

HONEST HANK'S GARAGE

The Shop Counter Playbook

Fair prices, the right words, and the upsells to turn down

36 real repair prices · word-for-word scripts · glovebox card

2026 EDITION

Part 3: The upsell list

The single best defense against upsells fits in your glovebox: **your owner's manual.** It's written by the people who built your engine, and it lists exactly what your car needs and when. If a service isn't on that schedule, the shop needs a good reason to sell it to you.

That doesn't mean every recommendation is a rip-off. Some are honest and important. The table below sorts the most common ones.

Service	Hank's verdict	Why
Fuel injection or fuel system cleaning	Usually skip	Modern gasoline already contains detergents. GM has said it does not acknowledge a need for injector cleaning as preventive maintenance on well-maintained cars. Only worth it if a mechanic has diagnosed clogged injectors.
Engine flush	Usually skip	Regular oil changes on schedule prevent sludge. Consumer Reports has called engine and transmission flushes not required, and said they can even hurt components.
Throttle body cleaning	Usually skip	Typically unneeded on most modern engines unless there's a rough idle that's been diagnosed.
Power steering flush	Usually skip	Many newer cars have electric steering with no fluid at all. Only do it if your manual lists it.
Nitrogen in tires	Usually skip	Regular air is already about 78% nitrogen. Checking your pressure once a month does far more good.

Service	Hank's verdict	Why
Premium gas (in a car that takes regular)	Skip	AAA tested it and found no gain in power, mileage or emissions in cars built for regular. Check the inside of your fuel door or your manual.
Oil change every 3,000 miles	Usually skip	Most carmakers now call for oil changes every 7,500 or 10,000 miles on the normal schedule. Follow your manual or your car's oil-life monitor, not the windshield sticker. Older cars may need shorter intervals.
Transmission flush	Sometimes	Changing transmission fluid on schedule is real maintenance. But ask for exactly the service your manual lists, which is often a simple drain-and-fill, not a machine "flush."
Coolant flush	Sometimes	Needed eventually, but many modern long-life coolants last far longer than shops suggest. Check the interval in your manual.
Brake fluid flush	Sometimes	Brake fluid absorbs water over time, and many makers list a change every few years. If it's in your manual and due, it's money well spent.
A/C recharge	Sometimes	If your A/C blows warm, it's low because it's leaking. A recharge without finding the leak is often a temporary fix. Ask: "Did you find the leak?"
Wheel alignment	Sometimes	Worth it if the car pulls, the steering wheel is off-center, tires wear unevenly, or after new tires or suspension work. Not needed at every visit.

Service	Hank's verdict	Why
New battery ("it tested weak")	Sometimes	Batteries usually last 3 to 5 years. Ask to see the printed test result. If it's young and passed, it can wait.
Engine and cabin air filters	Usually needed, often overpriced	Real maintenance, but some shops show you a dirty filter that isn't yours. Ask to see it come out of your car, or change it yourself in 5 minutes (Part 6).
Tire rotation	Usually needed	Spreads out wear and makes tires last longer. Many tire shops do it free if you bought your tires there.

Red-flag phrases

Consumer Reports' chief mechanic put it plainly: "High scare equals high profit". Be careful when you hear:

- **"Most cars like yours need this by now."** A good mechanic checks *your* car, not cars like it.
- **"It's not safe to drive."** Sometimes true. Ask them to show you exactly what's wrong, and get it in writing.
- **"Your whole brake system needs replacing."** Usually it's pads, and sometimes rotors. Get a second opinion before paying for calipers, lines and everything else.
- **"This price is only good today."** Real repairs don't come with a countdown clock.

How to check your owner's manual in 2 minutes

1. **Find it.** It's usually in the glovebox. If not, search "[your year, make and model] owner's manual". Most carmakers post them free online.
2. **Go to the maintenance section.** Look in the table of contents for "Maintenance schedule" or "Scheduled maintenance."
3. **Find your mileage.** The schedule lists what to do at each mileage, like 30,000 or 60,000 miles.
4. **Compare it to the shop's list.** Anything on their list that isn't on the schedule, ask: "Can you show me why my car needs this?"
5. **Know "normal" from "severe."** Many manuals have two schedules. "Severe" covers towing, dusty roads or lots of very short trips. Most people drive under "normal," even though shops often quote "severe."