

Top-Quality Products for Low-End Prices??!

By Chris Alston

I just got back from the SEMA Show in Las Vegas. As always there was way too much to see and not nearly enough time to see it all. There are so many cool cars on display that it just overwhelms you. It's kind of like seeing a stadium full of super models; it just takes your breath away.

It was a whirlwind week for sure, with lots of ideas and suggestions coming at us from all angles. But, there was one interesting thing that happened that I would like to share with you this month. I like to work my company's booth at the trade shows because it helps keep me in touch with the people who pay my bills. A customer was looking at our billet control arms and asked me if we made them for his vehicle. He had a fairly rare, late-model car. He explained that he had been looking all over and could not find what he wanted. He had some interest in a component from an offshore company that looked good in the ad he saw. He was smart enough to go see the real products before he bought them and could not believe how bad they looked. He noticed that the machining was not that precise and couldn't believe just how shoddy looking the components were in person. Then he told me that he had found a set produced in the USA, but they just lacked the attention to detail he expected an American-made part to have and seemed like the design was not all that well thought out.

I explained that our parts are indeed manufactured in the USA and showed him all the little features that set ours apart from the others. He had a lot of dimensional information about his vehicle so I figured we could make a product for his application without too much work because it was very similar to a size that we already produce. As I was just about to tell him we could probably make him a custom set, he dropped the bombshell. He explained that what he was really looking for was a product with the design and features of ours but the price of the offshore part. After a short pause to determine if he was kidding, I told him we couldn't help him.

I just could not believe that someone would actually think that you could get a top end feature designed into a product and expect to buy it at a low-end price. He seemed like an intelligent person and obviously understood that there was a tremendous difference between the parts. Why would he believe that it could be sold cheap?

The more I think about it the more I wonder. Is this what we expect as consumers? Are we so brainwashed by the low-price advertising on television, the Internet and in print that we believe we should be able (almost believe that it is our right!) to buy the highest quality parts at the low-end item prices?

Do consumers not realize that quality products require time and investment to design and produce? Do intelligent people not realize that you have to pay a good wage to a skilled worker or pay for a high-dollar machine that produces the part? Are we so ignorant as a society that we forget that quality should be job one and that to get quality we have to pay a fair price for it? No, we're just conditioned to look for the cheapest price and then know that we still have the right to complain when the product doesn't live up to our expectations. It's a vicious circle, for sure.

There is a valid reason similar parts have different prices. The cost to manufacture quality products does not allow us to sell them cheap. There is one more old saying that comes to mind: YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR.