

BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU BUY AUTOPARTS

Some are cleverly packaged to look like the big-name brands, but what's inside is not **what you** bargained for... and could cause major damage to your car.

One way to economize is to do some of the maintenance and repair work on your car yourself. Your labor doesn't cost you anything out-of-pocket, and you can often get the parts for less than a repair facility charges. But there's a hidden hazard that can cause you inconvenience and extra expense and even seriously damage the car.

You might unwittingly buy and install one of the counterfeit parts showing up increasingly on the market— gypsy parts, they're called in the trade. The boxes they come in and sometimes the parts themselves are cleverly designed to simulate original equipment from the major auto manufacturers— General Motors, Ford, Chrysler and lately, Volkswagen. Even having your car repaired at a dealership may be no guarantee that factory parts will be used.

Instead of getting parts of original-equipment quality, made to the rigid specifications of the manufacturers, you could be getting equipment of inferior quality. On at least one occasion buyers got defective parts that had been thrown on the junk pile by the manufacturer.

Some of the reputable suppliers of high-quality replacement parts are being victimized by the counterfeiters, too. Standard Motor Products, for example, not long ago warned buyers that its parts were being simulated. So did a unit of the Bendix Corp.

Unlike the gypsies, the manufacturers of parts sold under well-known brand names— Fram, Federal-Mogul, Bendix, Standard Motor Products, Monroe, Mallory, and the like— stand behind their products. Their corporate names and addresses are printed on the packages. A gypsy parts box seldom bears an address.

A GROWING PROBLEM

It was about ten years ago that the problem first came up for General Motors, the company with the most cars on the road. R.C. Hockstad, administrator for quality assurance and quality control for GM Parts Division, learned that synchronizer rings— parts that allow you to shift gears without clashing them— were failing shortly after GM dealers installed them.

The synchronizers were shipped to GM headquarters, where inspection revealed that the parts didn't meet factory specifications. GM said they weren't GM parts. Yet the dealers swore they got the parts from GM. The boxes backed up their contention: They were identical.

Investigation uncovered an outfit in Florida that had gone to the box manufacturer, said it was doing some work for GM and acquired a supply of boxes. It was then a simple matter for the gypsies to package cheap rings in the genuine GM boxes and sell them as GM parts.