

and sent from there to Los Angeles, where they were sold. As is common with gypsy parts, the filters were the same color as original-equipment parts.

Do these boxes also fool the retail and repair shops that buy them? Sometimes yes and sometimes no. The parts usually cost less than original-equipment parts. Sometimes buyers are told that the parts are authentic but have slight flaws that don't affect their reliability. This makes them second-line parts, the story goes, so the box is a bit different. Sometimes buyers are so familiar with parts packages that they scarcely glance at what they're buying. Other parts retailers do know the difference, as Bob Cerullo, an auto expert on the staff of *Motor* magazine a widely read trade publication, found when he investigated the subject and wrote a warning article for the trade entitled, "Are You Selling Junk?"

WHAT THE COMPANIES ARE DOING

Gypsy parts put the manufacturers of original equipment and quality replacements in a difficult position. Certainly, they are losing money on parts sales. But far more important to them is the possible loss of their good name with buyers.

As a VW representative says, "The owner believes he is buying original-equipment quality, and if it fails, he blames us, not the simulator." ...The majority of these products don't come close to original-equipment quality."

For those reasons the companies have been eager to take legal action against any simulator they catch. At GM, for instance, Hockstad says his office has turned up 77 cases, and corporate attorneys have taken action in 62 of them. Many of the fly-by-nighters simply vanish, only to appear elsewhere under a different name.

When you're buying parts or having work done, look closely and ask questions to get the quality you expect.