

Automotive Parts Salespersons



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

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Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- General Hardware Salespersons
- General Merchandise Salespersons
- Jewelry Salespersons
- Manufacturers' Representatives
- Sales Exhibitors

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Auctioneers
- Automobile Accessories Salespersons
- Electric Motors Salespersons
- Floor Coverings Salespersons
- Horticultural and Nursery Products Salespersons
- Photographic Supplies and Equipment Salespersons
- Stamps or Coins Salespersons

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Cashiers
- Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food
- Counter and Rental Clerks
- Retail Salespersons
- Sales Representatives, Agricultural
- Sales Representatives, Medical
- Stock Clerks
- Waiters and Waitresses

Noteworthy Quote:

"At times, this job can be very taxing on your mind. However, the job can be very rewarding, especially when you become involved in parts fabrication. I have been in this profession for over 30 years, and I continue to look forward to each day."

Lee Conklin, Manager, Kellogg Auto Supply, Moravia, New York

Automotive parts salespersons (au-to`mo-tive `parts `sales-per-sons) sell automobile parts, supplies, and accessories.

When Ford's assembly line production of cars first made automobiles affordable to the public, there were no spare parts available for repairs. Drivers turned to blacksmiths for repairs when their horseless carriages broke down.

Harness dealers were the first to sell automotive parts. Later, independent manufacturers began to make and sell parts for new cars as well as parts for repairs.

Today, automotive parts, numbering in the tens of thousands, go to wholesale and retail auto supply stores, new car and used car dealerships, and other firms. All these businesses employ salespersons to sell parts to customers. Automotive parts salespersons in parts stores sell parts to independent repair shops, service stations, self-employed mechanics, and people who do it themselves. Some auto supply stores also sell parts for lawn mowers, garden tractors, or other small engine equipment.

The counter workers in dealerships handle only the parts and supplies for the line of vehicles the dealership sells. They deal mostly with the mechanics who service these vehicles.

Work Performed

Automotive parts salespersons in parts stores or centers sell thousands of parts and supplies and equipment. They sell both rebuilt or remanufactured units and new parts such as piston rings, filters, water pumps, engines, spark plugs, and fuel injectors for used or new cars, trucks, and other vehicles. Other items are



Automotive parts salespersons sell automobile parts, supplies, and accessories.

Photo by Amy Elliott

tools, chemicals, paint, supplies, and accessory items such as mirrors, fog lights, seat covers, and trailer hitches.

To sell these parts, salespersons first ask the customer about the make, year, and kind of part needed. They may inspect a damaged part to decide on the kind of replacement needed. Sometimes they may test a part such as a starter, alternator, battery, or coil. They may check parts catalogs or a computer-based inventory for the vehicle model, and the corresponding part number and price of the item the customer wants. Then they get the part from stock. If a part is not in stock, they check to see if a part with another number may be an acceptable replacement. They record sales in a cash register or a computer.

Automotive parts salespersons may suggest sales of related items or accessories, point out sales, or encourage the customers to browse. They may tell a customer about another business that may have a part. Or they may get the merchandise for the customer from a wholesaler. By supplying the right part, they reduce the number of returns. If they do get a return, they may examine the item to see if it is defective and exchange the part or give the customer a refund.

Besides selling over the counter, these salespersons do much of their business on the phone. Automotive parts salespersons receive and fill telephone orders for parts. They may have the part or parts delivered.

Salespersons unpack, mark, and store parts in stockrooms according to a prearranged system. They price items and do stock inventory. They keep price lists and catalogs up-to-date. They may also place orders with suppliers.

The increasing complexity of automobile systems makes it important that parts salespersons understand the purpose and installation of parts and accessories. They must understand newly evolving automotive systems and constantly review the use of new parts, replacements, and changed parts for new or late model vehicles. They learn to recognize and identify the proper function of tens of thousands of parts.

Salespersons help keep the store attractive. They keep aisles and counters neat, and set up displays featuring seasonal items.

Many of the large supply stores have a machine shop. This department may employ a full-time machinist to resurface disc brake drums and disc brake rotors, turn crankshafts, rebore cylinders, reface valves, or do similar tasks. In some stores, however, the automotive salesperson is trained to do these jobs.

Working Conditions

Most automotive parts salespersons work in clean, well-lighted, air-conditioned stores. Up-to-date tools and equipment, including computers, help them in their work. As a rule, the job is not strenuous, but some of the parts can be

heavy. These workers spend much time on their feet and do a lot of walking. Some of these workers may drive a pickup truck or van to deliver parts to customers.

At times salespersons may have to serve several customers at the same time as well as take phone calls. In slower intervals they can do other tasks.

Hours and Earnings

Automotive parts salespersons usually work forty to forty-eight hours a week. Many firms are open half a day or all day on Saturdays to give the public more service. Some are open one or two evenings a week and on Sundays.

Automotive parts salespersons may earn an hourly rate, a weekly, monthly, or yearly salary. Most beginning workers start at the minimum wage. Delivery workers and stock clerks may earn more than the minimum wage. In some stores, experienced salespersons also get a commission on their sales, usually starting at around 2 percent. Some stores give their employees a discount on purchases.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2000, parts salespersons earned an average of \$11.20 an hour. Wages ranged from a high of more than \$19.96 an hour to a low of less than \$6.99 an hour. As with most occupations, earnings vary depending on geographic location, employer, and years of experience.

Salespersons in large stores may have benefits such as hospital insurance, sick leave, and possibly a pension plan. They may receive vacations of one week after a year of work and two weeks after two to five years. Most stores require their employees to take vacations in slow seasons.

Education and Training

Employers prefer to hire persons with at least a high school education. Courses in auto mechanics, electronics, shopwork, business mathematics, computer science, and mechanical drawing will help those interested in this work. They should be accurate spellers, should be good with numbers, and should have good handwriting.

It is important to get some practical experience working on cars and light trucks. A knowledge of auto mechanics or work in automotive repair will help these individuals understand the needs of the customers.

In a large store some initial training may include instruction on sales techniques, store policies, or procedures for recording sales, as well as computer data entry. To learn about parts, job seekers may begin in part-time work as stock clerks or parts delivery workers. New employees may set up displays or work in the receiving department. These tasks will help them learn the inventory and the stockroom layout. They will learn to use catalogs and price lists. They may then be ready to wait on customers. In time they become skilled salespersons.

Licensing, Certification, Unions and Professional Societies

Few auto parts salespersons belong to a union. Some salespersons belong to unions such as the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. This union negotiates wages, working conditions, and benefits for their members.

There are professional associations that promote the interests of workers in this business.

The Automotive Warehouse Distributors Association consists of about 200 warehouse distributors of auto parts and supplies and about 200 manufacturers.

The Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association represents more than 2,700 manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and sales representatives who market automotive replacement parts and accessories.

Auto parts salespersons should seek to become certified by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE). Currently, the ASE represents more than 420,000 certified professionals working in every segment of the automotive industry. Candidates must pass one exam after two years of relevant work experience. To remain certified, those with ASE credentials must be retested every five years.

The National Association of Sales Professionals (NASP) is an organization composed of successful salespersons. Although certification is not required for this occupation, this organization offers a program which enables salespersons to become a Certified Professional Salesperson (CPSP). This title enhances the prestige of salespersons and is recommended for those seeking advancement in retail sales.

Personal Qualifications

Automotive parts salespersons should have an interest in and an understanding of auto and truck component systems and how they work. They need a quick mind to work with parts numbers, prices, and discounts. They should have legible handwriting and a good memory.

Since they spend a lot of time dealing with the public, these workers should have a neat appearance, excellent communications skills, and a friendly personality. Tact is important.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2001, there were about 244,400 parts salespersons working throughout the United States. There are automotive parts stores in every part of the country. Employment of these

salespersons is nationwide. Automotive parts salespersons work in auto supply stores, wholesale stores, and in the parts departments of vehicle dealers. Some work for farm equipment dealers. Large department stores and hardware stores that have auto supplies and parts departments also employ these workers.

They may work for truck fleets and bus lines that maintain their own vehicles. These workers take care of stockrooms and give out parts to the mechanics who repair the trucks or buses.

Employment Outlook

Job security in this work is fairly good. This industry is not greatly affected by the ups and downs of the economy. Whenever the economy is down, the public drives its older cars longer. That means more parts are going to wear out. It is projected that by the year 2010 employment in sales positions will grow about as fast as average. Many jobs will become available due to employee turnover.

The millions of vehicles registered in the United States will continue to require parts. Many families own two or more cars. More used cars and trucks on the road and a wider range of vehicle makes and models cause a steady demand for parts.

The trend toward self-service in stores does not apply to automotive parts suppliers who sell parts for specific applications. These products require knowledgeable sales personnel who know what the customers need and where it is.

Entry Methods

Job seekers should visit auto supply stores, distributors for rebuilt or remanufactured parts, automotive parts wholesalers, distributors of heavy duty parts, and new car dealers. Newspaper want ads are a good source of leads for this kind of work. The Yellow Pages of the telephone book list possible employers under the headings "Automobile Parts & Supplies, Retail" and "Automobile Parts & Supplies Wholesale & Manufacturers." Professional organizations, trade journals, and the Internet also list job opportunities.

Advancement

While on the job, salespersons can learn to sell, run a business, and organize their work. They may become parts department heads, store managers, or owners of their own auto supply store. As managers they may order stock, verify cash receipts, and keep sales records. They may also hire, train, and discharge workers.

With more education, training, and a greater knowledge of products, they may become outside salespersons for parts wholesalers, distributors, or vehicle manufacturers. Outside salespersons call on auto repair shops, vehicle dealers, service stations, trucking companies, and other firms that buy parts and accessories.

Parts salespersons can become sales associates for new and used cars and trucks. From this point they can advance to become showroom managers or owners of new car dealerships. Individuals interested in the work of automotive parts salespersons might be interested in the jobs of agricultural sales representatives, automobile sales associates, or farm equipment dealers. They might explore the work of automobile technicians, automotive service advisors or consultants, or farm equipment mechanics.

For Further Research

Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association, 4600 East-West Highway, Suite 300, Bethesda, MD 20814-3415. Visit their Web Site at: www.aftermarket.org

Automotive Warehouse Distributors Association, 4050 Pennsylvania, Suite 225, Kansas City, MO 64111. Visit their Web Site at: www.awda.org

National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, 101 Blue Seal Drive, S.E., Suite 101, Leesburg, VA 20175. Visit their Web Site at: www.asecert.org
Career Tracks. Video. VHS. 18 minutes. \$19.99.
Careers in the automotive industry.

Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.
Sales Occupations. Occupational Outlook Reprint No. 2450-12. \$1.25.

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