

'This here's the thingamajig'

Of course LCC instructor Charles Freeman knows a Volkswagen doesn't come equipped with such a thing, but he says his students usually don't know their dipsticks from their pistons.

"I changed the oil in my car this weekend!" the young woman proudly announced as she took a seat in the classroom.

"I fixed my turn signals," a classmate replied.

"I lubricated my car," another piped in.

The instructor walks in, asks one of them how to spell carburetor, and another to spell vacuum. He then writes three words on the blackboard — ignition, compression, fuel — and begins to tell the women all about spark plugs.

The class is a car maintenance course particularly designed for women who don't know a dipstick from a piston. The course is offered by Lane Community College (LCC) with a primary emphasis on preventative car maintenance.

"I'm mainly trying to teach the women how to identify the parts of their car so they can explain their problems better to a mechanic," says course instructor Charles Freeman.

"I want to teach them to call a certain car part its real name, not just 'thingamajig.'"

LCC offers several auto repair courses, but only a few specifically for women. The courses are taught at night at various auto workshops around town by actual auto mechanics.

Freeman, an auto shop teacher at South Eugene High School, teaches his course in the high school's auto shop. The shop is large enough so the students can drive in their own cars and work on them.

Freeman's class has 17 stu-

dents — "just about the right size for a class like this," he says. Usually, the auto maintenance courses for women have large waiting lists, although this term enrollment dropped slightly and two of the classes were forced to combine.

Freeman's Wednesday class sessions from 7 to 10 p.m. are part lecture, part workshop. One night the women learn about spark plugs, another night it's engine timing.

By the end of the term, the students will know how to check air filters, spark plugs, oil levels and how to change tires.

Freeman first taught a course in "powder puff mechanics" several years ago in Cottage Grove. When he moved to Eugene, he agreed to instruct one of the auto maintenance courses LCC was offering.

"A car is usually a person's second largest expense next to a house," Freeman says in stressing the importance of his course. "You might as well know how to take care of it."



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