

Choosing the Right Scan Tool for Your Shop

First, determine what your usage will be based on the vehicles you service and how many times you face a particular issue:

- 1. Vehicle category (domestic or European or Asian).
- 2. Vehicle categories (domestic and European, domestic and Asian or European and Asian).
- 3. All 3 vehicle categories (domestic, European and Asian).

If you don't know which category you fit in, check the chart here: www.airbagsolutions.com/scanlist.aspx.

Next, calculate how many times a month you see a check engine, SRS or ABS light on in a vehicle you repair:

- 1. 1-3 times per month
- 2. 4-10 times per month
- 3. More than 10 times per month

Finally, determine your needs and potential usage. Review the six months or check your payables. How much do you spend at a dealership during a typical visit to get the MIL fault corrected? Under \$50, \$150, \$300? The money you spent could have stayed in your pocket if you had the proper equipment. Did you know you could earn enough to pay for the scan tool you buy in as little as three months?

The scan tool you purchase should have engine, transmission, airbag and ABS functions. Some functions like programming restraint systems, programmable keys and entry systems, or occupant classification systems can only be done by vehicle-specific scan tools in conjunction with downloads directly from the manufacturer. Also, don't expect the tool you buy to be up to date. Most of the software available to the af-

Cost Per Repair @ Dealer	1. Vehicle Category		
	Trips to Dealer Per Month		
	1-3 x Per Month	4-10 x Per Month	Over 10 x Per Month
Under \$50	BASIC	BASIC	BASIC
\$50 - \$250	BASIC	BASIC	MID-LEVEL
Over \$250	BASIC	BASIC	MID-LEVEL

Cost Per Repair @ Dealer	2. Vehicle Category		
	Trips to Dealer Per Month		
	1-3 x Per Month	4-10 x Per Month	Over 10 x Per Month
Under \$50	MID-LEVEL	MID-LEVEL	ADVANCED
\$50 - \$250	MID-LEVEL	MID-LEVEL	ADVANCED
Over \$250	ADVANCED	ADVANCED	ADVANCED

Cost Per Repair @ Dealer	3. Vehicle Category		
	Trips to Dealer Per Month		
	1-3 x Per Month	4-10 x Per Month	Over 10 x Per Month
Under \$50	ADVANCED	ADVANCED	ADVANCED
\$50 - \$250	ADVANCED	ADVANCED	ADVANCED
Over \$250	ADVANCED	ADVANCED	ADVANCED

termarket scan tool makers is two or more years behind the current model year.

So let's get back to the chart (above). If your result was “**BASIC**,” your needs are simple. You need a basic, inexpensive, multi-purpose, single vehicle line scan tool. These scan tools are available and cover most carmakers in their region. Domestic would cover GM, Ford and Chrysler. European would cover Audi, BMW, MINI, Mercedes, Volvo and Volkswagen. Asian would cover Acura, Honda, Lexus, Mazda, Mitsubishi, Nissan and Toyota.

Many scan tool companies also offer an even simpler code reader for vehicle-specific car lines (VW-Audi, Toyota, Honda, etc). Selecting

a specific car line will limit your coverage, but also reduce your scan tool costs significantly. Since your monthly cost for scan tool needs will most likely be under \$300 per month, you can recover it quickly with a simple purchase to handle your specific needs. Almost all of these scan tools range in price from \$150 to just under \$300.

If your result was “**MID-LEVEL**,” your needs are a little more complicated. The scan tool you'll need will be more expensive but will also cover more functions. These scan tools will cover multiple lines of vehicles, but will also have substantial holes in their coverage. These tools range in price from \$500 to \$1,000. Once again, though, remember that they may not cover all the vehicles that come through your door. They will, however, reduce your trips to the dealer, increase your profits and provide you with new potential profit centers.

If your answer was “**ADVANCED**,” your needs are complex. The scan tool you need will be more expensive and may require some additional research to make sure it handles your expanded needs. This tool will have more than just code reading capabilities. In addition to the categories listed in the chart, you should also be able to perform a full DTC scan, reset tire pressure sensors, access body and chassis systems, reset oil light systems and even gain access to “Fast-Fixes.”

In addition, some scan tools (i.e. the Launch series) will give you the ability to reset the OCS (seat calibrations) for import models like Toyota, Lexus and Scion. These advanced scan tools should cover be-

tween 40 and 50 vehicle manufacturer lines, with the capability of being updated regularly on the web. A scan tool to meet these needs will range in cost from \$1,500 to \$2,850.

BASIC	MID-LEVEL	ADVANCED
VAG Volkswagen / Audi \$129.95	AA101 Multi-Line \$499.50	OTC 3871 Multi-Line \$2049.95
PEAKE BMW Coverage \$154.95	MD 801 Multi-Line \$599.95	OTC 3874 Multi-Line \$2254.95
OTC 9450 Domestic Coverage \$189.95	Launch EuroPro European Coverage \$1575.00	Launch X431 Multi-Line \$2549.95
JP 701 Asian Coverage \$269.50	OTC 3869 Multi-Line \$1682.00	Launch Diagun Multi-Line \$2610.00
US 702 Domestic Coverage \$289.50		Launch Infinite Multi-Line \$2999.95
EU 703 European Coverage \$289.50		

The chart on this page shows a sample of scan tools I've found that offer coverage in each category. There are scan tools above this level as well. Unless you're prepared to spend upward of \$5,000 for the scan tool and \$500 to \$1,000 on annual updates, you'll have to make some choices. Top-of-the-line scan tools will give you all three categories but require larger memory space and more complicated hardware. Keep in mind that recovering \$5,000 from scan tool services in a year is a lot different than recovering a more modest investment in three to six months.

Finally, many carmakers are going wireless, utilizing laptops, remote DLC connections and software that requires access to their websites to give you the data and support you may need. This, too, will cost you, either every time you need

it or for an annual fee (for each manufacturer). At this level, you need to be clear on how much scan tool you need and what you're willing to invest. – *Douglas Gan is chief operating officer of Airbag Solutions LLC and president of Auto Information Services, Inc. (AISi). These companies provide hundreds of shops, insurance companies and individuals with diagnostics, technical repair and information. Gan is ASE certified in seven categories, trained by General Motors, holds a degree in Mechanical Technology and is on I-CAR's Course Development Committee. He can be reached at (866) 294-0095.*