



GWONNA NEED A BIGGER BUCKET

By Kenneth E. Seaton



I'M SURE THAT HENRY FORD WASN'T THINKING ABOUT FUNDRAISING WHEN HE STARTED ROLLING

HIS MODEL TS OFF THE ASSEMBLY LINE AT HIGHLAND PARK, MICHIGAN BACK IN 1913.

He and his investors – while planning on making their own profit from his Model T sales – had no idea of the financial impact that they were about to have on so many people's lives. They probably just laughed at the kids who were running after his cars with a bucket in one hand and a sponge in the other.

Nonetheless, the growth of the auto industry and the increasing number of vehicles operating on our roadways would soon segue into what has become an almost guaranteed method for raising money. Over the years, car wash fundraisers have proven to be the go to means of gathering cash. Every group from athletic teams, non-profit groups, service clubs,

youth & church groups, etc. have taken advantage of this technique at one time or another.

Case in point, in many Mexican cities and towns, street parking in most barrios or neighborhoods are controlled by the "Viene, Viene" men. For English speakers that translates into "Come, Come". They beckon you into a parking spot by tapping on your vehicle's trunk and calling out, "Viene, Viene!" You lock your car, leave it parked there and they will not only wash it but hopefully, keep an eye on it for you.

Car wash fundraisers are easy to do as all that's required is; flyers & signs, a venue that has good vehicle traffic, an easily accessible water supply, cleaning equipment, and of-course a ready supply of willing volunteers. Kids have always proven to be a great draw with their unbounded enthusiasm, attention grabbing voices and there's always one wag who – upon spotting a truck or bus pulling up – will shout out "Gonna need a bigger bucket!"

BUCKET BRIGADE TO AUTOMATIC CAR WASHES

As early as 1914 a so-called "Automated Laundry" was opened in Detroit. Cars were pushed manually through a tunnel

where workers soaped up, rinsed off and then hand dried the cars. Since this was an all-day operation, customers had to leave their cars and come back at the end of the day to pick them up.

In 1914, Detroit also hosted the first semi-automatic car wash. Cars were pulled on factory type conveyor belts through a tunnel and were washed down by overhead water sprinklers. Manually operated brushes scrubbed the cars down and a blower was used to dry them.

It wasn't till the 1960s that car washes started looking like the ones we use today. Rollers began to be used, along with water recirculation and soft cloth friction cleaning replaced the rough brushes of the past. Hot air blowers dried the vehicles and attendants would give a final touch up with a rag. These and other innovations have led to the touchless automatic washes that we know and utilize today.

Also in the late 60s the motorists who wanted the hands on experience, could begin using self-service car washes. They were equipped with spray guns and brushes. Some washes even supply – for a fee – shampoo, foam treatments, spot removers with tire cleaners and spot free rinses. Or you can supply your own cleaning materials.





Car washing has come a long way from its early bucket brigade beginnings. Vehicle owners and drivers want to travel around in a clean vehicle and they are willing to spend the money to do so. IBISWorld's 2016 Car Wash & Auto Detailing market research report stated that there are around 3,000 Canadian car wash establishments with earnings equaling \$442m.

Now if you drive a – bigger bucket – vehicle you know that not all car washes can or are willing to wash your vehicle. What about RV & bus owners, trucking fleet owners, and anyone who owns or drives a big rig or truck? Where and how do you get them clean and pressed?

THE BIGGER THE VEHICLE THE BIGGER THE BUCKET

When washing a larger vehicle, prices around the country at commercial vehicle washes or truck stops can cost vehicle owners anywhere from \$40 to \$150 or more per vehicle. Of-course the type of wash, prices and wash quality will vary depending on location and service level.

Company owners, operators and fleet managers – whether they operate big rigs, RVs or buses – are closely examining their options in how they may best manage the rising costs of keeping their vehicles clean. One option that some are considering, is investing in in-house vehicle cleaning equipment. These washers can range from portable hand-held machines to larger self-contained truck-wash systems.

Since company vehicles form a type of moving billboard, which is often capable of making a positive/negative impression on customers, most vehicle owners insist on clean vehicles. Fleet managers have learned that not only are clean vehicles easier to maintain, but that they also ex-

perience fewer maintenance issues than dirty vehicles do.

Some vehicles are also “hand-washed” by owners or their operators, using brushes, rags & mitts, and pressure washers. Independent owner/operators sometimes wash their vehicles at home between trips, often with pint sized helpers. Additionally, some owners are hesitant in using automated washers, fearful that the equipment may damage their vehicles.

When company owners, operators and fleet managers are choosing a particular vehicle wash system they need to consider; their vehicle fleet size, where the vehicles will be washed, will the vehicles be washed before/after their runs or when they are in for maintenance, and ultimately the total cost of wash per vehicle?

CHOOSING MANUAL OR AUTOMATED CLEANING

The manual method has proven to be a time tested means of vehicle cleaning. It usually results in a thoroughly cleaned vehicle thus insuring, that every corner of the vehicle has been given at-least a once over. Buckets, brushes, hoses and/or pressure washers get the job done.

Pressure washers can use either hot or cold water or even a combination of both. Some washers are equipped with a “steam combination” option that adjusts the hot-water flow and produces a “wet steam” effect. Pressure washers come in a wide variety of types, shapes and models.

Cold water – combined with a great detergent – is probably the most cost efficient method for simply cleaning, rinsing down and/or blasting off a stubborn piece of dirt or mud. Hot water pressure washers' are best when it comes to getting rid of grease, oil or damaging road salt. Steam cleaning is most often employed when de-

tailoring automobile engines.

Automated cleaning systems come in a number of shapes, sizes and types. Some are the rollover type, which moves over and above a parked vehicle. Drive-thru washers have the vehicles drive in one end and out the other; and are either touch-less using chemically treated high pressure water or soft touch which employs foam fingers to clean the surfaces on the vehicles.

When a roll-over gantry system is used, the vehicle drives into the wash bay, stops at a predetermined spot and the driver stays in the cab. The wash components move back and forth over the vehicle by means of a moveable gantry to complete the washing cycle. Normally a gantry will perform two or three passes over the vehicle. First pass applies the wash chemicals and the second involves the brushes. The third and final pass would be for the rinse.

Brushes and spray nozzles are attached to gantry by means of vertical and horizontal arms; some models also include arms that spin. The rollover systems can be purchased with a brush configuration or they can be completely touchless. To ensure a complete wash job, sometimes some fleet managers, will have someone doing hand detailing during or after the wash cycle.

When using the drive through system the washing components – a combination of wash detergents, low & high pressure cleaning jets – remain stationary and the vehicles are driven through the wash bay. Some systems are completely touchless and others come equipped with brushes. The vehicle's driver controls the pace of the wash and since the equipment is positioned on either side of the vehicle, it's a one and done type of wash system.





These cleaning systems can handle more vehicles in a shorter time than the manual truck wash systems can. Depending on the type, an automatic cleaning system can usually wash around three trucks an hour; comparatively a manual system typically takes about three hours to completely clean one vehicle.

MOBILE TRUCK WASH SYSTEMS

A growing number of enterprising entrepreneurs are taking advantage of the rising demand for mobile truck wash sys-

tems. They mount a power wash system's equipment on their trucks and they drive it to their customer's locations. The owner/operators of these types of truck wash systems usually are very accommodating and flexible when it comes to meeting their customer's needs and schedules.

Vehicle wash quality is usually contingent on the type of system that the owner/operator uses. Cost is normally a defining feature on whether a manual wash or high-pressure power wash is employed. The time it takes to professionally clean a

vehicle – obviously the bigger the rig the longer the time – ought to take on average 20-30 minutes, which should be comparable to a manual vehicle wash facility.

While evaluating the cost of keeping their fleets clean, many owners and fleet managers have found that the financial outlay in buying and maintaining their own power wash systems can prove to be overly expensive. Not to mention, the added costing incurred in training their drivers on how to properly use & maintain the equipment, plus the additional wages spent in paying them to clean their vehicles.

The number of companies who use professional mobile truck washing businesses to handle their vehicle cleaning needs is large and growing. Companies like Consolidated Fastfrate Inc., a trucking, logistics and intermodal freight company, who employs brokers to drive their vehicles.

According to Patrice Nevers the Admin Supervisor at Fastfrate's Halifax/Dartmouth terminal, their brokers take care of the vehicle washing. "They hire mobile washers and they come in with their own trucks and do the mobile wash," she says. "The operators are responsible for paying for the washing." She adds that the vehicles are cleaned at Fastfrate's terminal and that the mobile washers "do a great job."

ENVIRONMENTALLY SPEAKING

Although it may not be strictly enforced, throughout the country there are stringent laws pertaining to vehicle mobile washing business operations. Government's – be it federal, provincial or municipal – are concerned that the run-off wash water will seep into the ground and could potentially pollute the aquifers or that the untreated water may be allowed to flow into the storm sewers.

Not only mobile truck washing businesses, but all vehicle washing facilities, are required to conduct business in a manner that prevents harmful pollutants – which may be found in their wash wastewater – be contained and collected. They also must ensure that wash wastewater is disposed of in an acceptable manner that is in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. And finally, all business owners, operators and fleet managers, when making the final decision on which system they will use to keep their vehicles clean; must also factor in the cost of ensuring that they avoid any future problems, issues or any legal consequences that may result from any possible damage that their vehicle cleaning may cause to the environment. 🚗

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