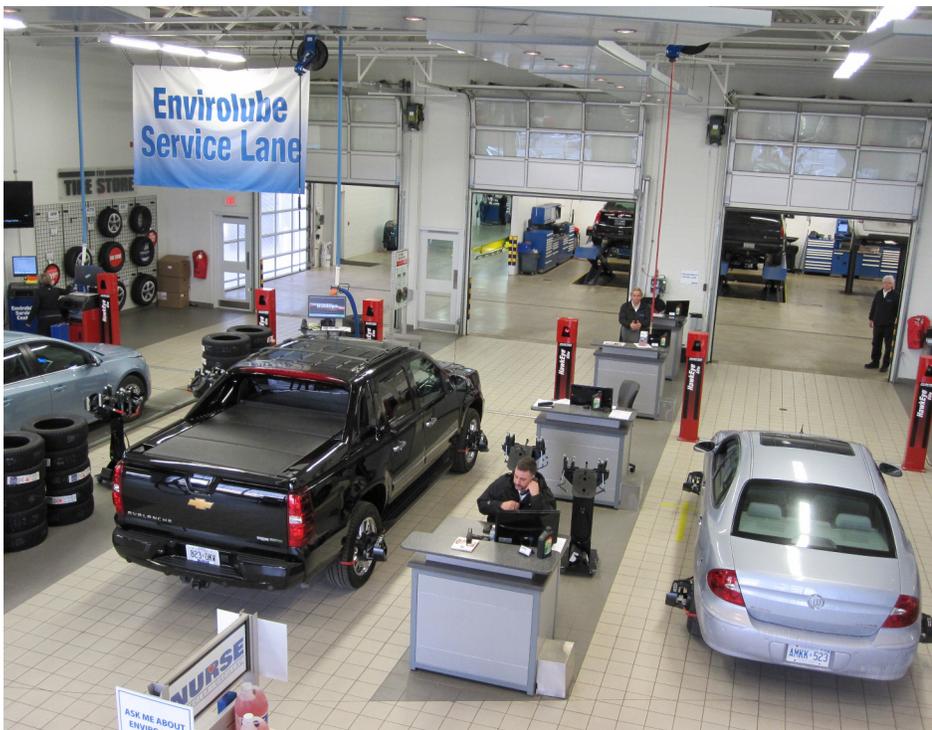
Automotive News

Automotive News

ELECTRONICALLY REPRINTED FROM APRIL 2, 2012

Quick-alignment tool bolsters profits 20-minute check becomes a right-now routine process

By Larry P. Vellequette



Each service lane at Nurse Chevrolet-Cadillac in suburban Toronto has the system to check wheel alignment in less than 90 seconds

A service technician typically needs 20 minutes or more to hoist a car and install laser devices to check wheel alignment. Since Jan. 17, Nurse Chevrolet-Cadillac in Whitby, Ontario, has been using a device that requires no hoist and does the job in 90 seconds.

The device, widely used at Sears auto shops and now available to U.S. auto dealers, is so quick that Nurse's service techs check for free every vehicle that drives into their three-lane service line. It has helped the suburban Toronto dealership increase alignment revenue dramatically.

Nurse Chevrolet-Cadillac is among the first dealerships in North America to install the Quick Check HawkEye Elite 3D system from Hunter Engineering Co.

The system — whose exclusivity agreement with Sears, Roebuck and Co. in the United States expires this week — was introduced in 2011 and shown to dealers in February at the National Automobile Dealers Association convention in Las Vegas. It uses spring-loaded clamps to attach targets quickly to the wheels, and pole-mounted cameras to determine a vehicle's tire wear angles.

Dave Duggan, general manager of Nurse Chevrolet-Cadillac, said the dealership sold an average of six alignments per day in 2011 at \$89.95 (Canadian) before installing the quick-check devices — and now averages 16 alignments per day at the same price.

The dealership has done more than 5,000 free alignment checks since installing the Hunter Engineering system. About 53 percent of the vehicles were out of alignment, Duggan said.

"In the first two months we converted 588" free alignment checks into alignment sales, Duggan said. The vast majority of customers are "appreciative of the information, even if they don't get an alignment," Duggan said. The dealership runs each vehicle through the free test, even its new cars.

The quick-check unit retails for \$27,900, says Kaleb Silver, a product manager with Hunter Engineering. The price includes installation and on-site training from the Bridgeton, Mo., company.

Jim Sassorossi, head of Mopar sales and product development for Chrysler Group, said the automaker decided to showcase the quick-check system at its NADA expo booth after he tried the system out himself.

Sassorossi, a former service technician, said he was impressed at the ease and accuracy of the alignment check. The automaker has been encouraging its dealers to offer express oil changes and expand service hours.

You can reach Larry P. Vellequette at lvellequette@crain.com.