

New Bedford Company Booms by Making Direct-Fit Pipes and Catalytic Converters



In 15 years, Davico Manufacturing has grown to become one of the nation's leading providers of direct-fit pipes and catalytic converters. Ray Surprenant (center), Davico's general manager, meets on the factory floor with Mark Pacheco (left), floor manager, and Bob Hamel, production manager.

Davico Manufacturing, a New Bedford-based company, produces 575 kinds of direct fitting catalytic converters and 250 kinds of front pipes. Their niche is providing direct-fit and special order aftermarket catalytic converters for when OEM (original equipment manufacturer) cats are either not available or too costly. All aftermarket cats are not the same, and this is an important distinction; Davico's direct-fits and special orders offer a much better option to the universal or generic aftermarket cat.

"Davico specializes in odd pipe shapes," said **Raymond Surprenant**, the company's general manager. "We emphasize high quality and fast delivery."

Davico does not retail its products; it relies instead on manufacturers' representatives to market its vast array of direct-fit pipes and cats to auto parts stores.

"We'll make special order direct-fit cats the same day they are requested and have them shipped the next day for overnight delivery," Surprenant said. "That means the repairer will have the product in his hands within 48 hours of it being ordered." One customer needed a cat for his 1987 Alpha Romeo. The Italian manufacturer was not sure when the part would be available and questioned the shipping time to the United States. Davico was able to have a special order direct-fit in his hands in three days time.

Along with the quality and dependability of a Davico direct-fit cat, Surprenant promises another benefit: good price. "Generally,

our cats are three to four times less expensive than those supplied by vehicle manufacturers," he said.



The advent three years ago of the *Enhanced Emissions & Safety Test* program raised the stakes for consumers and repairers faced with the need to replace a catalytic converter. It might be easier to put in a universal after-market cat, but doing so now, you risk emissions-control performance that is too low to pass the enhanced test.

Bert Cox, a former repair shop owner-operator and current chief of vehicle programs for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, stated that, if a repairer is going to use an after-market cat, the repairer "should go with a direct fit from a quality manufacturer."

A product configuration that "differs even slightly from OEM (original equipment manufacturer) could result in less-than-desired emissions control," Cox warned. "Considering the high cost of buying and installing a new cat, and the requirement to pass the enhanced emissions test, it makes the most sense to use an OEM or direct-fit."

"All Davico products," Surprenant pointed out, "are truly direct fit. Our fabrication is all computer-controlled and, therefore, exceptionally reliable. We follow the Clean Air Act to the letter of the law in that we meet OEM configurations on all pipes and placements, (such as oxygen sensors). And we now have more people dedicated to making special order direct fits than anybody else in the business."

There are three main characteristics of a direct-fit cat, according to Surprenant. "First, it must be sized precisely to the engine. Second, it must have the right flow (of exhaust). Third, the cat itself must have the right substrate, that is, inner materials that meet the performance criteria for aftermarket converters.

In accord with federal law, Davico provides a two-year/25,000-mile warranty. It gladly accepts, and replaces, all returned products with warranty documentation.

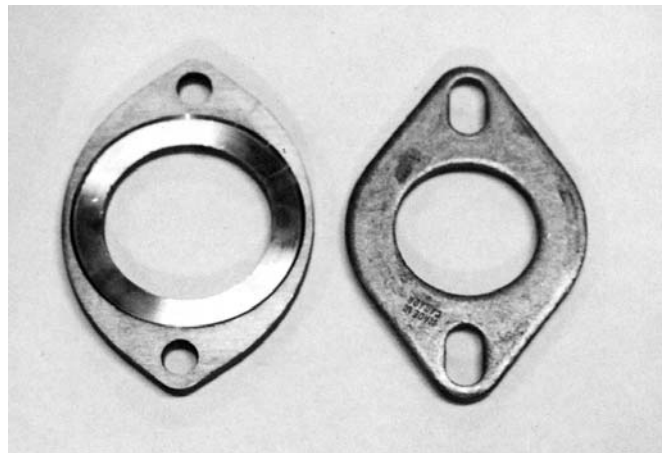
Davico recently took a close look at a large number of "returned products" cases, interviewing its retailers and repair technicians in depth. Interestingly, the company found that, in 70 percent of the cases where a cat had been sent back and replaced, the root cause of the emissions failure had not been properly diagnosed and corrected the first time.

"If you don't address the root cause – anti-freeze in the exhaust, for example, or a rich fuel mixture, or a misfire — the new cat will fail, and fail, perhaps, in rapid order," Surprenant explained.

"New cats are so good," Cox concurred, "that they'll cover up a problem ... for a while."



Making a replacement (left) for the original Ford Taurus catalytic converter (right), Davico did its usual flawless replication.



The direct-fit flange (left) made by Davico is a much finer part than the universal flange (right) that could be used in its stead.

Davico has been in business for 15 years, growing steadily. In each of the last three years, it has enjoyed a 20 percent increase in sales. Davico sprang from another business founded years ago at 475 Church Street, New Bedford, (still the company's address), by Raymond Surprenant's uncles; it is named for Raymond's cousin, David, whom he refers to as a "mechanical genius – an unbelievable talent."

Raymond started working there in his teens, "bending pipe and welding on the floor." Eventually, he discovered that he was better at selling than welding. Four years ago, he moved from sales manager to general manager.

"It's a job I love," said Raymond. "I'm lucky to be working with great craftsmen who make a great product, for which there is a strong demand." ■

A partial listing of Davico distributors include: Bagnell Auto Stores, Norwood Auto Parts, International Car Parts, Foreign Autopart, and Lacava & Sowersby. Davico's toll-free number is 800-422-6046.

Coming next edition: "Why Catalytic Converters Fail"

Full OBD II Testing

continued from page 1

including emissions controls, than the dynamometer. Massachusetts is required by the federal Clean Air Act to incorporate OBD II emissions testing into its I&M program.

"OBD II is a win for everybody," says Wert. "It's a win for inspectors because it is fast;

for motorists because it is convenient and and can save money on repairs; and a win for the environment because it is more comprehensive and provides an early warning of emissions control problems. When OBD testing causes these malfunctions to be found and fixed sooner rather than later

it will prevent such vehicles from becoming gross polluters in the first place."

The proposed regulations and background document may be obtained through DEP's web page: www.mass.gov/dep under "new additions" or the I&M program's Web site at www.mass.gov/vehicletest under "news." ■